

**“THE PERIPHERY IS THE PERIPHERY EVERYWHERE”:
CULTURAL PRODUCTION IN URBAN PERIPHERIES**

“Not everything is a bed of roses, but everything is roots”: Raízes de Gericinó, conquered territory, assured dream

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Abstract:

This article analyzes the existence of the Cultural Group Raízes de Gericinó, which is located in the Comunidade do 80 — Catiri, in Bangu, in the West Zone of the city of Rio de Janeiro. The group's history is intertwined with the fight for land faced by the community's inhabitants in the beginning of the 2000s. The Arraiá Flor da Roça, the first cultural action carried out by the group resulted from the bond constructed and based on their fight against displacement. The Mercês family, who came from Maranhão and led the movement, connects the popular culture of its land with the consolidation of community bonds. The party thus was introduced to one of the main characters of this story, Bumba meu Boi, which would be named in 2012: “Boi Estrela de Gericinó”. The institution, which is currently considered the house of Bumba meu Boie — Museu Social, based in the Neighborhood Association's old headquarters, exerts an influence on the recognition and in the mobilization in the territory. The name of the group itself demonstrates its intention to (re)construct itself: it is both roots and new land. The cultural heritage they carry, both material and immaterial, forges identities and memories. Not excluding the existing conflicts in these categories, the research, an excerpt of which is presented herein, proposes a reflection on the fight for land and its relationship with popular culture.

Keywords: Popular Culture; Ancestry; Community; Bumba Meu Boi; Community-Based Cultural Policies.

“Nem tudo são rosas, mas tudo são raízes”: Raízes de Gericinó, território conquistado, sonho garantido

Resumo:

O presente artigo analisa a existência do Grupo Cultural Raízes de Gericinó, localizado na comunidade do 80 — Catiri, em Bangu, Zona Oeste da cidade do Rio de Janeiro. A história do grupo se confunde com a luta por terra que os habitantes da região enfrentaram no início dos anos 2000. O Arraiá Flor da Roça, primeira ação cultural que realizaram, veio desse vínculo construído a partir da luta contra a remoção. Maranhense, a família Mercês, que tomou a frente deste movimento, conecta a cultura popular de sua terra de origem à consolidação de laços comunitários. Com isso, a festa ganhou um dos personagens mais importantes dessa história, o Bumba meu boi, que, somente em 2012, ganhou seu nome: “Boi Estrela de Gericinó”. A instituição que atualmente é considerada a casa do Bumba meu boi - Museu Social, sediada na antiga Associação de Moradores, exerce uma influência no território, de reconhecimento e mobilização. O próprio nome do grupo já demonstra a sua intenção em (re)construir-se: é simultaneamente raiz e terra nova. O patrimônio cultural que trazem consigo, tanto imaterial quanto material, forja identidades e memórias. Não excluindo os conflitos existentes nestas categorias, a pesquisa aqui apresentada de forma resumida se propõe à reflexão da luta pela terra e sua relação com a cultura popular.

Palavras-chave: cultura popular; ancestralidade; Bumba meu boi; comunidade; políticas culturais de base comunitária.

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(...) Therefore, land is converted into cause, freedom is converted into dream, a strong shout is converted into war, and all the people follow but one path in the narrow trail, planting the future. May the dark night of pain and death pass quickly, may the sound of our hymns excite our conscience, and the fight redeem our poverty, may the dawn find us smiling, celebrating our freedom.

Ademar Bogo

INTRODUCTION

Life is made of encounters, and so are parties. I would venture to affirm that they are the main facilitators of unexpected encounters. It is also at parties that the desire to transgress the established order so as to live in celebration pulses, allowing one to find oneself in the other, explore the new and be in the collective. It is at them that, in our relationship with the other, we are touched by the existences that allow us to see and build other possible worlds.

In one of these encounters enabled by parties, I found, in the West Zone of the city of Rio de Janeiro, the cultural group Raízes de Gericinó [Roots of Gericinó]. The encounter first took place in 2015, through my work in the city's Municipal Department of Culture. My visit occurred due to a Public Cultural Grant¹ that awarded the Arraiá Flor da Roça [Backwood Flower June Festival] Cultural Initiative.

1 The Public Grant for the Contest of the Award for Local Initiatives was an initiative of the Municipal Department of Culture to prize, through the transfer of funds, 40 local initiatives in the city of Rio de Janeiro, issuing a “local initiative” certificate to all proposals that obtained the minimal grade according to the public grant. “Local initiatives” are understood as continuous practices, activities, and projects in the fields of culture, the arts, communication, and knowledge that promote positive sociocultural transformations in the communities and territories where these initiatives are developed. Available at: <http://www.rio.rj.gov.br/dlstatic/10112/5457666/4143619/1. EditaldoPremiodeAcoesLocais.pdf>.

The first time I heard about the group Raízes de Gericinó was through the project Cantinho de Leitura Cultura em Movimento [Culture in Motion Reading Corner], which was submitted by the group in the Edital Pontos de Leitura [Reading Spots Grant].² This article is a product of my master's thesis, conducted alongside the cultural group Raízes de Gericinó. In it, I present the origin of the group's initiatives, as well as the significance of their cultural production.

During the research, I observed that the actions undertaken by the leaders of Raízes de Gericinó were acts of survival. It was through these efforts that the group, whose characteristics are so striking, was formed. Located in the West Zone of Rio de Janeiro, in the Catiri neighborhood — more specifically on the Gericinó road — is the Museu-Casa Bumba meu boi em Movimento [Bumba meu boi Museum-House in Motion]. The museum is part of a Cultural Space called Raízes de Gericinó. Both are part of the histories that enable various reflections and intersections, such as time, memory, ancestry, identities, and territories. The museum was built through the involvement of a group composed primarily of people from a single family, who, through their movements, forged routines in the art of making, building future narratives from past memories and identities.

Currently, Raízes de Gericinó is an NGO working mainly in the fields of culture and social assistance in the periphery of Rio de Janeiro. However, as previously stated, during the research I identified the intersection of the *movements* that led to the creation of this NGO, which are rooted in collective and community struggles for survival in multiple periods and spaces. It is important to emphasize that Rio de Janeiro's West Zone is the furthest region from the city's center and comprises extremely populous neighborhoods, which, however, receive little support from cultural policies and public policies in general. It is one of the areas that face the greatest challenges regarding urban mobility, due to the scarcity of available services. In this context, cultural production in the region is a significant challenge, marked by the absence of incentives and recognition from the public authorities.

The idea of movement presented in this article may function more as a guide to the writing process, but it nevertheless operates as an analytical category to approach Raízes de Gericinó, not only because the museum includes the word *motion* in its name, but because the word imparts meaning when the space is analyzed. By reflecting on movement, we also disrupt the idea of linear time, as Leda Martins (1997) does, when conceptualizing spiral time and stating that, when knowledge is built and transmitted through the body, it renews itself *in motion*. During interviews in the field, the notion of spiral time gained a lot of meaning, for, when the subjects tried to recount the original history of Raízes de Gericinó, time was disrupted, even if the history sought to follow a chronological path. Consequently, numerous

2 Reading spots are community cultural actions aimed at promoting books and readings that help fight inequality and promote diversity. In 2013, the public bid was released, in order to provide for Reading Spots in the municipality of Rio de Janeiro, and the Project Cantinho de Leitura Cultura em Movimento, by Association Raízes de Gericinó, was selected.

digressions emerged. The interviews in the field were not structured according to specific durations, and many of them were spread across multiple visits to Raízes de Gericinó during the research. The interviews started in 2019 and extended to 2024, approximately five years. They were all semi-structured and conducted both in person and online. Although they followed a script, the dialogues with interlocutors presented important elements that helped me to rethink some of the research's directions. Furthermore, the work may be understood as ethnographic, considering its methodology and the long period spent in the field.

