



Children of the land and children of the Saint:
Heritage, religion, and territoriality in a Brazilian *quilombo*

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is looking at *quilombo* grassroots land and identity politics as they transpire in a compound of Black rural communities in the north of the state of Maranhão, Brazil.

One of the main questions this thesis asks is: How do communities mobilise resources in defence of their territories when formal means of establishing land claims have been exhausted? Based on ethnographic research conducted over fifteen months my analysis delves into strategies employed by peasant groups for the assertion of their collective land ownership. This assertion taps into specific ethno-racial legislation and it is especially directed towards Evangelical Christians, whom the majority of Catholic *quilombola* residents regard as their territorial and religious antagonists.

This thesis's broadest argument is that this territorial defence mainly materialises through two streams of action: religious and cultural grassroots activism. It is argued that creative uses and articulations of cultural and religious practices, and the creation of a network of alliances, transpire as the most relevant means of 'informal' community politics.

More specifically, I argue that local ceramic production (intrinsically attached to notions of a '*quilombo* heritage') and religious festivities in honour of the local patron saint contribute to the preservation of a specific *quilombo* territoriality. In the ethnographic context examined, this territoriality is inherently attached to popular Catholicism and notions of *quilombola* cultural identity. Employing approaches from agrarian, peasant politics, *quilombo*, and heritage studies, this dissertation seeks to illuminate the dynamic relation between local perceptions of land and territoriality in the 'lands of Santa Teresa'. Overall, this thesis aims at contributing to those studies that explore the diversity and creativity of politics 'from below'.

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To Luisa,
and all the *guerreira/os* of Itamatatua
with all my respect and admiration.

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My long-term fieldwork was then developed in three periods. The first was a period of four months in 2014 and 2015 (Oct 2014 - Feb 2015), the second of six months in 2015 (May-Oct 2015), and the third and final of five months in 2016 (Jun-Nov 2016), amounting to fifteen months of ethnographic field research.

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A statement on the use of pseudonyms and maps in this thesis

The decision to use, or not use, pseudonyms to change the real names of the people discussed and quoted in an ethnographic study needs to consider whether a pseudonym will be used to change the name(s) of the location(s) where the study takes place.

There are several reasons an anthropologist may opt for the use (or not) of pseudonyms, based on a set of, predominantly, ethical concerns and guidelines that are specific to a given social and political context at a given historical time. The ethical code an anthropologist decides to apply to her ethnographic data depends on diverse constitutive elements of her ethnographic context, such as the nature of her research, concerns about participants' safety and well-being in case their real identity is used, and, most importantly, the participants' own desires in relation to the disclosure of their identity.

All these ethical concerns effectively crumble when real names are used for the locations where a given ethnographic study is being conducted. Although there are several examples, in the anthropological literature, where pseudonyms are used with the intention to protect specific localities and their residents, it is commonplace that real names are eventually revealed, even despite the author's efforts to protect their anonymity (Geest 2003: 16). Furthermore, the expected historical discussion with which most ethnographies begin, and which lays a useful foundation upon which the ethnographic discussion unfolds, further complicates the anonymity option. Discussing the history of a given locality, inevitably yields information about specific geopolitical circumstances that render the locality's identification rather inevitable, if not altogether obvious. Once the real name of the study site is revealed is it ever possible to protect the anonymity of our interlocutors?

In pondering the above questions, I have decided not to use pseudonyms in my thesis. To this general stance I have made an exception, which I discuss below. Let me first give the grounds for my decision. Besides the reservations outlined above, and after having discussed my research's scope and having obtained explicit consent from all my interlocutors, I have opted to use the real names of Alcântara people as this was what appeared to be the 'good research practice', from an ethical point of view, in my field site. First, a great part of my research participants were community leaders, *Quilombola* rights' activists, and other people holding formal or informal political, religious, and administrative roles. These people are public figures with relatively (at least at the local/municipal level) known political or other activity and positions, who consistently and actively express their views. Second, even research participants with no public involvement in or active engagement with religious, political, or other issues, in my main field site, are extremely familiar with the concept of consent in an academic research, and the consequences it may entail, due to the presence of several researchers in their communities in the past. Third, the real names I am using in my thesis already exist in dozens of published theses, journal articles, and other academic documents, produced by anthropologists and other researchers who have conducted research in Alcântara in the past. Finally, the use of real names –for both the locality and the people– was repeatedly pronounced as imperative by my local interlocutors. As I hope will be explained in the course of this thesis, the need to 'make the community broadly well-known'

and, therefore, raise awareness of their specific land issues, is an integral part of Itamatatiua's political struggle. As I was assured by residents on several occasions, knowing that their names, and the name of their community were travelling abroad reaching people 'on the other side of the world' was a source of great pride and satisfaction. Opting for not using pseudonyms was, therefore, my way of keeping my part of the agreement made with the community on several occasions, which entailed the diffusion of my results and the return to the community to leave a copy of my thesis and present my finished research. I am confident that, to the best of my knowledge, the disclosure of the identities of my interlocutors does not pose any threat or danger, and will not compromise their trust and confidentiality.

While both the localities and the participants are identified for the reasons outlined above, I have chosen to use pseudonyms when my interlocutors expressed openly critical and/or polemical views on the local leadership and/or other people from the communities discussed. While the big picture is there, I decided that the use of pseudonyms on those occasions (very few in the text) was justifiable in my attempt to prevent the possibility of inter-communal frictions. Although not explicitly asked by the people concerned to protect their anonymity, I believe that this is a rather innocuous proactive measure that neither distorts nor interferes with their accounts. Clearly, someone from the community reading this thesis can make a guess at the person behind those statements, but the use of pseudonyms will, I believe, give them the benefit of the doubt.

Finally, the maps I am using in this thesis are loans and/or slightly modified versions of maps I have taken from different sources. I have decided not to use more detailed or informative maps than the ones included here, or produce new ones. This decision is due to the delicate nature of issues around land, and since this is a thesis primarily about land tensions and the ways the local community mobilises in defence of a disputed territory, the use of detailed maps that would delineate a specific territory seemed unjustifiable and an unnecessarily risky enterprise. Maps can be used in different ways by different people and can therefore become a source of dispute and confrontation. Avoiding the use of detailed maps in this particular case, is a way of being able to situate my discussion in its geographical context, without setting borders that could create problems for the communities discussed.

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Acronyms

ABA: Brazilian Anthropology Association
ADCT: Temporary Constitutional Provisions Act
ADI: Direct Action of Unconstitutionality
APA: Area of Environmental Protection
CCN-MA: Centre for Black Culture in Maranhão
CEA: Alcântara Space Centre
CF: Federal Constitution
CLA: Alcântara Launch Centre
CONAQ: National Coordination for the Articulation of Black Rural *Quilombo* Communities
CPI: Parliamentary Inquiry Committee
DEM: Democrats (political party)
FAB: Brazilian Air Force
FCP: Palmares Cultural Foundation
FNT: Black Brazilian Front
FPA: Parliamentary Front for Farming
FPE: Evangelical Parliamentary Front of the National Congress
FUNAI: National Indian Foundation
IBGE: Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics
ILO: International Labour Organisation
INCRA: National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform
MABE: Movement of those Impacted by the Space Base
MNU: Unified Black Movement
MPF: Federal Public Prosecutor's Office
MST: Landless Workers' Movement
PMDB: Brazilian Democratic Movement Party
PSOL: Socialism and Liberty Party
PT: Brazilian Workers' Party
SEIR: Secretary for Racial Equality
STF: Supreme Court
STTR: Rural Workers' Syndicate

When it comes to land there's only one way to go about in this country:
you either fight for it, or you stay without it. There is no other option.

Sandra Araújo,
lawyer and member of the
Pastoral Commission for Land in Maranhão

The subaltern classes are not destitute of sophistication
in their act of making culture and history.

Negro and Gomes, 2006: 234

Chapter 1. Introduction: A plural quilombo landscape

April showers. After a refreshing afternoon downpour the temperature had dropped just enough to allow for a pleasant stroll without the sun gluing our clothes to our skin. I was walking alongside Seu Chico, a middle-aged man from Itamatatiua and great-nephew of former community leader Seu Eurico de Jesus. Son of Beata, Eurico's niece, Chico grew up together with Neide, Heloísa (Luisa), Maria de Lourdes (Pirixi) and Cecília (Cecí), the four daughters of Eurico and Cipriana de Jesus, and Tolentino, the only son, who died at a young age. He continues to maintain close relationships with the sisters and Neide, who is the current community leader, in particular, participating actively in community politics. Like most residents his age, Seu Chico holds a detailed mental map of the communal land; the territory that is in the process of land regularisation by the Brazilian state. As we were walking, he was running, in his mind, through the natural landmarks that delimit Itamatatiua's vast territory. In a steady, serene, and confident voice he said:

There are 57,000 hectares of land. First, it goes up to Girijó. From there it goes further up, towards the river of São Bento. From there it continues and goes towards the Aurá river, in Joaquim de Santo. From there it turns and continues towards Jaburú. From Jaburú it goes until the Engenho Velho; from there it continues, it passes through Barroso and Balandro, and from there it goes on, it passes here in the slope of Santa Maria, from there it continues straight to Girijó. It borders with the lands of Lady Sant'Ana...those [lands] of Lady Sant'Ana are on the other side, over there, and she [Santa Teresa] stays in these parts here. It [the land] goes up until the slope of Carrapicho, it is from there that it goes back to Girijó; only there does it end.