When Leda Martins (1997) presents *encruzilhada*³ [crossroads] as a possible path, she states that memory defies linear history, which consists of a chronological, Cartesian, universalist, and nullifying narrative, and that time is rearranged in spiral forms, acting in communication with its other versions of action. This overflows through the power of ritual in the educational and philosophical aspects of the experience of the groups. The trajectory of these subjects is the path traveled through the body, through their movements. Therefore, we draw upon the narratives of Raízes de Gericinó's coordinators and cultural producers to recount the living history of the collective through intertwining memories rooted in Maranhão, Bangu, Gericinó, and Comunidade do 80 [80 Community]. The women are Rosa Mercês (the family's matriarch), Auricélia Mercês (Rosa's oldest daughter), and Rosélia (Rosa's youngest daughter).

This article aims to present the roots of the perverse dehumanizing structures and violence that affect certain segments of society. One can observe, in the experience and the cultural production of the group in question, the struggle for belonging and existence through art and memory.

Peripheries may be very similar across the world; the same is true for the production of concentrated wealth and luxury by the owners of the means of production. Economic circumstances and social inequality produce common experiences for social classes. However, the production of life in these spaces is distinct, especially according to the perspective of solidarity and struggle for survival imposed on those who are born in the peripheries of capitalist society. Therefore, peripheral experiences may intersect through aesthetics, polyphony,⁴ and cultural hybridity, producing histories and experiences that shape the place, a space produced by those who occupy it and modify it through their identity. It is in this condition that many people from peripheries find themselves, in *motion* to survive, creating with these movements "survival narratives" (Lopes et al. 2018: 678–703) that set the tone of the struggle for a less unequal and fairer future for all who inhabit the earth. Raízes de Gericinó is one of these places.

The periphery, most of the time, is a conquered territory. Unlike the inheritance of private property — such as those owned by large landowners and their heirs, who are born with

3 T.N.: The word *encruzilhada*, which means crossroads, is a term used in many religions of African matrix as a point of convergence of the spiritual and the material world.

4 Such concepts are part of studies and reflections by authors such as Homi Bhaba (1994) in dialogue with Mikhail Bakhtin.

secured land and pass it down from generation to generation — the periphery is a contested space that is frequently built collectively. It is a place that struggles to exist, and many people struggle to be able to exist in it.

These territories are marked by the constant pursuit of rights and better living conditions, which places them in a permanent state of *motion* and *survival*. At the same time, it is through this process that the symbolic heritage and histories that produce local identities are built.

However, it is important to recognize that there are bodies that do not even have the right to peripheralization, deepening dehumanizing processes that reach people, groups, and their cultural productions.

NARRATIVES OF DREAM AND STRUGGLE

A product of the collective struggle for survival and territory, Raízes de Gericinó is marked by the struggle for land and housing. One of the first times I visited the group was in 2019, in order to develop my research. I arranged a conversation with Auricélia, the institution's coordinator, but my idea was also to arrive and experience the space's dynamics freely. I arrived in the morning, and the *Museu-Casa Bumba meu Boi* was busy — it was the beginning of the year, the time for after-school tutoring registration. Once I had waited for some time, I sat in the kitchen where lunch is served. After Auricélia had attended and talked to some of the arriving families, she sat with me, and we started to talk as we had lunch. The first thing she told me was, “Raízes was shaped by the struggle for land, a collective struggle for rights.” That was the day when I was sure I wanted to know more about their history.

Arriving at a territory and putting down roots is not simple, and the narrative produced by the agents of this trajectory in constant motion is also the narrative of subaltern groups condemned to silence by colonization. However, this narrative allows the construction of decolonial perspectives of past and present time. Homi Bhabha, in the book *The Location of Culture*, helps us reflect on how the cultural practices and ways of life of these groups produce critiques of Western thought, which imposes dehumanizing processes on subjects who have been historically colonized and subjugated by Eurocentric logic.

A range of contemporary critical theories suggest that it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history — subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement — that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking. There is even a growing conviction that the affective experience of social marginality — as it emerges in non-canonical cultural forms — transforms our critical strategies. It forces us to confront the concept of culture outside *objets d'art* or beyond the canonization of the “idea” of aesthetics, to engage with culture as an uneven, incomplete production of meaning and value, often composed of incommensurable demands and practices, produced in the act of social survival. (Bhabha 1994: 172)

The act of narrating and interpreting this present-past time, sharing knowledges of the self and about the self, constructs these stories. Through this narrative, we seek to revisit

memory as an action that is constantly mobilized and produced within survival strategies, especially by those whose lives are consumed by a system of subjugation and erasure.

The group was created by a family from the State of Maranhão who migrated to Rio de Janeiro. We have found, in *Museu Casa Bumba meu boi em Movimento*, symbols and elements that transport us to the family's homeland. By experiencing the museum, based on the transmission of the appreciation for the cultural roots of those who built the space through objects and texts, we began to glimpse the *Bumba meu boi* festivities and the culture of Maranhão. However, before the museum took its current form, we discovered the (up)rooted histories, traditions, and trajectories that constituted the place.

By remembering our roots, we can also associate them with family through the idea of birth, origins, and identity, which is why I'll introduce the family responsible for the creation and coordination of Raízes de Gericinó. I do this without intending to present a kinship study; throughout the research, I approach this family's trajectory mainly through the narratives of its women. Rather than producing a detailed study on each of the family members or studying their family tree, I present the members who were involved in the research.

The surname of the family is *Mercês*, which is the word I will use to refer to it in this article. The family is predominantly Black and composed of women. Born in Maranhão, Rosa and José met in São Luís, the State's capital, and the couple had seven children, all born in the city. Their daughters are Auricélia, Rosélia, Jurá, and Cilene; their sons are Ariel, Nelson, and Piteco. The core family migrated from Maranhão to the city of Rio de Janeiro about 30 years ago; currently, all of them live in Rio de Janeiro. Rosa, her four daughters, and two of her sons live in the Bangu area, in the West Zone, and only one of her sons lives farther away, in the neighborhood of Benfica, in the city's North Zone. José Mercês, Rosa's husband and the father of their seven children, died in 2018.

While reflecting on the family's displacement to Rio de Janeiro as a starting point for their struggling narratives, I do not approach it in strictly formal terms, but also through its symbolic aspect, since there are various forms of displacement — forced displacement, migration, eviction. I do not use the term “displacement” to refer to all of them in a homogenizing way nor as an analytical and political category — my intention is to reflect on these displacements through social trajectories and their paths. Furthermore, I also intend to add complexity to the various displacements precisely through the narrated stories.

The use of the term “history” deserves to be explained so as to ward off any monolithic assumption regarding “the past.” Biographical descriptions, as well as ethnographic and historical writing, are narrative constructions that simultaneously “empower *and subvert* their messages” (Clifford and Marcus 1986: 6). That is why, in getting to know more about the underground roots of the Raízes de Gericinó cultural group, the history of the Mercês family's struggle for survival and belonging becomes intertwined with the creation of the group and vice versa.