As Seu Chico was finishing voicing the mental map of Santa Teresa's territory, shared among the inhabitants of about 40 Black rural quilombo communities, he lowered his head and with a mixture of regret and exasperation he said:

And when they arrived, they started...each one grabs a small piece of land. But this land is one only, a single unit. Nobody can say 'I am the owner' because it is Santa Teresa's, it was donated to Santa Teresa. The Carmelites¹ donated it [to her] because they didn't find who to sell it to at the time, so they donated it to Santa Teresa. Because she is the owner. I mean, they didn't donate it to me, neither to Neide nor to Luisa, not even to the elders. No. It was donated to Santa Teresa. Then, since residents were the workers of Santa Teresa—because they were not slaves ... nobody is a slave of Santa Teresa—everyone worked the land that is of Santa Teresa. So us, we always have this tradition with her. Everyone knows that [the land] is hers and that we stayed here. The elders have died, now it is the younger ones who are holding their ground (ficam de pé firme). Dona Neide, Dona Cecí, Dona Heloísa, Dona Maria de Lourdes have always been there, and I have also stayed with them. We have always been fighting. Until...my wish is that we acquire the titles of this land. Because when we acquire the title of this land, we will have peace of mind (estaremos tranquilos).

¹This refers to the Roman Catholic Christian Order of the Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Mount Carmel.

Maurice Bloch wrote that ‘for Malinowski what was to be studied was a long conversation taking place among the people with whom we live during fieldwork and in which we inevitably join’ (Bloch 1989: 1-2). For Malinowski, Bloch continues, ‘everything was to be found there, in that long conversation’ (ibid.). With this in mind, I sought, throughout my fieldwork among *quilombolas* in Brazil, to tune in and carefully listen to utterances and nuances of this conversation. Of course, as many anthropologists have long reflected upon their own field sites and people they have worked with, there is usually more than one facet of this long conversation (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991) as well as different levels or ‘moments in the unfolding dialogue’ (Robbins 2007: 7).

It is, perhaps, precisely because of the intricacy of this mission that anthropologists have long been attracted by the long conversation which they have attempted to put into words in subtle and penetrating ethnographies. The very acknowledgment of the complexity of the long conversation, however, makes anthropologists aware that they can only delve, at the very best, into some relevant aspects of it and come to terms with the fact that there is never a chance of capturing and deciphering, in their anthropological accounts, the ‘whole picture’. Indeed, besides admitting the *de facto* limitations of ethnographic accounts, it has also become common practice in anthropology, since—at least—the 1970s ‘reflexive turn’ (see, especially, Rabinow [1977] 2007, Stocking 1983, Clifford and Marcus 1986) to critically reflect, in their works, on their own positionality in their respective ethnographic contexts.

My own field research started with a preliminary trip to Brazil in early 2014, when I spent about two months trying to figure out exactly where I would undertake long-term fieldwork. On that trip I spent several weeks in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo where I met with academics and researchers and discussed some of the rough ideas I had in mind at the time. I also spent two weeks in the state of Maranhão, during which I visited Alcântara, saw the ceramic work of Itamatatiua, and realised I had to return to that place, stunned by the

peninsular landscape and captured by the warmth of the people I had met there.

At the time, I knew about the existence of Brazil's satellite launch base in Alcântara and the ongoing struggles of the local *quilombo* communities to acquire land titles for their collectively occupied territories. There was much hope, and there is still, that these land titles will put an end to land tensions and give local people the 'peace of mind' Seu Chico talked about in the opening vignette. However, it is also feared that these land titles might never come and, if they do, that their issuance might take many more years. So, the big question transpires: what to do while waiting? This thesis will attempt to answer this question by looking at the actions people from Itamatatua currently take in order to protect and defend their collective territory.

In this thesis, I mostly use the term 'community' as a translation from the Portuguese word '*comunidade*' and based on its use by rural residents in Alcântara when referring to theirs and other village settlements. It describes groups of people—usually relating to each other through kin or *compadrio* links—co-inhabiting a territory. In Alcântara's communities, local economy is characterised by the following two elements: the land is considered a common good that is accessible to all members of the village, and work is largely undertaken in a cooperative way (see also Almeida 1985; 2006: 61-63, 153-155). The land is collectively appropriated by a given group, the community, that forms the *quilombo*. In the discussed ethnographic context, colloquial use of 'community' and '*quilombo*' make the terms largely overlap and, in reflection of this use, I also tend to use them as synonymous.

The Black rural peasant communities of Alcântara trace their history in early settlements back to the 17th and, especially, 18th centuries. Despite their long-established presence in the region, however, their sovereignty over their collectively-inhabited territories is constantly being threatened by different land antagonists. For many of those communities, this threat is

predominantly exemplified in the Alcântara Launch Base,² and their collective struggles and political mobilisation for land rights have mainly been structured around it. For others, however, different land antagonists seem more threatening than the military and civilian space ports. Hence, while they may actively engage in the larger political mobilisation around *quilombo* land rights, fuelled by the conflict between villagers and the Brazilian State, they simultaneously take action to tackle their specific land threats and protect their own collective territories. I found myself living in a *quilombo* that falls into the latter case.

What is then the long conversation in Itamatatiua? My field research suggests that the major and lasting conversation there is one revolving around land rights. More specifically, the collective actions taken in order to re-affirm and maintain religious and political control over the shared territory against what most residents perceive as their religious and land antagonists. Having exhausted all formal, legal, channels for establishing land claims, and while awaiting the outcome of the state-regulated procedure (through INCRA),³ initiated since 2012, Itamatatiuenses throw themselves into safeguarding their territory in their double capacity as a) Catholic Christians defending the land of Santa Teresa; and b) *quilombolas* defending their ancestral land. They are doing this against their different land antagonists, especially Evangelical Christians⁴ who defy and directly oppose both aspects of Itamatatiua's struggle for land rights.

² The Alcântara Launch Centre (CLA), is a military launching base run by the Brazilian Air Force (FAB). The Alcântara Space Centre (CEA), the space port run by the civilian Brazilian Space Agency (AEB), also operates from the same base. Commercial launches take place at the CEA, while Brazilian government launches take place at the CLA.

³ Stands for National Institute for Colonisation and Agrarian Reform. Since 2003, it is the official government body in charge of *quilombo* land regularisation.

⁴ These are Pentecostal Evangelicals. In Alcântara there are currently no neo-Pentecostal churches. The term 'Evangelical' is locally used to describe any non-Catholic Christian denomination; from Pentecostal Evangelicals to Jehovah's Witnesses. I am hence similarly using 'Evangelical' to refer to all non-Catholic Christians, although I am almost exclusively discussing Pentecostal Evangelicals.

More specifically, Evangelicals are seen to disdain the first aspect of Itamatatiua's collective identity (their identification as Catholics and children of Santa Teresa) by representing a different religious denomination and by denying the existence of the cult of saints. They are also understood to disregard the second (their legitimate collective occupation of ancestral territory) by transgressing, or 'disrespecting' as residents say, long established rules of land management and regulation. They finally go against both by trespassing on the communal territory and occupying space within it without the residents' agreement.

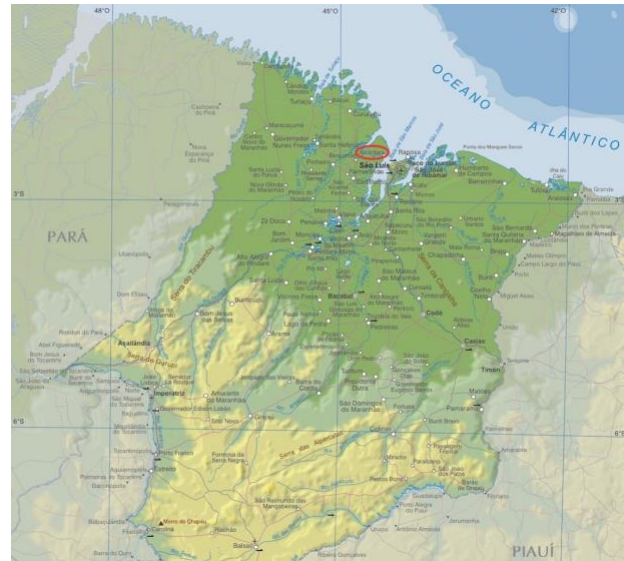
Itamatatiuenses respond to those threats against their collectively inhabited territory by creatively articulating their cultural and religious practices through which they create and mobilise a wide network of allies. These creative uses of Itamatatiua's religious and cultural capital transpire as the most relevant means of grassroots community politics. Or, in the words of Arruti (2003: 2), 'cultural differences' transpire as a 'force of mobilisation at the micro-political level'.