DISPLACEMENT

Influenced by the hope for a better life and by the chance of having a job, the Mercês family migrated to Rio de Janeiro in the mid-1990s. In Brazil, the large number of displacements of the population from the Northeast to the Southeast became a social phenomenon. These migrations took place from the 1960s to the 1980s. During this period, the flow of people leaving the countryside and migrating to cities intensified, reflecting society's economic dynamics in the industrialization process of certain regions that concentrated capital accumulation in the context of a developmentalist policy. In that sense, author Paul Singer argues the following:

The central issue relates to regional inequalities, which would be the engine of internal migrations. In the place of origin, expulsion factors arise, which manifest in two forms: change factors — determined by the introduction of capitalist relations of production, increasing labor productivity, generating a decrease in employment levels. Consequently, they expel peasants and smallholders. They generate massive out-migration flows, reducing the absolute size of the rural population; and stagnation factors — associated with the farmers' inability, within a subsistence economy, to increase the productivity of the land. (Singer 1980: 219, my translation)

According to Antônio Oliveira (2011), this process divides regions into areas of expulsion or emigration, or areas of attraction or intense immigration. The study points out that a large number of people moved from the countryside to the city, which outlines intense urbanization. However, the particularities found in each case may either confirm previous studies on the phenomenon and/or introduce new elements that add complexity to the reflections about this flow. The migration of subjects may occur due to countless situations, influences, and contexts. Displacement between regions may also be a choice. Guillen's (2001) provocation is approaching the perspective on this phenomenon through rights, including the right to choice. She emphasizes that there is little research on migratory displacements, which imposes a "historic invisibility" on migrants.

For the author, the point is that it is worth understanding this displacement also as a drive for change and transformation, instead of understanding it merely as something that surpasses the economic influences imposed by a system that places subjects in subaltern positions.

(...) the meaning of migrating, therefore, is always ambiguous — as an imposition of economic and social or environmental conditions — and, in this case, it appears more often than not as one of the strongest elements that explain a destiny for the northeasterner being, but also as a choice against the misery and poverty of the *sertão* [backcountry]. Migrating is, ultimately, saying no to the situation in which one is living, taking destiny into one's own hands, rescuing dreams and hopes of a better or even different life. The issue lies in the fact that a vast part of discursive production has deprived migrants of their condition as subjects, as if migrating were not a choice, as if they do not have their own will. Migrating may be understood as a strategy not only to minimize the hardships of everyday life, but also to seek

a social position where one can dodge the exclusion intended by Brazilian elites through its modernizing projects. (Guillen 2001: 1, my translation)

Albuquerque Júnior (1999) approaches the construction of a negative imaginary and the lack of public policies for the Northeast and its out-migrants. It is very common to find unilateral narratives when the subjects move from or to specific regions, such as out-migration to the country's Southeast, which shaped mainly the stereotypes constructed around the figure of the *retirante*⁵ or of northeasterners in Brazil, always in search of employment and opportunity. This imaginary has also constructed a stereotype of the Northeast, which is always associated with droughts, poverty, and miserability. It is true that the issue of droughts as a climate phenomenon also creates political and social facts such as hunger. The creation of stereotypes that link the *sertão* to miserability, however, limits the reading of the migration phenomenon and conceals economic relations based on a structurally unequal exploitation system.

Monica Silva's (2016) provocation in her research is that the debate is not about what people think northeasterner and immigrants represent, but rather about facts and occurrences that cause such a phenomenon. "What would be the narratives of the subjects themselves on this kind of migration? Is migrating to the Southeast the *nordestino*'s [northeasterner's] fate? What truly motivates people to leave their place of origin?" When such a phenomenon has constructed a place in the population's imaginary, creating stereotypes and singular narratives on the process, it is also worth considering what the subjects themselves narrate about their own history.

In this case, we will analyze the Mercês family's trajectory, in their struggle for belonging in Rio de Janeiro. It is a fact that the reasons influencing migration are marked by social inequality conflicts and by a social imaginary created around a promising Southeast. It is important to remember, however, that knowledges, life experiences, and cultural traditions travel with these individuals, contributing to the construction and reinvention of the territories they reach. This article affirms that migrating is not restricted to leaving a location — it also recreates roots in new soils, affirms cultural identity and strengthens bonds.

BELONGING

Upon arriving in Rio de Janeiro, the family faced challenges while looking for a place of residence, and that is why the group delineates its history through struggle, whether rooted in the departure from Maranhão or in the socio-economic conditions it experienced in its home state. The cultural institution and its projects are located in the neighborhood of Gericinó, which was part of the Bangu region until 2006. Bangu's history is permeated by housing conflicts. Located in Rio de Janeiro's West Zone, it has an estimated 250,000 inhabitants, according to the 2011

5 T.N.: In Brazil, the term refers to out-migrants from the Northeast to the Southeast, initially escaping droughts and later moving to the former's capitals in search of work.

census. It is known for its high temperatures and for being the furthest neighborhood from the coast. The neighborhood's construction is directly associated with Companhia Progresso Industrial do Brasil's [Industrial Progress Company of Brazil] intervention, responsible for the famous *Fábrica de Bangu* [Bangu Factory]. The neighborhood is surrounded by two mountain ranges: the Bangu range (known as the Pedra Branca [white stone] massif) and the Medanha range.

The region was known as the “*sertão carioca*” [Rio de Janeiro's backcountry], as it comprised Rio de Janeiro's rural zone, with agricultural production throughout the region's large estates. The territory divided into farms transitioned from rural area into an urban area with the arrival of the Bangu Factory in 1889, which purchased most of the estates. In their study, Peixoto and Egler (1993) present the *history of the location* through the recollection of certain occurrences surrounding the company's arrival.

As some merchants refused to sell their plots, the factory went to great lengths to destroy the commercial center, exerting political pressure and influencing the train station's construction and location. In addition to influencing economic power, the urbanization shaped the management of commerce developed on the factory's lands, sparking conflicts among the oldest merchants.

However, there is little data on these facts, since the company initially produced not only the location, but also, we may say, the “history of the location,” erasing documental traces of conflicts the recording of which was not in its interest. (Peixoto 1993: 58, my translation)

The Bangu Factory was the first in Rio de Janeiro to implement a vertical production system involving three stages of production, making it one of the first factories established under typical capitalist industrialization. The choice of a distant location, considered a rural area at the time, also represents an influence of a production model based on isolated factories, allowing greater social control of workers through the creation of workers' villages, nurseries, warehouses, spaces for leisure, and a local church. This large estate became a source of conflict as the neighborhood grew, bolstered by the company itself as a strategy to attract more labor for its operations due to the shortage of houses in its property. As the population increased, land issues also emerged between the company and the occupants of its lands.

In the 1920s, the number of factory workers increased, and demands related to housing, among other rights, started to gain momentum. The context surrounding the establishment of the workers' villages and their houses was also a cause for the workers' struggle. Over the years, numerous neighborhood associations were created in order to substantiate these fights. The public housing projects conceived in the Vargas Era⁶ also reached Bangu as housing templates and became a benchmark in the region.

6 The Vargas Era was a 15-year period in Brazilian history, extending from 1930 to 1945, during which Getúlio Vargas was the country's president. Vargas' rise to power was the direct result of the 1930 Revolution, which removed Washington Luiz from office and prevented Júlio Prestes (the President-elect who would be in charge of the country) from taking office. The Vargas Era was a period in which Brazil was intensely transformed through the combination of industrialization and labor rights, with moments of political authoritarianism.

According to Peixoto (1993), the struggle for land shaped Bangu's territory, as the factory's acquisition of the estates placed most of the region under its ownership. The workers' need for housing caused the factory to create a Territorial Department, in charge of organizing the neighborhood's constructions and urbanization. Furthermore, in 1929, the conflicts and disputes that erupted between the factory and the workers were centered on land issues. Therefore, the department also aimed to control these disputes through coercion and negotiations with the factory's workers.

When the Mercês family moved to Rio de Janeiro in 1995, they began to live in a Public Navy Project in Bangu, where they were welcomed by José's nephew, who served in the navy and housed them during the first years in the city. In 1998, while still living in the Navy Project, the family began to have news of the sale of plots in the Gericinó region — which, at the time, had not become independent from Bangu and, therefore, had not become a neighborhood. At that time, the family paid rent for one of the project's apartments near José's nephew. The apartment was small, and the wish to build their own house was among the family's dreams.

With the fall of the Bangu Factory, the sale of these plots was part of a new occupation and urbanization process in the neighborhood at the end of the 1990s. In the area for sale there were some houses modeled after the factory's workers' villages, but the rest of the land was empty, with a rural aspect and very little urbanization. The family was very interested in the land, but, fearing the risk of possible frauds, decided to go to the Registry Office in Campo Grande — a West Zone neighborhood bordering Bangu — accompanied by other residents.

While living in the Navy Project, the family was able to save some money, which enabled them to purchase the land. This was the first step towards realizing a dream. The house would be built by José himself, both to avoid costs related to labor and due to the fact that José was the one who best understood the family's needs. According to Rosa, all the money saved over the years was invested at that point to begin construction. Balancing the costs of rent and construction work proved unfeasible; therefore, once work began, the family moved to their new home, still under construction, with bare plaster walls and no windows.

One month and fifteen days after the family had moved to the house under construction, they were caught off guard by the arrival of a bailiff with a request for repossession. The document presented by the bailiff claimed that the land belonged to the former Bangu Factory. Construction on most of the houses was unfinished, and some had not even begun. Few families, such as José's and Rosa's, already lived on the plots. However, everyone settled in the semi-finished or newly begun residences was forced by the courts to leave the place immediately. Having already settled there, the families faced the urgent challenge of finding a new place to live. According to the accounts of Rosa, Auricelia, and Rosélia, this was one of the most painful periods of their lives. They recall having to leave in a hurry, unable to take anything with them, leaving all their construction materials behind. Auricélia recounts

that she did not understand how that was possible, as people had been living in the village's houses for over ten years, having acquired the right to land through adverse possession.

With nowhere to go, the family started living in the kitchen of a snack bar. The space was offered by a neighbor — the owner of the bar located nearby —, who told the family they could stay there for as long as they needed. “My whole family will live in a the snack bar [next to the area contested by the Judiciary] of a neighbor who had some compassion, and that is when the struggle for land began,” recalls Auricélia. Outraged by the situation, residents decided to organize and reclaim the right to the land that had been expropriated from them. The leadership of the *Vila Catiri* [Catiri Village] Neighborhood Association, presided at the time by Hélio, grew stronger as the displaced families joined. As the mobilization grew, Auricélia started to act as the association's secretary. The group of residents and the association understood that, at that moment, it was important to seek justice, so they decided to go to the Public Defender's Office in downtown Rio de Janeiro — a strategic decision, since the West Zone's Public Defender's Office, which was closer, could be subject to the pressure of the region's political disputes and interests. Therefore, they acted seeking legal protection, initiating a series of strategically planned actions to recover the land.

The group began organizing to establish a dialogue with government representatives and public agencies that could intervene in the case. In one of the interviews, Auricélia explained the logic guiding the collective's actions: “We're not going to burn tires in the streets, we won't break anything, so we will use the same trickery they used against us.” This “trickery” consisted of resorting to the judicial system and using the documents they had, as they had done before the bailiff. They sought ways to bring visibility to the situation without employing methods that, at that moment, would work against them. The strategy was rooted in attempts to establish a dialogue, such as arranging meetings, seeking conversations, delivering documents to public authorities, and insisting on legal channels as an instrument for resistance.

However, in 2000, the residents were prohibited from visiting their unfinished homes. It is believed that this decision was prompted by the mobilization and the meetings proposed by the neighborhood association. Men were hired to guard the land and prevent residents not only from visiting, but also from holding any kind of gathering or intervention in the territory. In view of the new reality, the meetings began to take place under trees located in front of the makeshift gate installed to restrict access.

After many meetings and discussions with the representatives, the negotiations included two proposals. One proposed indemnifying those who were forcibly removed or resettled to Bangu's landfill, in a region that is very close to the disputed plots. Despite its name, the landfill is actually located within the Gericinó territory. Neither proposal was accepted by the group, so they began writing letters to government representatives. They also started organizing to occupy public institutions in large numbers, but silently, simply and patiently waiting for their turn.

And it was the elections, right? The Count was in power, he was betting on *César Maia*. He put the Count there, and later César Maia would come again, right? Look at the time that went by since my arrival, and the Count reiterates it, “they will get you out of there,” because I think the Count already had an issue with Bangu Factory before us, ha ha ha, just our luck. And so, what we have with, you know... the César Maia government, it has this way of looking at us. And it was hard releasing [unintelligible] later, with the guys from the Housing Office. But when we got it, see, we would spend all day at the Housing Department, until... what’s her name? Oh, God... Ah, it was the secretary... Solange Amaral! Until Solange Amaral came to attend to us. If she wouldn’t see us, we wouldn’t go away, all of us would stay up there, quietly, silently, but we packed the place. (Interview with Auricélia, June 16, 2020)⁷

What is surprising — or not that surprising — about the story is how it reveals the continuity of a cycle of violence sustained by a system rooted in colonization and in the private property of the *latifúndio* [large estate]. The evidence presented in the repossession action proceedings comprised a document from the period of the Brazilian monarchy in which the royal family granted use rights to the Bangu Factory.

The family recalls many saying it was impossible to win that fight, that the factory was very powerful throughout the entire region. Nevertheless, the group was relentless during the negotiations. Auricélia spoke of the achievement with pride, while expressing an awareness of the political dynamics and power relations of the time.

There is a particularity about the historical and social formation of the neighborhood of Gericinó. According to Brito (2012: 69, my translation), “there is no neighborhood in Brazil with Gericinó’s characteristics, its institutions, or created by such unparalleled circumstances.” The statement highlights the singularity of Gericinó’s territorial formation, marked by land tensions, the presence of large state institutions such as the penitentiary, and the old landfill.

During Mayor César Maia’s⁸ administration, the idea of turning Gericinó into an official neighborhood came up. The Comunidade do 80, for example, is very close to *avenida Brasil* [Brazil Avenue] and right next to the Coca-Cola Factory, a more expensive, easily accessible area far from the landfill. The attempt to displace the families to a degraded area reveals not only an issue on removal, but also a dispute over territory, power, and access to the city.

The entire struggle with the public authorities for the community’s regularization generated a sense of unity and solidarity among the residents, who had experienced the trauma of losing their land. When they finally won the suit and were able to return to their homes, new bonds and forms of sociability had been established. Raízes’s coordinators say that the experience was one of the main reasons for organizing Arraiá Flor da Roça, the family’s first collective action, which gave rise to the institution.

7 The interview was conducted online due to the Covid-19 pandemics.

8 In 2003, during his second term as the mayor of Rio de Janeiro, Cesar Maia presented Bill No. 11,167/2003, whose title is “Creates and demarcates the neighborhood of *Gericinó* and alters the demarcation of the neighborhood of Bangu”.

In 2001, an Appellate Justice ruled in favor of the community, an important victory in the process of land title regularization. However, other legal steps in the process had to be overcome in order to guarantee the definitive possession of the land. That same year, the residents organized a June Festival in the Comunidade do 80, which had become the name of the disputed area, in reference to the oldest street number on Gericinó Road. The festival, attended by around 200 people, became a strategy for symbolic resistance and an affirmation of territorial belonging, serving primarily as a way to continue the struggle for land. In her work on Trombos and Formoso, anthropologist Maiara Dourado addresses aspects of the struggle for land experienced by the community that directly resonate with the experiences and narratives constructed by the Mercês family and, consequently, by the Raízes group.