Itamatatiua is a village of some 500 people in the swamp lands off Maranhão's north Atlantic coast where hills turn into 'islands' in the rainy season (see Map 3 below). It is situated at the southern end of Alcântara and, therefore, the furthest away from Brazil's launch base built in the municipal area. Itamatatiua is well-known in the region mainly for two reasons: its annual religious festival in October, and the ceramic work produced locally by the women. The greater part of its residents proudly identifies as Black and *quilombola* (*quilombo* inhabitant), the nuances of which term I will explore throughout this dissertation. I, a young White woman from 'the other side of the world', as *quilombolas* often said, ended up spending a substantial part of my 15 months of fieldwork in this Black rural community. Another important part of fieldwork was spent visiting other *quilombos* in Alcântara, as well as in the surrounding region called Baixada Maranhense. While travelling and spending time getting to know other *quilombos* and their ways of living, my base was the small urban centre (*sede*)

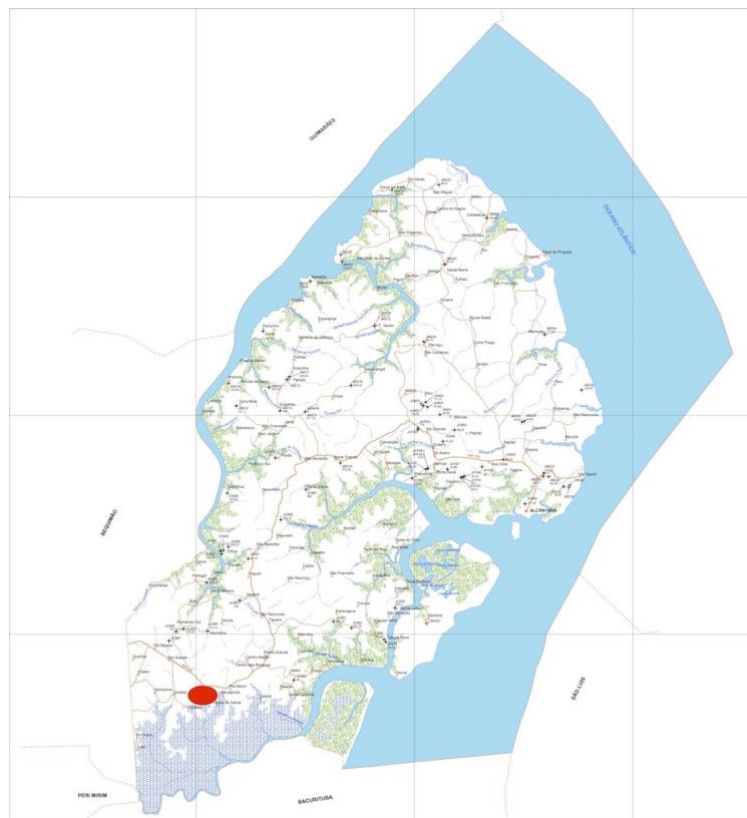
of Alcântara (approx. 6,000 people, IBGE 2010)⁵ where I also met some of my long-term interlocutors and friends.



Map 1: Maranhão (in red) within Brazil
(source: Wikipedia)



Map 2: Alcântara (in red oval) within Maranhão
(source: IBGE)



Map 3: Itamatatuiua (under red dot) within Alcântara
(source: IBGE)

⁵ Both the municipality and its capital are named Alcântara. See table of total resident population: http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/populacao/censo2010/tabelas_pdf/Maranhao.pdf, accessed on 24 October 2017.

In the *quilombos* and the town of Alcântara, my conversations and interviews involved a very broad range of ‘everyday people’: housewives, farmers, potters, fishermen and women, teachers, drivers, street vendors, priests and pastors, un- or under-employed youth, security guards, shop owners, tourism agents, students at different levels of education (from primary school to university), cleaners, tailors, hairdressers and manicurists, drug dealers, and municipal employees –to mention but some of their formal and informal occupations. Many of my primary interlocutors, especially in Itamatatuiua, were also actively involved in formal politics and often held a political role such as community leader or city councillor. Outside the *quilombo*, *Quilombola* and Black movement activists, as well as Rural Workers’ Union (STTR) activists, were also among the people with whom I established lasting conversations.

Although I did have personal encounters with both the former and the current mayors of Alcântara, as well as with a federal deputy and military officials who worked at the Alcântara Launch Centre (*Centro de Lançamento de Alcântara*—henceforth, CLA), I generally avoided close relations with people of whom my main interlocutors (the *quilombolas* of Itamatatuiua) had conflicting opinions. I carefully tried to maintain a ‘neutral’ position when it came to formal politics and their representatives, with the exception of the city councillor from Itamatatuiua, whom I saw on a nearly everyday basis and with whom I had many conversations. This is also why I repeatedly rejected invitations to visit the launch base by friends who were, or had been, soldiers there, or military officials who wanted to show me that the base was ‘just like in the first world’ and it therefore had ‘nothing to do with Alcântara’. I knew how strongly many of my closest interlocutors and friends felt about the base, especially some of the elderly ones, so I decided not to make a visit.⁶

⁶ It needs to be acknowledged that the relationship between *quilombolas* and the Alcântara Launch Centre (CLA) is not always straightforward. Given that under- and unemployment are particularly high in the area, the CLA often provides employment opportunities that can be hard to ignore, even for those who actively engage in political movements against it. One of the founding members of the Movement of those Impacted by the Space Base (*Movimento dos Atingidos pela Base Espacial* – MABE), for instance, told me in a conversation that she

I, therefore, must acknowledge my own positionality in the field and I thus recognise that, despite never being openly hostile to anyone, I did, discreetly but clearly, align myself with the land struggle of *quilombolas* and agreed with them politically on most issues.

Nevertheless, I have always tried to be very open to dialogue with everyone in the field, no matter what their political views, or stance with regards to the *Quilombola* struggle, were.

If I learned anything from the *ethos* of the *quilombolas* of Itamatatiua it has definitely been to respect everyone irrespectively, to dedicate time, and to *listen*, even when my feelings (and my impatient Western habits) would urge me to walk away. I was always observing the elaborate technique of subtle balance between holding one's ground while simultaneously letting the uninvited Other in, that the *quilombolas* of Itamatatiua seemed to master.

Unlimited patience or a strategy for 'taming the enemy'?

Santa Teresa, residents say, is the 'owner of the lands' (*dona das terras*) of Itamatatiua.

According to local narratives, circulating widely across and beyond the 'lands of Santa Teresa', she is the one who donated the land to, or invited to share with, the 'Black people of Itamatatiua' (*os pretos de Itamatatiua*), at some remote and undefined point in time. They hence became the Saint's children (*os filhos da Santa*), as they refer to themselves.

Itamatatiuenses are also commonly known in the region as 'the Blacks of the Saint' (*os pretos da Santa*) a denomination that indicates, on the one hand, the widespread perception in Alcântara that Itamatatiua is a 'real *quilombo*', by virtue of the majority of its residents being of dark skin complexion, and, on the other, the extent to which the relationship of Itamatatiuenses with their patron saint is well known.

spent several months working as an employee of the CLA. Even if, as she said, 'it was rather unpleasant' to work for the same government entity that she vehemently opposed, it was the only job she could find at the time. The most common employment opportunity at the CLA, for local residents, is the recruitment of young male soldiers by the Air Force. If accepted, they are in service for a period of four years. With the salary earned, young soldiers typically contribute to family expenses and buy a motorcycle. The latter is so commonly associated with the military service that being able to afford a motorcycle has become an incentive to enlist for many young men in the area.

‘They’, who arrived and started grabbing land, in Chico’s account, are not children of the Saint. Quite on the contrary, many of ‘them’ do not want anything to do with the Saint.

‘They’ do not acknowledge her existence, neither her possession of land, nor the kinship relation forged between the Saint and Itamatatiuenses. In fact, for ‘them’, none of that is true, valid, real, or existing. For ‘them’ there are no saints, no children of saints, and no land possession by saints and their alleged children. ‘They’ are Evangelical Christians and for ‘them’ there is only land on which to preach the gospel and souls living there to be saved.

Chico’s opening account encapsulates the major land problem as many Itamatatiuenses see it: private and illicit appropriation of parts of the shared territory of Santa Teresa by ‘outsiders’ (*gente de fora*) and/or Evangelical Christians. This land occupation is especially problematic for the Catholic residents of Itamatatiua and adjacent *quilombos* because it disregards the customary law of collective land use.

As any Itamatatiuense knows, and as explained to me on various occasions by local *quilombolas*, an essential part of the agreement between Santa Teresa and her children was the establishment of the role of the land custodian (*encarregado/a da terra*). The role, passed on from one generation to the next to this day, is the most important administrative role within the Saint’s territory since it carries the responsibility to administer the communal lands and protect them from land grabbers. Also importantly, it is the land custodian’s role to allocate plots of land for use and appropriation by residents according to their needs. In principle, the land custodian, currently Neide de Jesus, needs to be consulted before a plot of land is cleared for farming or a house is built. Furthermore, the land is to be accessed and shared equally by all of the Saint’s children and, therefore, no resident is allowed to fence out, or otherwise demarcate, land for private use or sale.