The struggle is not eventual, an episode, a circumstantial occurrence in life, as the struggle for land experienced by these people has been described. It is permanent; it takes place in the duration of the incessant movement of those who are also *hunting* for something that enables them to *act* in favor of their own lives. In that sense, the *struggle* is historically produced by these people that way, by *walking*. But this is not a linear historical movement, a chronological movement, marked by notions of past, present, and future, but rather by the continuities and discontinuities of these walks. (Interview with Dourado, June 19, 2020)

The struggle for land, in this case, did not unfold according to the classical models of agrarian reform, associated with peasants in rural social movements. However, the meaning attributed to this process by the Mercês family is also part of the context of political disputes over land and power in Brazil. We arrive in Bangu through displacement — physical, geographic, and cultural displacement. Movement is central to this history, a movement towards the impulse to stay alive; after all, what is the northeastern migration to the Southeast if not a movement? Displacement does not necessarily mean migration. Movement, here, somehow takes shape through a political body. Organization, political strategies, courage, and action were required. In this sense, the struggle is not an isolated event in the movements of the Mercês family, since it is not necessarily understood as an effective struggle — an event, a suit against the State, or a possible claim.

THE ART OF MAKING AS THE MEDIATOR FOR BELONGING

You are not my enemy
I don't want you tamed,
I don't want you restrained
It is conquered territory
It is guaranteed space
Larissa Luz

The first festivals in the Comunidade do 80 were held in front of the home of Rosa, the matriarch of the Mercês family and the organizer of the games. Therefore, the June festival incorporated elements from northeastern tradition, becoming not only a celebration, but also a space for affirming memory and community resistance. The art of making is always mobilized by Raízes de Gericinó's women as an important category in the formation of the group; in fact, it was through this art that the festival materialized. Rosa was a seamstress, and the festival's costumes, accessories and decoration were all conceived and produced by her. Currently, she is in charge of sewing workshops at Raízes' space.

When Leda Martins speaks of spiral time, she disrupts the notion of finitude. The art of making consists of the infinite possibilities that spring from thinking-knowing-making as a continuity that binds situations, times, places, and things. The family's social and cultural trajectories have also forged traditions and narratives of the self. Therefore, upon moving to Rio de Janeiro, they reinvented traditions and created these narratives.

The Mercês family opened the doors of their home, creating a network that strengthened their culture, uniting family members and transforming the newly settled territory. These dynamics resonate with what Moura (1995) identified in his book on Tia Ciata and *Pequena África* [Little Africa]: "in her house, the capital of the small continent of Africans and *Baianos*",⁹ it was possible to reinvigorate the group's values, affirm its cultural past and creative vitality, which were denied by society" (Moura 1995: 152).

The same way Tia Ciata's house served as a central space for cultural reaffirmation and as a symbol of Black resistance in Rio de Janeiro's *Pequena África*, the festival organized by the Mercês family in the Comunidade do 80 represented a symbolic moment that strengthened bonds. In 2010, the celebration took on its own name and form: the Arraiá Flor da Roça. Forged in the family's Maranhão's traditions, alongside the collective struggle for land and the right to housing, the festival became a symbolic event, combining a sense of longing and belonging, community and the maintenance of bonds in the *conquered territory*.

The name "*arraia*"¹⁰ itself denotes a place — *arraias* are understood as villages, but the term is also used to refer to traditional festivals held in the months of June and July in Maranhão. The June festival represented a bridge between the family, the new territory, and the neighborhood. Contributing food was one of the communal gestures associated with the event, since it only took place if neighbors, acquaintances and relatives brought a typical dish while organizing the celebration.

9 T.N.: People born in the state of Bahia, in Brazil's Northeast.

10 Furthermore, all June festivals and their traditions compose the *arraial* (or "*arraia*"), which is a kind of village. Currently, however, it is the name of the place (and even of the party) where typical June celebrations occur. In June festivals, the *arraial* gains a rural aspect, a kind of celebration that includes traditional costumes, concerts, cultural manifestations, fires, traditional food, the staging of marriages, spaces for dance, and plays, among other characteristics.

The process of the “struggle for land” also influenced how residents relate to the territory. The idea of naming the festival *arraiaá* also emerged from this relationship; the festivals reinvent spaces, and the word *arraiaá* itself denotes a place. Although it was not an *arraiaá* with specific characteristics, the Comunidade do 80 valued the construction of an imagined community based on the festival’s actions and on the shared experience of the struggle and the place. Life is not shaped solely by conflicts, but also by exchanges, alliances, and interactions in general. These processes involve the experience, production, and recognition — whether explicit or implicit — of various interests and values. The negotiation of reality is frequently unconscious, facilitated by language in its broadest sense; it also represents solidarity and produces a web of meanings, as stated by Geertz (2008). In other words, culture, following Schutz, acts as a means of communication that does not suppress differences, which, on the contrary, flourish through them (Velho 1986).

The struggle for land, understood here as a political category and as a tool for mobilization and organization through the confrontation of public authorities to conquer a territory that rightfully belongs to the group, materialized this achievement. It was through the festival that the group conquered the place, and the festival is not understood merely as a strategy for unity and collectivity, but rather as a symbolic form.

(...) historically, the human needs to not live simply according to everyday utilitarian tasks flourish in the party. It is a space/time for the celebration of life, spontaneity and joy. That is why celebrations have a special meaning in the social relations of various eras of civilization, when man reveals and recognizes himself in his condition as a communicative and social being. By participating in a festivity, each individual feels that he is in a collective and, at the same time, in the reconstruction and withdrawal of his identity, which is always influenced by the serious, everyday, and orderly life of the social world. (...) (Nóbrega 2012: 217, my translation)

Currently, Arraiá Flor da Roça may be considered one of Raízes de Gericinó’s initiatives as a Cultural Institution. But it was through the festival that the family began forging bonds with neighbors in Bangu and gained recognition for the actions it carried out. With these movements, the family’s doorstep became a meeting place not only because of the festivals, but also for representing a point of reference for the community that had just returned to its land.

The notion of place arises from a sense of belonging. It is not merely a place, but rather the site where affects, memories, and relationships that create meaning are built. Before becoming an institutional struggle, it served as the mediation of territorialization and identity. The struggle for land/territory enabled the family to conquer a place, and the festivals they organized on the streets of São Luís, their city of origin, also became a bridge between the territory they left behind and their new territory.

The *struggle for land*, which materialized against the family’s removal after they were in Rio de Janeiro for some time, may have been an act that consolidated communal bonds that were already forming; moreover, the notion of “struggle for land” may mediate the identity of the

Comunidade do 80. Reinventing everyday life through June festivals like those they organized in Maranhão was a way for the Mercês family to recreate that space, revealing how social relations help to determine individuals through social and cultural practices (Certeau 1998).

After settling into the family's house and in the community, Auricélia's husband, Dourado, returned from Maranhão in the mid-1990s with a DVD player. On an ordinary Sunday, Auricélia heard a familiar voice among the music playing on the DVD player. She immediately recognized the voice and ran to the living room, where she realized it was a friend from the time when she was part of a choir in São Luís; her friend sang with Alcione. Overcome with emotion, her first attitude — accompanied by tears of nostalgia — was to immediately call her mother, Rosa, who was visiting Maranhão, and tell her, moved, “Momma, let's organize a *boi*? It's our tradition.” Rosa replied, “Are you sure? In that case, I'll bring everything from here and we'll put one on one this year.” The idea was also driven by the neighborhood's enthusiasm at the prospect of having its own *boi* for the *arraia* and its festivities. It was then that *Boi Estrela de Gericinó* [Gericinó Star Ox], a symbol of the resistance, memory and cultural identity of Gericinó, was born.

Mother and daughter fondly recall the moment of the *boi*'s birth. The phone call, which occurred right before the June festivities, rekindled their shared desire to relive the *boi* tradition in Rio de Janeiro. When they returned from Maranhão, José and Rosa brought the *boi* [ox] in the bus's luggage compartment. They brought the *bois* and the materials needed to produce the costumes, accessories and all the elements that make up the practice. Since they already organized the *arraia*, that year they decided to produce a special performance, incorporating the *boi* and the accessories brought from Maranhão. The unannounced arrival of these elements caught the community by surprise and enchanted everyone. It was such a success that, the following day, neighbors and friends asked when the next presentations would take place. Rosa, in good humor, replied, “if you saw it, you saw it; we won't have another until next year.”

The arrival of the *Boi Estrela de Gericinó* changed the festival's dynamics. In the ritual, *Bumba meu boi*'s traditional characters, such as the Indigenous woman, the cowboy, and mother Catirina, were played by residents, especially children, strengthening the community's connection to the cultural manifestation.

The winners of the Public Grant for Local Initiatives, which awarded 20,000 Reais to the initiatives chosen by the municipality of Rio de Janeiro, were announced on February 25, 2015. The cultural group Raízes de Gericinó was among the recipients for its Arraiá Flor da Roça. The Municipal Department of Culture team, responsible for administering the grant, organized a series of visits to get to know the awarded initiatives up close. As representatives of the Municipal Department of Culture, Helena Serpa and Ricardo Vaz attended the Arraiá Flor da Roça, whose festival was scheduled to take place on July 4, 2015, at the Raízes' space in Gericinó. When we arrived, we were immediately struck by the feeling of

being in a familiar environment. The people present knew one another, and the place itself also contributed to the feeling, since it was like a yard, a *terreiro*.

The feeling was indeed that of an *arraia*, owing to the characteristic of the territory where it took place and the decoration, which reinforced the welcoming and communal atmosphere. That year (2015), the festival was no longer held in front of the family's house, but rather in a new space they had "gained"¹¹ to manage the community's activities, which had grown and gained visibility in the region. Right at the entrance of the Comunidade do 80, in an ample and grassy terrain, hung the Arraiá Flor da Roça banner, with stalls, flags, food, balloon decorations, and people dressed in traditional attire.

As soon as we arrived at the festival, we greeted the sisters Auricélia and Rosélia, whom we had met through the Public Grant for Local Initiatives. After a brief conversation about the festival, they took us to the house-museum so we could get to know it. Upon entering the space, we gained a deeper understanding of the project's meaning. We were taken directly to the room where the *bois* of the Bumba meu boi were stored, alongside a very rich collection of costumes, accessories, and objects used in the festivals.

In 2015, the scale and characteristics of Arraiá Flor da Roça were very different from previous years, since the funding awarded to the group via the public grant enabled an exchange between two *bois* from Rio de Janeiro, Brilho Parada de Lucas¹² [Parada de Lucas Shine] and Estrela de Gericinó. The festival also featured the Black women's collective Mulheres de Pedra¹³ [Stone Women], located in the West Zone. Both of the invited groups performed. The Boi de Parada de Lucas brought their entire group and all the instruments to perform their *batalhão* [battalion]. At one point, both *bois* met in the center of the space, where they greeted one another and soon began to dance.

During the performance, the children getting ready to dance with the *Boi de Gericinó* began to gather, mixing with the *Brilho de Lucas* group and merging into a single body. Later, during the *Boi Estrela de Gericinó*'s performance, children took over the space, as most members of the group are children supported by other social projects coordinated by Auricélia. As organized by the family, the *arraia* is a collective and communal celebration. Although the knowledge is centered within the family from Maranhão, the mobilization permeated the entire neighborhood.

The Bumba meu Boi manifestation can be analyzed through various aspects: its origin, its history as a script, the religious play, the dance, and the characters. Yet, the tale of mother Catirina and father Francisco serves as a kind of script that guides the *folguedos*,¹⁴ with its char-

11 The space currently occupied by the Mercês family was the headquarters of the Comunidade do 80 Neighborhood Association. Since the beginning of the struggle for land, Auricélia stood out as a community leader, actively taking part in projects developed by the association. Once the family's activities expanded and grew stronger, the association itself granted the space for these initiatives.

12 The *boi*'s profile is available at: <https://www.instagram.com/brilhodelucasoficial/>.

13 The collective's profile is available at: <https://www.instagram.com/mulheresdepedra/>

14 Traditional Brazilian folk festivities that include music, dance, and plays.

acters and acts. However, the romp's narrative is no longer the same as it was in the past, when it was created. Its enactment is shaped by its context and by symbolic interactions. Thus, how the romp and/or ritual is conducted depends on what it represents for the *boi* groups, which do not necessarily follow a script with a beginning, middle, and end. Gathering around the *boi* that binds them together, the group of revelers seeks to last and survive time through the manifestation. The ox that dies and is resurrected marks and establishes the cosmological temporality of the ritual, which is recreated every year in the context of the June saint festivities. The narrated drama triggers the temporal parameters that frame ritual actions and give life to the *folguedos*.

In Brazil, June festivals, especially those held in the Northeast, and Maranhão's Bumba meu Boi are important Brazilian cultural manifestations that articulate festive, religious, symbolic, and communal dimensions. These festivals, traditionally held in June as a tribute to the saints of popular Catholicism — especially Saint John, Saint Anthony, and Saint Peter — combine elements of European origin with cultural practices developed in rural Brazil, including collective dances such as *quadrilhas* [square dances], traditional food made from corn, and rituals that celebrate agricultural cycles and communal sociability.

Bumba meu Boi, on the other hand, is a more complex and territorialized manifestation based on the tale of mother Catirina and father Francisco, associated with the traditions of the June festivities and sacred rituals of African and Indigenous matrix, centered on the story of the death and resurrection of an ox during the period of the June saint festivals in the State of Maranhão. These festivities, mainly in the North and Northeast of the country, can be understood as collective cultural practices that foster belonging, memory, and identity, serving as spaces that renew traditions and forge social bonds.

While reflecting on the concept of parties, historian Luís Antônio Simas (2019: 75) draws upon the philosophy of samba composer *Beto sem Braço* [Armless Bert]: “Parties scare misery away.”¹⁵ Arraiá Flor da Roça was created in 2012, but its origins also lie in Maranhão. I found out about Raízes through Arraiá Flor da Roça, the festival, and, as I wrote in the first paragraph of the introduction to this work, it was that event that made me set foot in the Comunidade do 80 for the first time. Festivals and parties are grounded on the art of encounters, but they are also responsible for enchantments. Relations of power and domination are embedded in the history of Bumba meu Boi, both ludically and mythically. Rather than dwelling on the origin of the *boi*'s religious play, I seek to bring out its dimension of enchantment — the mystery of an ox that comes back to life and confers animism¹⁶ to the *folguedo*. The existing mediations in the script approach knowledge that transports the en-

15 This is not a bread and circuses situation. Beto sem Braço said that parties scare misery away. Parties are not organized because life is good, on the contrary. All of my work dialogues with fringe cultures that invent the world and subvert misery, including existential misery, through syncopations.

16 Animism, in general terms, is the doctrine that says that living organisms are animated by a soul, that is, the soul is the basis for organic and psychological life. It is a cosmovision that does not separate the physical world from the spiritual, and is common in Indigenous cultures, which approach the environment as alive, conscious, and interconnected.

chanted elements beyond the representation of the ritual/act. The power to create narratives about Bumba meu Boi is proof of the inventiveness of the groups who organize the festival.