In recent years, however, these rules of collective land use, retained by residents for many generations and transmitted through oral accounts and practice, are ever more frequently being discarded by outsiders who move to the lands of Santa Teresa or by the very ‘children of the land’. The latter are locals who, typically after a recent conversion to an Evangelical church, stop being ‘children of the Saint’ and, like ‘them’, adopt a rather materialistic relationship with the land, which they detach from notions of collective use and sanctity. Those who remain her children, like Chico and Neide, do not stay passive in front of this rapidly changing situation but they choose to ‘hold their ground’, as Chico said. While many believe that the official titling of the territory (to be given collectively to the community for the area that corresponds to the lands of Santa Teresa) will deter land grabbers and put an end to land conflicts, they also know that it may take several more years. Until then, they are faced with (what they perceive as) actual land threats that need to be resolved. And they choose to do so peacefully and creatively by mobilising local resources intrinsically attached to residents’ notions of, and relations with, the land.

By defending their Catholic identity (and targeting the Evangelicals), Itamatatiuenses do not only attempt to protect and defend their communal territory, but also their culture and traditions. While, for Itamatatiuenses, Catholicism emerges as a faith of openness and acceptance, Evangelical Christianity stands in stark contradistinction threatening to eradicate their cultural distinctiveness with a narrow, and strict, uniformity. This dissertation explores two main channels through which *quilombolas* of the lands of Santa Teresa resist such transformative forces and aim to reinforce their effective control over their shared territory: religious activism and cultural production.

Itamatatiuenses mobilise an extended network of Catholic residents against the growing (and largely perceived as hostile) presence of Evangelical Christians in their lands. They also strive to make their ceramic work known outside the limits of their municipality, actively

seeking to create a wide network of possible agents who may help advance their land cause, e.g. academic researchers and intellectuals, politicians. The remainder of this introductory chapter is split in two parts. In the first, I discuss different uses of the category *quilombo* in Brazil's history and explore the main land tensions in Itamatatuiua and Alcântara more broadly. I also discuss current challenges faced by the *quilombolas* of Brazil and their struggles' affinities with those of other groups around the world. In the second part, I critically review the literature on *quilombos* and position my own research within it.

Part A

Quilombo: From informal settlement to metaphor for political struggle

Quilombos and *mocambos*⁷ in Brazil have historically been described as maroon settlements, formed by runaway and/or self-emancipated enslaved people and their descendants.

Reference to the terms, both of Central African origin initially designating improvised encampments (Vainfas 2000: 494), is found in colonial records. The earliest known record, dating back to 1575, is of the term '*mocambo*' used to describe a group of enslaved runaways in Bahia. The term '*quilombo*' first appears in colonial documents at the end of the 17th century (Gomes 2015: 11-12; citing Goulart 1972 and Moura 1972, 1981). The largest *quilombo* known to have existed in Brazil is Palmares, the 'Black republic' of the Serra da Barriga, in the current State of Alagoas. Palmares reached its apogee in the 17th century, numbering about 20,000 inhabitants and having successfully resisted colonial authorities for

⁷ The terms are essentially synonymous. Throughout this dissertation I will be using them interchangeably although '*quilombo*' will be most frequently used reflecting its broader use in Brazil today. For a discussion of definitions and different appropriations of the terms throughout the centuries see especially: Leite 2000, 2008, 2012; Gomes 2015, Almeida 1996, O'Dwyer 2007.

almost a century (Gomes 2011, Assunção 2005; Leone, LaRoche and Babiarz 2005; Anderson 1996).

While Palmares stood out because of its size and duration, and, consequently, its history is better documented than that of most other *quilombos* (Price 1996), small, makeshift and temporary settlements of formerly enslaved people were a constant phenomenon throughout slavery and across Brazil's immense topography. These 'extrastate zones of flight and refuge' were typically 'a composite of runaways and earlier-established peoples' (Scott 2009: 133), often forming an extremely diverse ethnic array. As Leite has phrased it: 'The *quilombo*, besides being a disruptive force to the Portuguese colonial system, is at the base of the transcultural and historical experience and of the formation of the political systems that characterise the so-called culture of the "Black Atlantic"' (Leite 2016: 294).

Throughout the colonial period, the legal occupation of land was, by and large, the exclusive privilege of wealthy White individuals and absolutely unattainable for *quilombolas*. After Brazil gained independence from Portugal in 1822, land titles remained essentially out of reach for the inhabitants of those Black rural communities. Although on many occasions they managed to collectively acquire land and effectively establish themselves on specific areas (through donation from former landowners, the disintegration of lands owned by Catholic Orders, purchase, or appropriation of land in disuse), these actions were not accompanied by legal titles.

During the First Brazilian Republic (1889-1930), that started soon after the abolition of slavery in 1888,⁸ the country was far from discussing any form of slavery reparations or land reform that would include parts of the population excluded from the right to land and denied most human rights. Quite the contrary, it was a time when Brazil struggled to maintain the

⁸ Brazil was the last country in the Western hemisphere to abolish slavery, on 13 May 1888, with the Imperial Law n. 3.353, commonly known as *Lei Áurea*.

Afro-Brazilian population nearly as suppressed as it was during slavery. Indeed, the abolition of slavery seemed like an empty gesture when politics of *branqueamento* (literally ‘whitening’) characterised the following decades (Nascimento 1978; Hofbauer 2003, 2007; Domingues 2005).⁹ The mass influx of White European immigration, invited to the country and given preference even for menial jobs, importantly limited the socio-economic integration of Afro-Brazilians in the post-abolition era (Haag 2012, Molina 2015). With restricted (or no) access to the job market, education, healthcare, land and housing the Afro-Brazilian population faced insurmountable barriers to survival, let alone wellbeing and growth.

Things were slightly better for some Afro-Brazilians in the growing urban centres of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Salvador, where several political and cultural groups started to emerge.¹⁰ The influential Black Brazilian Front (*Frente Negra Brasileira* - FNT, 1931-1937) was carved out of São Paulo’s urban context by a group of Afro-Brazilians. Besides its valuable efforts to educate the urban Black population of São Paulo, it also importantly lobbied for human rights and ‘won some victories in the field of civil rights’ (Domingues 2008: 522). But after the 1930 *coup d’état* ‘these movements were legally prohibited’ and the FNT ended abruptly (Fernandes 1967: 567).

While Black movement activism was mobilising hundreds of Afro-Brazilians, the formal political scene in Brazil remained hostile, or indifferent at best, to the Afro-Brazilian population. The short-lived democratic period of the Fourth Republic (1946-1964) was violently interrupted by the military dictatorship that was established in 1964 and ended in 1985. However, not all was lost. Despite constraints, the different expressions of the Black

⁹ On contemporary ‘everyday whitening’ see Mitchell 2016.

¹⁰ Of course, many of the abolitionist intellectuals and activists were Afro-Brazilians. However, organised groups with an explicitly political agenda pressuring for better living conditions for the Afro-Brazilian population only started to emerge in the early 20th century.

movement would persevere and eventually grow. In 1978, the Unified Black Movement Against Racial Discrimination (*Movimento Negro Unificado Contra a Discriminação Racial*, later known simply as *Movimento Negro Unificado* – MNU) was born in São Paulo. While many of its actions were violently suppressed by the military dictatorship, the MNU publicly debunked the myth of ‘racial democracy’ and denounced everyday racism suffered by the country’s non-White population (Albuquerque and Fraga 2006, Quintans 2015, Costa Vargas 2003, Hanchard 1998).

From the mid-1970s, in the years of Geisel government, and until the end of the military dictatorship in 1985, Brazil entered a rather slow process of gradual democratisation called ‘*abertura democrática*’ (period of democratic transition). While this period was still characterised by severe restrictions on civil rights, it allowed some flexibility in applying more liberal social and economic reforms, that opened the way for major changes that took place in the post-junta era. Soon after the dictatorship’s end, a new Federal Constitution coincided with the centennial of the abolition of slavery. As a result of the larger social and political changes taking place in the country, and long battles fought by militants of the Black movement, three of the articles introduced in the 1988 Constitution were to finally mark an important legal conquest for (a large part of) the Afro-Brazilian population.

Also known as Brazil’s Magna Carta, the 1988 Federal Constitution defined the country as a ‘multi-ethnic state’ and made a radical break with past constitutions (Oliveira and Müller 2016: 315). The Article 68 of the Temporary Constitutional Provisions Act (*Ato das Disposições Constitucionais Transitórias* - ADCT), states that ‘Final ownership shall be recognised for the *quilombo* remnant communities which are occupying their lands and the

State shall grant them relevant land title'.¹¹

Not only did Article 68, recognise, for the first time, land rights for *quilombolas* but it also formally relaunched and established the word '*quilombo*' and created a specific, ethno-racial, category of citizenship. Furthermore, Articles 215 and 216 included Afro-Brazilian and *quilombo* cultural manifestations and their *sites* –i.e. *quilombo* territories– in the country's national cultural heritage (*patrimônio cultural*).

It took a century after the abolition of slavery for Brazil's Constitution to establish land rights for a part of the Afro-Brazilian population, namely *quilombolas*. The Article 68 gave legal grounds to pre-existing *quilombola* struggles for land nationwide. Although initially it was a marginal article of the Constitution that lawmakers did not expect to affect more than a few communities in the country (Boyer 2009: 140), it became the focal point of an array of social movements and organisations working in defence of land and other human rights mobilising and directly affecting thousands of people. Besides establishing a legal framework for land struggles, the Article 68 consolidated positive meaning for the term '*quilombo*'.

Initially given negative connotations as it was used as an accusatory and deprecating term by police and state officials in the colonial and imperial periods (Arruti 1997, 2009, 2011; Leite 2008, 2015, 2016), '*quilombo*' had been re-appropriated by Afro-Brazilian political activists who started to positively re-semanticise it. A landmark moment for this positive re-appropriation and its eventual transformation into a keyword in the struggle for human rights was the publication of the newspaper *Quilombo* in December 1948. Abdias do Nascimento, its editor, prominent Black movement activist, artist, intellectual, and founder of the *Teatro*

¹¹ All translations from Portuguese in the present thesis are mine unless otherwise stated. The original reads: '*Aos remanescentes das comunidades dos quilombos que estejam ocupando suas terras é reconhecida a propriedade definitiva, devendo o Estado emitir-lhes os títulos respectivos*'.

Experimental do Negro,¹² wrote in the editorial of the first issue: ‘the struggle of *QUILOMBO* is not specifically against those who negate our rights, rather especially to remind the Black man (*o negro*) himself of, or acquaint him with, his rights to life and culture’ (*Quilombo*, Editorial, 1948). The word ‘*quilombo*’ here, while referring to the newspaper’s name, simultaneously encapsulates the Black struggle for freedom and equality. However, even if the term was used by Black movement militants since, at least, the 1940s it was only after its introduction in the 1988 Federal Constitution that *quilombos*, as *existing* communities, began to re-appear in official documents (Ratts, Aguiar and Silva 2016: 87) and the use of the term eventually gained popular currency.

A phenomenon ‘more intensely’ observed in the North-eastern states of Brazil (Arruti 2006: 28), Black rural *quilombo* communities were locally known by various different names before the Article 68 established a national consensus on their denomination (by establishing a legal category). In Maranhão, as in other parts of the North and North-eastern states, *quilombos* were largely known as ‘Black lands’ (*terras de preto*)¹³ (Almeida 1989), or simply as sites (*sítios*) and villages (*povoados*). Either as a result of a conscious choice *not* to use the term because of its pejorative connotations, or simply because it was not part of the colloquial vocabulary in many parts of Brazil, the term ‘*quilombo*’ had to be (re)introduced to subjects who proudly identify as *quilombolas* today (Arruti 1997, Andrade 2006). Perhaps unsurprisingly, this has been one of the stable accusations levelled against *quilombolas* by

¹² Founded in Rio de Janeiro in 1944, the *Teatro Experimental do Negro* (TEN) had as its main objective to create a theatre company composed exclusively of Black actors. Its initiatives however exceeded the theatre space and, among other things, it helped organise the National Convention for the Black Brazilian in 1949 and the I Conference of the Black Brazilian in 1950. The newspaper *Quilombo* was also one of its intellectual outcomes. For more, see: Albuquerque and Filho 2006: 272-277; Quintans 2015.

¹³ Although I do think Hebe Mattos’s (see, e.g., 2005) translation of ‘*terras de preto*’ as ‘negro lands’ is more accurate, I choose to use ‘Black lands’ instead in accordance to the majority of the English translations in anthropological texts.

those who oppose, and typically have vested interests in standing against, *quilombo* land regularisation.

The fact that the use of the term *quilombo*, and the identification as *quilombola*, might have arisen, in some areas, in the wake of the 1988 Constitution has given fertile ground to conservative voices who questioned the legitimacy of claims to *quilombo* identities and have consistently tried (especially in the press and mainstream media) to discredit *quilombolas* as ‘ethnic fraud’ (see Boyer 2015: 33, Oliveira, Mura, and Silva 2015). I will return to discussions of ‘ethnic fraud’ in Brazil in the following pages. For now, it is worth stressing that such accusations fail to consider that a change in the lexicon does not necessarily reflect changes in the way people see themselves and their history (see also Peña 2012).

Popular awareness of, and political mobilisation around, *quilombo* rights were born mainly in the national meetings of Black rural communities in the states of Maranhão and Pará in the early 1980s (Arruti 2009, 2016; Oliveira and Müller 2016). It was in this context that the name ‘Black rural *quilombo* communities’ (*comunidades negras rurais quilombolas*) was adopted by political activists to describe and unite, under a common denomination, the different Black rural communities across the country. As Linhares (2004) has emphasized, landowners had restricted the word ‘*quilombo*’ to settlements formed by runaways ‘but today’s [B]lack activists prefer the term *rural [B]lack community*, which minimises the importance of how these social groups were formed’ (2004: 823; emphasis in the original).

This self-denomination was largely established after the organisation of the first National Meeting of Black Rural *Quilombo* Communities in Brasília, in November 1995, and the creation, on 12 May 1996, of the National Coordination for the Articulation of Black Rural *Quilombo* Communities (*Coordenação Nacional de Articulação das Comunidades Negras Rurais Quilombolas* – CONAQ) (see, e.g., Costa 2008, O’Dwyer 2002). The CONAQ is the

political organisation that the national *Quilombola* movement has chosen for its legal representation with delegates from most states.

Intellectuals, political activists, members of governmental and civil society organisations, even clergy and lay Church agents, have acted as agents for the dissemination of knowledge on human rights and political organisation, and have provided technical and administrative support that in many ways shaped and helped articulate the communities' claims over land and other rights. With time, the strong reluctance to identify with what was often considered a disparaging term attached to a dreadful slavery past, was gradually transformed and the term was reappraised. Especially after 1988, the inhabitants of Black rural communities in Alcântara, as anywhere else in Brazil, recognised that a *quilombola* identity may not only be positive but also necessary in order to enshrine basic human rights, especially their rights to land.

Quilombos in Alcântara

The slave system in Alcântara is situated way, way back in time. In 1888 this system in Alcântara had already been left behind. The *fazendas*¹⁴ here had already been in crisis. The Black man was already very free [sic]. And proof of that is that the spoken memory is so scarce. Passed on from father to son, it is really empty, very empty [sic]. It is different from other *quilombos*.

Sérvulo Borges,
syndicalist and political activist for the rights of *quilombolas*;
founding member of the MABE

¹⁴ Many authors have noted that in Alcântara, and Maranhão in general, there were no *fazendas* in the sense of large plantation sites or the sugarcane mills of the North-eastern Brazilian coast. Alcântara's cotton estates were smaller in size and typically did not possess more than 50 slaves (Assunção 1995: 271, see also Almeida 2006).

Quilombo formation was indeed a phenomenon concomitant with, and as widespread as, slavery. However, it has not taken the same shape everywhere but it was decisively influenced by the specific geographical, economic, and political conditions in which *quilombos* emerged (or failed to emerge). Much like slave experience that, even at a specific location, at a specific point in time, has never been uniform (Slenes 2012), every *quilombo* was the product of a compound of elements that determined its lifespan, population, internal structure, subsistence activities, and defence mechanisms.

For Alcântara, the municipality in the north-west of the state of Maranhão where ethnographic research for the present thesis has been conducted, most information about *quilombos* during slavery is limited to police reports. They register largely unsuccessful attempts of violent repression of existing settlements and rather desperate efforts to prevent the formation of new ones (see, e.g., RDHEM, Vol I: 402, 896, 417). Given the scarcity and nature of such accounts, information about life in those *quilombos* is not only extremely limited but also written by the very people who were actively trying to destroy them.¹⁵ By the very existence of such records, however, the reader today is able to identify a growth in the numbers of free rural communities formed in Alcântara, and the alarmist way they were perceived by colonial and, later, imperial state authorities.

Similarly to Borges's account above, *quilombolas* and other Alcantarenses unanimously assert that *quilombo* formation in their area has been a widespread, and well-established, phenomenon long before the abolition of slavery. But how 'different from other *quilombos*'

¹⁵ In an 1841 report issued by the Chief of the Santa Helena Legion (an administrative area attached to the south borders of Alcântara) we read about the destruction of a *quilombo* settlement in the margins of the river Turí. The report gives us a glimpse of how a *quilombo* community may have looked like in the region. In his description, the Chief describes that police forces raiding the *quilombo* first encountered 'three black people in a canoe' their role being that of safeguarding the entrance to the *quilombo* and warn for intruders. The *quilombo* itself is described as 'well developed, with plantations and constructions, which were destroyed and burnt. Sixty to seventy slaves lived in the *quilombo*, but only seven were captured' (RDHEM, Vol II: 2026).

has this phenomenon been? Souza (2002) has argued that the region of ‘Sertão of the present-day state of Pernambuco was not a region characterised by slavery; it was a region propitious to the refuge of Black and indigenous people, something that reinforces the unanimity of accounts in respect of the condition of non-slaves’ (Souza 2002: 125), in many ways similar to Alcântara. Another example comes from the north-eastern region of the state of Espírito Santo, known as Sapê do Norte, where the diffused abandonment of *fazendas* by landowners (Batista Ferreira 2016: 146), bears similarities to what took place in Alcântara. An important difference, however, is that, unlike Alcântara, the *en masse* abandonment of private estates in Sapê do Norte took place *after* the abolition of slavery.