It is also important to analyze the significance of cultural policies that engage with initiatives such as this one, policies reaching territories and strengthening community-based cultural production. Furthermore, the Local Initiatives grant enabled an exchange and a network of other groups that develop culturally relevant initiatives in their territories.

ANCESTRY AS A TOOL FOR UTOPIA

The women who brought the party to life with the community carry knowledge, memories, and connections from the territory they left behind and gained strength through Bumba meu Boi, a peripheral, Black cultural manifestation that has long been persecuted and criminalized.

How could I not analyze this trajectory through the lens of ancestry? Not necessarily ancestry as that which we do not experience or moves us away, becoming untouchable. The ancestral materializes in the art of making, observed in sewing, in exchanges, in knowledge, and in movement. Ancestry, therefore, would be constructed now, through actions in present time intertwined with the past. The family's tradition was not simply brought from Maranhão — it sprung from Rosa's and José's lives and materialized in the family's cultural practices in Rio de Janeiro. The couple's ancestral knowledge gained new meanings through their bodily displacement. In the words of Auricélia:

Where do my family's Bumba meu Boi's influences come from? From Vitória de Mearim, through my father. I learned to sew, to do embroideries, with my grandmother, and I made hammocks and cast nets with my mother. I used to live with my grandmother when she washed clothes in the river, those songs, I don't remember the songs, but I think they influenced this cultural aspect. In my father's house, in addition to the *boi*, they founded a samba school. My mother's influences were associated with herbs, sweets, food. (Interview with Auricélia in January 28, 2019)¹⁷

Martins (1997) and Nogueira (2011) ground their notions on the concept of ancestry, which represents the belief in the impact of our actions and our responsibilities as an emotional component of a shared, interdependent, and attentive world. Believing in ancestry means believing in one's own capacity to act, since it manifests through a reflection on a present past and on an active awareness of the crucial role we play in the construction of new histories.

Neither nostalgia nor the lack of June festivals were solely responsible for making the family organize the celebrations in their new territory. I understand that these actions also conveyed notions of community that comprise the value of their ancestry, not only of Maranhão's cultural identity, but also and mainly of them as the bearers of their agency.

¹⁷ The interview occurred in Raízes de Gericinó's space. It was conducted in the kitchen, during one of the afternoons I spent talking and experiencing the space.

In *O Terreiro e a Cidade*, Muniz Sodré (2019) points out that communities differ from collectivities. Collectivities hold impermanence, inconstancy, and, above all, individual projections to deal with social relations. Communities — a dimension shaped by aspects of the African diaspora and of traditional Indigenous peoples — are the guarantee of survival in the midst of adversity, the body's psychographic memories used to navigate time. There is no community without ancestry, and there is no ancestry without community. The dimension of ancestral construction occurs through the significance of passing over lessons of a life that reveres the past, moves presents, and seeks a future for one's kin. It only makes sense because it is created with/and for the other. These are the precedents and extensions of its trajectories in the world.

The creation of *Boi Estrela de Gericinó*, beyond simply representing a cultural recovery, actualizes what Muniz Sodré describes as the community's foundation: ancestry as a collective and embodied practice. By proposing the "making of a *boi*," Auricélia not only recovers a tradition but also activates the memory connecting bodies, territories, and times. This dimension is evidenced by histories such as those of Auricélia and her mother, Rosa.

Bumba meu Boi, regardless of its origin and the disputes it conveys as a folk cultural manifestation, is maintained through the art of making. One could say that it was a cultural heritage before it was recognized as such. In this case, the heritage lies in the art of making, the same art that created Estrela de Gericinó. The art of know-how as a form of knowledge transmission materializes crafts that are often forgotten amidst the needs and ways of life imposed by a hegemonic, colonial logic of being and existing. Ancestries are recreated through the invention of routines, through rescuing and valuing these crafts that belong to certain groups.

Once it became an institution in 2010, the coordinators of Raízes began writing projects to receive grants and/or establish partnerships to implement their initiatives, but one of their greatest achievements was the space-house for its activities. The neighborhood association in the area where the family bought their lot was based in a house at the entrance of the community.

We began the [sewing] workshop at my mother's place, in the backyard; everyone would eat together. When it rained, the rehearsal would take place in the garage or in the backyard, with this little blue tarp. There was a space at the entrance of the community, two empty houses. The community began to plead with us to occupy the space. In 2012, we already organized the event in front of these houses, which we started to occupy in July; in September, we received the keys so we could use the space. What motivates us is this will to be happy, to be with others, to be with people. Whenever we learn something, we want to share it with people. (Interview with Auricélia on June 16, 2020)¹⁸

The family's communal activities, such as the Arraiá Flor da Roça festival, the Christmas parties, and the walks, gained such momentum that the president of the Gericinó Neighborhood Association, through the mobilization of the residents of the Comunidade do 80, offered the association's headquarters, which had long been vacant, to the family. It was one

18 The interview was conducted online due to the Covid-19 pandemics.

of the original houses from when the family moved to the area, retaining characteristics of the houses from the workers' village from the time of the Bangu Factory.

When she speaks of the creation of the museum's space, Auricélia talks about the significance of this exchange for understanding her own work:

It came up, they kind of began unintentionally, the handicraft and dance workshops. In the midst of Ecomunitário, Diogo Cardoso, Luiz Vaz, Cláudia Pereira from Coosturarte, Leila from Mulheres de Pedra, Ariel Cohen, I began to realize that we already had something related to memory, we already did it, but we didn't realize it, we were the authors of this production, we felt like we were the authors of this production, but we didn't realize that, in addition to us being authors, there was the issue of identity, of matriarchy, of territoriality. But it was this junction, this acquaintanceship with this network, the dialogues, the workshops in which we would participate, the exchanges, that made us realize that we had a space of memory. There was also the time Diogo visited the space, saying, "You are a museum." Next came professor Mário Chagas, a Professor from UniRio, one of the main names of Social Museology in the country, who was invited by Luiz Vaz. And then we found out that we were the museum's living collection, so it is with Luiz Vaz that we discover that what we did had something to do with ancestry, matriarchy. We took something from each of them, gathering the pieces, and we said: "Oh, wow, we already did all of that?" (Interview with Auricélia, June 19, 2020)

The musealization of the Museu Casa Bumba meu Boi [Bumba meu Boi Museum House] was a collective process, as noted in the excerpt above. The institution was already operating in the space it gained in 2012; with the festivals and the group's collection, its visibility reached a new scale. The Raízes de Gericinó cultural space, with its Bumba meu Boi Museum House, is a space with its doors open to the territory's population, enabling it to routinely create meaning for the neighborhood's imaginary as well as that of those who frequent the place. This perception is articulated through the concept of "territorialities" (Haesbaert 2004).

From migrating from Maranhão due to financial reasons to the struggle to resist a removal from Bangu, the art of making is updated by the knowledge and practices of the women of the Mercês family. Preserving the art of making as a material and immaterial heritage means fighting for the representations and re-signification of the Mercês family's everyday cultural practices in the recent past. At this point, we cannot refrain from drawing upon the concept of bricolage, explored by Certeau (1995), which describes the practice of combining various cultural elements in a creation. It is a form of engaging with everyday life where the product of any act of consumption is repurposed and reinterpreted as a new structure. For Certeau, individual trajectories form unpredictable stages, partially illegible "trails." He observes that even statistical analysis frequently neglects this aspect, since it restricts itself to classifying, calculating, and tabulating the "lexical" units that form these trajectories.