Quilombos in Alcântara started to proliferate especially after the second half of the 18th century when, due to the region’s deep economic crisis, colonists were impelled to abandon their estates and seek lucrative opportunities elsewhere (Almeida 2006: 72, Sá 2007, Viveiros [1950] 1999). As we will examine more closely in Chapter One, the region’s distinctive economic and trade history created propitious conditions for the creation and growth of rural communities of formerly enslaved people (self-emancipated, freed and runaways), who were able to establish their presence in a nearly uninhibited way (Almeida 2006: 29-31, [1983] 2008a; Linhares 1999; Andrade and Filho 2006) several decades before the official abolition of slavery in 1888. It is in large part due to this ‘unique’ history of *quilombo* formation, that Alcântara is currently the municipality with the greatest concentration of Black rural *quilombo* communities in the country, numbering nearly 200 (Gomes 2015: 154, Mattos 2005).

A demographic void of a few thousand lives

Adding to the *quilombo* land titling problems outlined above, official registries of land in Brazil have always legitimised private, and not collective, ownership of land. This legislative

‘cavity’ has often led to a discrepancy between legal and effective land possession, a phenomenon vividly illustrated in the case of Alcântara. While police reports and official communications throughout the 19th century are rife with worried complaints about the state of ‘general disorder’ in rural Alcântara, parochial registers give the illusion of *quilombo* non-existence since most areas effectively occupied by *quilombolas* appeared to be in the hands of their legal owners. Not only did *quilombolas* effectively control large areas, but they were often armed and attacking the very police forces that approached their settlements (see, e.g., RDHEM, Vol I: 1341).

Nevertheless, the legal invisibility of its *quilombo* communities sustained what would later become known as Alcântara’s ‘demographic void’: a state-concocted discourse according to which the peninsula was essentially an unpopulated area (see, e.g., Almeida 2006: 56). The formation of free peasantry in Alcântara since, at least, the 18th century and the absolute lack of any legal documentation recognising their effective land occupation has created a ‘lacuna between reality and legality’ (Caires 2012: 157) that continues to have important ramifications for the lives of Alcântara’s rural population.

Alcântara was selected for the construction, in the early 1980s, of Brazil’s main space port. In the eyes of government and military officials in charge of the new project Alcântara, with a ‘virtually non-existent’ rural population, provided ideal premises for the realisation of Brazil’s space technology development plans (Oliveira Braga 2011: 46). The project was hatched and implemented during the years of the military dictatorship (1964-1985) and despite the gradual ‘opening to democracy’, that was initiated in the mid-1970s, the approach of government and military officials towards the population of Alcântara reflected the reactionary policies followed by the military regime.

The installation of the space port has been largely propagated, in press coverage and public discourse, as a major advance for Brazilian space technology and innovation and an

exceptional strategic step towards establishing the country's position as a global power (Mitchell 2008: 6). For *quilombolas* in Alcântara, however, its construction created a long line of problems and dramatically accentuated land insecurity.

In 2008, after nearly three decades of tensions, forced evictions, and battles fought by *quilombolas*, the technical report for the identification and delimitation (RTID) of an area of approx. 78,000 hectares, 106 *quilombos* and 3,350 households, called 'unified *quilombola* territory' (*território único quilombola*), was published by the INCRA. The publication of the RTID is the third of five steps in the process of *quilombo* land regularisation by the Brazilian state.¹⁶ The area of the launch base was restricted to 9,300 hectares. In June 2015, however, and despite the fact that the contested area is still in the process of land regularisation (stuck at step 3), the Secretary for Racial Equality in Alcântara (SEIR) announced the state government's plans for the 'return' of 42,000 hectares of municipal land to the state which were, once again, to be taken back from *quilombolas*. With the spectre of future expansion and further evictions looming large, the CLA emblematically embodies land threats for most of Alcântara's *quilombos*.

It needs to be stressed, however, that not all communities have been equally affected by the space port. The 23 evicted communities, as well as the extended surrounding area, part of which is now reclaimed by the space base, form the 'unified *quilombola* territory' zone discussed above. This is one of the three zones into which Alcântara's municipal territory is being divided. The second one is the so-called lands of Santa Teresa, the area of more than

¹⁶ According to the INCRA, the five steps to *quilombo* land regularisation are the following: 1. A given community self-identifies as *quilombo* and requires a certification by the Palmares Foundation. 2. Once certified, the *quilombo* initiates a technical report for the identification and delimitation of the claimed territory (*Relatório Técnico de Identificação e Delimitação* – RTID). 3. Once produced, the RTID is published and all interested parties have a timeframe of 90 days to make any objections to the report. If objections arise, INCRA has 30 days to make a decision on the case. 4. Following that, the recognition decision (*portaria de reconhecimento*) is published on the official journal of the federal government and that of the relevant federal state. 5. Private properties within the recognised area are appropriated. 6. The President of the INCRA delivers the official land titles to the *quilombo* community. See also Linhares 2004: 821-822.

50, 000 hectares of which Itamatatua is the administrative and symbolic centre. The third one, is the island of Cajual. While the first, and largest, zone has been directly affected by, and has structured its land struggle in relation to, the CLA, the land question takes a distinct form in the second and third, where *quilombola* land occupation has *not* been directly threatened by the construction of the CLA.

Within these areas, *quilombos* often face their own specific land threats that they may tackle as a unit —e.g. Itamatatua— or a coalition of communities—e.g. the *quilombos* of the lands of Santa Teresa. Despite the existence of different *quilombo* land antagonists, ethnographic works that grapple with the *Quilombola* land struggle in Alcântara have nearly exclusively focused on the tensions around the CLA thus failing to acknowledge other ongoing land tensions. The present thesis aims to fill this gap in the anthropological literature on Alcântara's *Quilombola* land struggle by pointing in the direction of other, perhaps not as discernible at first glance as the CLA, threats to *quilombola* territory.

Nevertheless, even if not all Alcântara *quilombos* have been equally affected by the CLA, nearly all have had a certain level of engagement in the *Quilombola* mobilisation that was born out of the conflict over the launch base in the 1980s and continues to this day. Both the occupation of *quilombo* land and the uprooting of communities have created a massive wave of reaction and protest by *quilombolas* and political activists who joined their cause (Almeida 2006, Andrade 2006, Mitchell 2008, Pereira Júnior 2009, Serejo Lopes 2012). In particularly tense periods, community meetings were held even more frequently than usual and political discussions over land issues were an everyday phenomenon. During the 1980s and early 1990s, political activism was so widespread in Alcântara that there was hardly any *quilombola* in the municipality who had not been directly or indirectly involved in the discussions and actions taken in defence of *Quilombola* land rights. The heavily politicised everyday life in Alcântara consolidated a strong awareness of land and other rights amongst

the thousands of *quilombolas* (especially in relation to the Article 68 of the 1988 Federal Constitution), which decisively shaped political life in those communities, whether directly or indirectly affected by the CLA.

Contextualising land tensions: Itamatatiua

Itamatatiua, the ethnographic focus of this anthropological research, is a *quilombo* situated on the southern border of the municipality of Alcântara. Similar to other Alcântara *quilombos*, Itamatatiua has radically broken with slavery as the ‘single, overriding classification for the Black experience’ (Matory 2005: 288). This is not to suggest that Itamatatiua, or any other Alcântara *quilombo*, has repudiated its historical relation to slavery (or the escape from it) but that it has partly negated, or creatively navigated, one of slavery’s major consequences, namely the condition of precarious land possession (see, e.g. Gomes 2015). Furthermore, what I am suggesting is that each community, or zone within the municipal area, structures different narratives around the legitimacy of their collective land occupation. The question of ‘legitimate’ or ‘illegitimate’ land possession is central to the question of *quilombo* land struggle since it is on the lack of legal proof of land possession that *quilombola* rights to land are being contested (Filho and Andrade 2012, Almeida 2008b, Sá 2007).

Itamatatiuenses narrate manifold versions of their community’s foundation story (see, e.g. Pereira Júnior 2012, Reis 2010). Despite this plurality however, if one pays close ‘attention to the narrative quality and what it sought to illustrate’ (Mayer 2009: xviii), it becomes clear that all of them point to a specific event of paramount local significance: the holy pact made between Santa Teresa and the first inhabitants.

These foundation stories, attributing the acquisition of land to a donation (or an invitation) made by the saint, do not only give historical depth to Itamatatiua’s collective land possession but also present their own narratives of *quilombo* formation and history, firmly

grounding their claims to land. Since, as discussed above, legal land titles were, by and large, not available to Alcântara's non-White peasantry even after the abolition of slavery, the holy pact that created kinship ties between *quilombolas* and Santa Teresa gave legitimacy to their land cause and has served as the grounding principle of their land occupation, until the anticipated official recognition of their communal territory by the Federal State.

Itamatatuiá residents' territorial awareness is especially pronounced since it is directly associated with the community's patron saint and their own religious and onomastic identity.

When accepting Santa Teresa's invitation to live on her lands, the first inhabitants also adopted her religious name 'de Jesus' as their own last name. Pereira Júnior (2011) has observed that the adoption of the Saint's name 'needs to be seen as a means to reinforce social links with the Saint and the land' (2011: 96). It was precisely through the establishment of kinship ties with Santa Teresa that the people of Itamatatuiá became, and continue to be, the legitimate heirs and custodians of her lands. Since this putative inheritance was not accompanied by legal papers, it remained a holy verbal pact between the people and the Saint.¹⁷

From the Saint's children's point of view, assuming the responsibility to live on, and take care of, the lands Santa Teresa bestowed upon them, constitutes a very real and binding pact that justifies them—both in the literal and the theological sense of the word 'justify'¹⁸—as lawful occupiers of those territories under the Saint's divine protection. It is this firm belief of legitimate land occupation that compels them to defend their communally-owned lands from alleged predators. Having the Saint as their strongest and long-standing ally¹⁹ has

¹⁷ There is a large engraved stone in the possession of the land custodian, dating from 1878, which is regarded by many Itamatatuienses as a legal document of land possession and has been used as such in past disputes over land at the municipal notary's office. See discussion in Chapter Two.

¹⁸ The Oxford English Dictionary describes the theological (Christian) meaning of the verb as: 'To declare or make righteous in the sight of God; to confer or assure righteousness'. OED online: entry 102230.

¹⁹ It is perhaps worth mentioning that it is the very same Santa Teresa de Jesús (also known as Santa Teresa d'Ávila) who came close to becoming Spain's co-patron saint (alongside Santiago el Mayor) in the long debate

provided Itamatatiuenses with courage and determination in their overt and covert confrontations with land antagonists ever since the community's foundation.

***Quilombo* land regularisation at the crossroads: Some notes on the latest challenges to *Quilombola* land struggle**

The discussion of *Quilombola* struggle for the establishment of collective land rights is perhaps particularly pressing at the time of writing the present thesis, due to current developments in Brazil –especially after former President Dilma Rousseff's impeachment and her succession, in August 2016, by Michel Temer. Given that these socio-political developments closely relate to some of the main questions this thesis grapples with, i.e. *quilombo* land regularisation, in the following pages, I will attempt to give an outline of the relevant ongoing politico-economic tensions around land in Brazil.

Obstructions to *quilombo* land regularisation –despite their constitutionally guaranteed land rights– have been a rather continuous phenomenon since 1988. The Palmares Cultural Foundation (FCP) is the government institution entrusted with the task of issuing official certificates to *quilombo* remnant communities based on their self-identification as such. These certificates do not equal title deeds, which, since 2003, can only be issued by the INCRA. Despite the legal and institutional framework, however, the issuance of title deeds for *quilombos* in Brazil has proven to be an extremely long and heavily bureaucratised process. Only 152 *quilombo* territories in the country have been given titles deeds, while more than 1,500 are still facing land insecurity and their permanence in their traditionally

over co-patronage (1617-1630). Among the main arguments put forward by the supporters of Santa Teresa was their desire for 'the saint's aid in interceding to combat Protestantism in Europe' (Row 2005: 7). Santa Teresa's supporters put forward the argument that the co-patronage would attend to contemporary threats of the Spanish people, namely the growth and expansion of Protestantism similarly to Santiago's protection against the then major religious threat, namely Islam (which is why a common iconographic representation of Santiago has been that of Santiago Matamoros or Saint James the Moor-slayer).

occupied territories is often threatened.²⁰ Perhaps Akhil Gupta's (2012) concept of bureaucracy as 'structural violence' would be an apt analogy here, even though he often assumes good intentions on the part of bureaucratic administration and, as will be showed in the following paragraphs, this may not always be the case in Brazil. Indeed, the prolonged situation of land insecurity, that many *quilombolas* are facing, seems to be on a slippery slope since the so-called *bancada ruralista* (lit: 'ruralist bench' for the places they occupy in the national parliament) has taken a grip on key government positions, including in the very institutions that regulate land.

Let us first take a step back, in order to better comprehend the nature of the 'ruralist bench' lobby and its involvement in national politics. During the National Constitutive Assembly of 1987-1988, members of the parliament initiated the formation of different interest groups that eventually became today's Parliamentary Fronts (PF).²¹ Among those was the PF representing the *bancada ruralista*, a multi-party coalition aiming at protecting and promoting the interests of large landholders and agribusiness in the country.²² Until 1994, the ruralist interest group existed informally. In 1995, the Agricultural Parliamentary Front was founded as the formal instrument that voices the ruralist lobby in the National Congress. In 2002, it was relaunched as Parliamentary Front in Defence of Farming and was later, in 2008, changed to Parliamentary Front for Farming (*Frente Parlamentar da Agropecuária* - FPA), a name that remains to this day.

²⁰ The figures are based on data published by the INCRA on 13 April 2017. Accessible online at: <http://www.incra.gov.br/sites/default/files/incra-perguntasrespostas-a4.pdf>. See also: <http://www.cpis.org.br/terras/asp/etapa.aspx>, accessed on 24 October 2017.

²¹ According to Act n. 69 of 2005 of the Board of the Chamber of Deputies, Parliamentary Fronts are associations of members of the Federal Legislature from various parties that decide to join forces in order to promote the debate for the legislation of a specific subject of social interest.

²² The FPA's objective is clearly stated on its official website: '[it is to] stimulate the expansion of public policies for the development of national agribusiness. Amongst the current priorities is the modernisation of labour, land tenure, and tax legislation, besides the regularisation of the question of indigenous lands and *quilombola* areas, in order to guarantee the juridical security necessary for the competition of the sector'. See further: <http://www.fpagropecuaria.org.br/fpa>, accessed on 20 October 2017.

On FPA's official website we read:

In recent years, the Parliamentary Front has distinguished itself through its work in the National Congress. With a multi-party composition, and uniting more than 200 Members of Parliament, the bench has been an example of a very successful interest and pressure group. It is considered to be the most influential [PF] in the discussions, articulations and negotiations of public policies within the scope of the Legislative Power.²³

Written in an assured tone, the above self-description of the FPA's achievements and popularity is reflected on the growing number of its members in the National Congress: 230 deputies and 24 senators, from 21 different parties, have formally joined the FPA, which is represented by deputy Nilson Leitão.

Another popular front in Brazil's National Congress is the Evangelical Parliamentary Front of the National Congress (*Frente Parlamentar Evangélica do Congresso Nacional* - FPE). The FPE has 198 federal deputies and 4 senators, from 25 parties, formally joining its front that is represented by deputy João Campos. It should be noted that Members of Parliament can, and typically do, join more than one front. Indeed, it is not uncommon for deputies and senators to join both the FPA and FPE, two of the most influential pressure groups in the country.

The Presidential Decree n. 4.887/2003, inspired by Brazil's 2002 ratification of the 1989 International Labour Organisation Convention 169 on indigenous and tribal rights, codified 'self-identification' (*auto-atribuição*) as the main requisite for a community to be recognised as a *quilombo*. The Decree, fruit of the first year of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's presidency (2003-2011), was intended to facilitate the extremely slow and heavily bureaucratic process of land regularisation for *quilombolas*. Finally opening the way for the attribution of *quilombolas*' long overdue, constitutionally guaranteed, land rights, the Decree was met with

²³ From the FPA's official website. See previous footnote.

disapproval by opposition parties and was questioned by a Direct Action of Unconstitutionality (ADI-3239), proposed by representatives of the Democrats (DEM, former PFL) political party. A decision by the Supreme Court (STF) is still pending.

The 2003 Presidential Decree revoked the 2001 Decree n. 3.912 issued by the then President Fernando Henrique Cardoso in an attempt to regulate *quilombo* land titling. Among other things, the previous Decree required the production of a technical report (*relatório técnico*) that would justify whether or not a given community had *actually* any historical, cultural, ethnic, or other links with ancient *quilombos*. Anthropologists (usually the authors of such reports) were marshalling historical ‘evidence’ for a given *quilombo*’s ethnic ancestry (Linhares 2004: 824-825). Now representing the ‘archaeological paradigm’ (due to the search for tangible ‘proof’ of *quilombo* descent), this strictly historical conception of *quilombos*, which served as the basis for the legitimation of their land claims, is no longer formally required. The influence of the 2003 Presidential Decree decisively shaped the nature of the technical reports produced thereafter. Doing away with the need to ‘prove’ ethnicity, the reports focused instead on the most pertinent question: that of land.

In Alcântara, virtually all rural communities are certified ‘*quilombo* remnant communities’ (*comunidades remanescentes de quilombos*) by the Palmares Foundation but none has effective title deeds.²⁴ In 2013, the INCRA installed ‘permanent roundtables’ for monitoring *quilombo* land regularisation procedure. Four states—Bahia, Maranhão, Pará, and Minas Gerais—were given priority in these discussions since together they represent over 60% of the national demand for *quilombo* land regularisation.²⁵ The new government, however, has suspended all titling of *quilombo* territories until the Supreme Court decides on the

²⁴ According to data published by the Palmares Foundation, 156 communities in the municipality of Alcântara have been certified. See: <http://www.palmares.gov.br/comunidades-remanescentes-de-quilombos-crqs>, accessed on 24 October 2017.