According to Weber (2004), the modern world has imprisoned magic behind iron bars; that is why he talks about a disenchantment of the world as the expression of a rational world explained by science. "Disenchantment, in the strict sense, refers to the world of magic, and literally means: to remove the charm, to undo a sacrilege, to escape a cursed plague, to break a spell" (Pierucci

2003: 7, my translation). The idea of enchantment, in a way, is related to animist theory, which posits that objects and beings are animated, that is, they have a soul. For Weber (2004), religion and science are responsible for the disenchantment of the world, since both attempt to explain the world and the events of life in a more plausible manner than enchantment can allow.

The logic of capitalist society, in trying to control nature, led the organization of work to reject the unpredictability implicit in magical practices, as well as the possibility of establishing a privileged relationship with natural elements and the belief in the existence of powers accessible only to certain individuals, which, therefore, are not easily generalized or exploited. Magic also represented an obstacle to the rationalization of work processes and a threat to the establishment of all the principles of individual responsibility. Magic appeared, above all, as a form of rejection of work, of insubordination, as well as an instrument of grassroots resistance to power. The world must be “disenchanted” to be dominated (Federici 2017: 313).

The magic created day to day by these women connects to Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life*: “These ‘trees of gestures’ are in movement everywhere. Their forests walk through the streets” (Certeau 1984: 102 quoted in Di Giovanni 2018: 20).

The land that was found, in addition to becoming the Comunidade do 80, was also a place to cultivate the memories of this family, who, by recounting their experiences, took the lead of this history as protagonists in this cultural movement. In *Plantation Memories*, Grada Kilomba (2010) offers analyses of the silencing of Black voices. According to her, the act of speaking is seen as a negotiation between the speaker and the listener. Listening is, in that sense, the act of authorization toward/to the speaker — one may speak only when one’s voice is heard. In the dialectic presented by the author, those who are listened to are those who belong, “and those who are not listened to become those who ‘do not belong’” (Kilomba 2010: 22).

This struggle to belong through territory is reflected in the very construction of these territorialities. Haesbaert (2014) expands the concept of territorialities as discursive tools, given the “Latin-American context of resistances,” apprehending cultural identity through its material and symbolic formation on the territory. It is in this dimension of lived experience, of the relationship with the territory it occupies, that Raízes de Gericinó reaffirms the symbolic relationship between culture and space.

The folk culture of Maranhão, as a mediator of the mobilization in Comunidade do 80, also reaffirms the identities of Black culture from that state, constructing projects essential to survival narratives. When I contributed briefly to the organization of Raízes’ projects, I had access to a few documents. One of them included an excerpt that contextualized the NGO:

Raízes de Gericinó is an entity that emerged as the product of the collective struggle for the right to housing in Catiri, in the periphery of Bangu, known for assembling Northeastern and Northern migrants. It consists of a community surrounded by *Avenida Brasil* [Brazil Avenue] and factories, which makes it an authentic urban village. A scenario favorable for the emergence of an association like Raízes de Gericinó (or simply Raízes!). The family of

*Maranhenses*¹⁹ who started it seeks the reinvention of the folk culture of Bumba meu Boi in Bangu's lands. The group has a matriarch: Mrs. Rosa, a babassu nut cracker in Maranhão and a faithful communicator of Maranhão's Bumba meu Boi tradition. In addition to the festivities and the tradition of the *boi* related to the association, its creation was born of the need to attend to children and young people in the village and its surroundings. Cultural activities involve the creation and production of costumes and accessories for Bumba meu Boi, group rehearsals of the folk group "*Estrela do Gericinó*" and annual festivities. The association hosts a library for young adults, a film club, a *capoeira* group, Capoeirando, and a museological collection that makes community and folk group actions more dynamic and attracts tourists, students, and Northeastern migrants.

This text elucidates Raízes' trajectory, although it may cause various debates on what constitutes a favorable scenario for an association such as the one presented herein. After all, it faces constant challenges to maintain its projects, especially in the face of the political scenario of recent years. Through my study of Raízes, we have verified that the group's complexity extends beyond the institution, which is challenging in itself, in a scenario of limited access to cultural funding in the region where the group operates. The work they chose to do, however — a commitment to Maranhão's reinvented memories and identities, such as Bumba meu Boi — is also part of what this family represents. In the society we live in, this creates various tensions.

In the conversations we had, the spread of evangelical churches in the region and how the phenomenon affected their work were frequently highlighted. Projects such as Capoeirando are no longer active due to the evangelization process in the territory. According to Auricélia, those responsible for the children who participated in the *capoeira* classes started to disenroll them. Like *capoeira*, Bumba meu Boi itself has suffered from this process, very much associated, according to Rosa, "with a demonization of folk culture."

This context has somewhat shifted the work done by Raízes, which prioritized its work in the assistance sector, which impacts its cultural work. The shift is also caused by the lack of investment and the challenge of maintaining a Black culture museum in a territory marked by conflict and violence. It is interesting to think, however, that the collectivities fostered by Raízes, in their search for common ground, reinvent everyday life and affect their structures. When we think about the creation of new worlds that disrupt the hegemonic logic and necropolitics (Mbembe 2003), Raízes de Gericinó is presented as a space for resistance, not in spite of all the struggles they must maintain, but because of all the struggles they decided to face. Therefore, they talk with pride about the fact that they occupy that place with their knowledges and their movements.

When narrating the trajectory of the Mercês family, it is impossible to begin with "Once upon a time." One must start with the intense brushstrokes of the hard reality experienced by an enormous part of the Brazilian population. However, one can observe in this history the beauty of the life that forges creative and courageous answers to life's greatest questions, a truth so well portrayed by João Cabral de Melo Neto in *Morte e Vida Severina* [Death and Life of Severino]

19 People born in the state of Maranhão.

(...) there is no better answer than the spectacle of life: to see it unravel its string, which is also called life, to see the factory that it stubbornly fabricates itself, to see it sprout, as just now, as a new exploded life; even when the explosion is little, such as the one that occurred; even when it is a scrawny explosion as the one that occurred just now; even when it is the explosion of the life of a Severino. (Melo Neto 1994: 201–202, my translation)²⁰

Between life and death, one finds survival, the life experienced after one comes near death. For many, life is an eternal struggle for survival, yet it is through this survival that we find the answers required to create spectacles and their scenes. According to Facina (2019), “survival culture” is produced from the existence of these lives.

How can one survive such an overpowering destructive force, which envies and inhibits any creative drive originating from precarious lives, to use Judith Butler’s expression? Those who are the Other, who are dehumanized because they differ, sing out of tune, twist with their dribbles, with Garrincha’s legs, acquired through the need to prevail over death? As a transcendental force, as practical knowledge and as a philosophy of life, survival forges its means, traces paths and escape routes. Something is taking shape in invisible, underground movements, only foreseen. Loudly, the return can, at any time, explode in ecstasy in the face of those who are strait-laced. (Facina 2019) ²¹

“Not everything is a bed of roses, but everything is roots.” I read the phrase in the archives of Raízes de Gericinó. This made me think that, as Jorge Amado spoke of Bahia, this land would be “inhabited by people who, even in the face of poverty and adversity, know how to value life, in all that it means regarding light and joy.”²² Raízes de Gericinó represents a land that, more than being inhabited, is occupied and cultivated by people who produce life.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The entire dataset supporting the results of this study was published in the article itself.

20 *The Death and Life of a Severino* portrays the trajectory of Severino, who leaves the Brazilian backcountry toward the coastline in search of better living conditions. Severino finds, in the way, other northeasterners who, like him, suffer from deprivations imposed on the backcountry. The land’s dryness and the injustices against the people are perceived unsubtly by the author. Therefore, he portrays the burial of a man who is murdered at the command of landowners.

21 “A sobrevivência de Eros” article, by Professor Adriana Facina, published in Academia.edu in 2019.

22 Phrase found in the House of Jorge Amado, in Bahia.

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