²⁵ <http://www.incra.gov.br/sites/default/files/incra-processosabertos-quilombolas-v2.pdf>, accessed on 24 October 2017.

constitutionality of the 2003 Decree. The last session, scheduled for 16 August 2017, was postponed. It is unknown, at the time of writing, when another session will take place.

Impediments to *quilombo* land regularisation are largely the result of political pressure exerted by the two Parliamentary Fronts discussed above. The synergy between the FPA and the FPE is commonly described in the press and the parliament as the ‘BBB bench’ from ox (*boi*), bible (*bíblia*) and bullet (*bala*). Hundreds of deputies are either formally or informally affiliated with one or the other, and often both, parliamentary fronts. Ingrained in the state apparatus, powers antagonistic to *quilombola* land rights have managed to significantly curb *quilombo* land regularisation (Oliveira 2016: 13; Machado 2012). Clustering together a large number of the total of 513 deputies in the Chamber of Deputies,²⁶ the parliamentary power of the BBB cannot be downplayed. Since the 2016 impeachment, the influence of the BBB in the National Congress has become ever more tangible. With many of its members adhering to the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB), the party that currently occupies the majority of seats in the National Congress, deputies and senators that espouse the views of the ruralist and Evangelical lobbies have gained considerable power and can influence decisions in the National Congress.

The headline of an article published on one of Brazil’s major newspapers, *Folha de São Paulo*, after the Chamber voted in favour of Rousseff’s impeachment, vividly illustrates this point: ‘Ox, Bible and bullet: the “BBB bench” fortifies defeat of Dilma in the Chamber’.²⁷ As Alceu Luís Castilho, an activist journalist from the *De Olho nos Ruralistas* (Ruralists on the Watch) agribusiness observatory, illustrates: ‘It is a matter of numbers: the members of the

²⁶ The Chamber of Deputies is a federal legislative body and the lower house of the National Congress of Brazil. It comprises 513 deputies, who are elected by proportional representation to serve four-year terms.

²⁷ Article by André Monteiro, published on 18 April 2016: <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2016/04/1762237-bancada-bbb-do-boi-bilbia-e-bala-engrossa-derrota-de-dilma-na-camara.shtml>, accessed on 20 October 2017.

FPA today have the power to overthrow a president and maintain another in power'.²⁸ Half of the votes in favour of the impeachment (49.59%) of Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and in favour of keeping Michel Temer in power in 2017 (51%) came from the FPA alone.²⁹

The BBB's popular support also appears to be ever more visible and audible. Jair Bolsonaro is a very popular federal deputy (in the 2014 general elections he was the most voted candidate in the state of Rio de Janeiro) and former military officer. He has no fixed party affiliation and has gained popularity especially due to his alt-right, controversial, and rather provocative views on human rights and minorities, especially with regards to women, LGBTIQ, Black and indigenous people. He is an affiliated member of the FPE, or 'Evangelical bench' (*bancada evangélica*), and although not formally affiliated with the FPA, he has consistently voted in favour of their bills in Congress and has voiced opinions that support their actions. Indeed, for Bolsonaro, as for most representatives of the BBB, any demarcation of *quilombola* and indigenous territory is but an impediment to the country's progress and economic development. In 2016, when speaking to the Chamber's Council for Ethics, he declared his candidacy for President in 2018 'whether we liked it or not'.³⁰ An admirer of Donald Trump, Bolsonaro recently declared that the US President 'serves as an example' for him and has repeatedly expressed his wish for Brazil to follow in USA's footsteps of 'development' and 'progress'. In April 2017, he said that he once went to 'some quilombo' and his impression was that: 'The thinnest Afro-descendant there weighed 7 *arrobas* (approx. 100 kg.). They don't do anything. I think he [sic] doesn't even serve as a

²⁸ Published on *Combate Racismo Ambiental* on 26 September 2017: <http://racismoambiental.net.br/2017/09/26/frente-parlamentar-da-agropecuaria-compos-50-dos-votos-do-impeachment-e-51-dos-votos-para-manter-temer/>, accessed on 20 October 2017.

²⁹ Of the 155 deputies of the FPA who voted *both* on 17 April 2016 and on 2 August 2017, 124 of them voted against Dilma Rousseff and in favour of Michel Temer. That is 80% of the voters of FPA. For further reading see link in footnote above.

³⁰ See relevant story: <http://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2016/11/bolsonaro-diz-que-sera-candidato-em-2018-gostem-ou-nao-gostem.html>, accessed on 20 October 2017.

procreator anymore. More than 1 R\$ billion per year is wasted on them'. He went on to say: 'You can rest assured that if I get there [elected President], there won't be any money for NGOs. If it depends on me, every citizen will have a firearm in his house. There won't be a centimetre demarcated for indigenous reserve or for *quilombolas*'.³¹

Racism, so blatantly explicit in Bolsonaro's speech, shocks and enrages many, but also finds enthusiastic support in others. The political polarisation that seems to be growing ahead of the 2018 presidential elections in Brazil, serves as an indicator, and a reminder, of the great social and political divides in the country. But what is perhaps more important for our discussion is Bolsonaro's electoral promise with regards to ethnic-based land demarcation.

Discrediting *quilombolas*, in the way Bolsonaro did in the above-mentioned statement that caused national outrage especially amongst Afro-Brazilians, closely relates to the notion of 'ethnic fraud'. Indeed, this has been a key phrase used by members of the FPA and/or the FPE and by those who espouse their views of the ruralist pressure in general, when attacking *quilombolas* and indigenous people. Such accusations do not only aim at discrediting these peoples' land struggle, but at fully denying their existence as distinct groups within a pluralist, multi-ethnic, state.

For many members of the BBB, *quilombola* and indigenous struggles for land rights are often associated with a 'constructivist invention of ethnicity' (Viegas 2012: 537), also commonly called 'ethnic resurgence', that aims at taking advantage of constitutionally guaranteed land rights without 'really' qualifying for them. Anthropologists have long examined the phenomenon that Arruti (1997) has called 'the emergence of "remnants"' and which Boyer (2015: 22) has described, not without a sense of humour, as the 'coming out of villagers'),

³¹ The video of the speech has circulated widely in news media. For an article covering the news story, see the following published on 4 April 2017: <https://deolhonosruralistas.com.br/2017/04/04/bolsonaro-nem-um-centimetro-para-quilombola-ou-reserva-indigena/>, accessed on 20 October 2017.

against the background of ethnic legislation and land insecurity. They did so by showing that a relatively recent, or indeed subsequent to relevant legislation, identification as ‘indigenous’ (*índio*) or ‘*quilombola*’ does not, and should not, have any implications for the legitimacy of a given group’s ‘political processes of claiming ethnic differentiation’ (Viegas 2007: 65-66) and ethnic-based land rights.

However, the agendas of BBB members dictate otherwise. Indeed, in May 2017, the Parliamentary Inquiry Committee (CPI) of the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI) and the INCRA, published a report which recommended the indictment of nearly 100 people for purportedly illicit acts in the processes of demarcation of indigenous and *quilombo* land, and rural settlement projects. The degree of involvement of the ruralist lobby in state decisions that affect land regularisation is evident in that many of its members hold positions in the very institutions that regulate such procedures. Deputy Nilson Leitão, president of the FPA, is also the author of the report. The current president of the Committee, Alceu Moreira, is a member of both the FPA and the FPE. In fact, all seven members of the Inquiry Committee formally adhere to the FPA, with four of them also being affiliated members of the FPE.³²

In other words, members of the same Parliamentary Fronts that formally represent, and lobby for, the rights of large private landholders, the promotion of agribusiness, and the influence of Evangelical churches, are the same people who comprise the Committee that accuses authors of expert reports (many of them anthropologists) of skewed assessments that favoured indigenous, *quilombolas*, and landless groups. Despite the constitutionally guaranteed rights to land at stake, and in reflection of the power currently held by the ruralist and Evangelical interest groups in the National Congress, the second CPI of FUNAI-INCRA approved the

³² Besides those already mentioned, the remaining members of the Committee are: Valdir Colatto: assistant-author on FUNAI, Tereza Cristina: assistant-author on INCRA, Luis Carlos Heinze: 1st vice-president, Mandetta: 2nd vice-president, Nelson Marquezelli: 3rd vice-president, all affiliated members of the FPA. Colatto, Heinze, and Marquezelli also formally adhere to the FPE.

final version of the report authored by Leitão on 30 May 2017.³³ The final report requires the indictment of 67 people linked to activities developed through, and in collaboration with, the FUNAI, among them 15 anthropologists and 26 indigenous people, and 23 people linked to activities developed through, and in collaboration with, the INCRA.

For many federal deputies, the 2017 report authored by Leitão is not only absurd, or farcical, but ‘a pamphlet against the people’, representing an ‘effort of new colonisation of the country by the large rural property owners’, as deputy Érika Kokay said.³⁴ Many members of the parliament opposed the report, predominantly from such parties as the PSOL that has no members that are signatory to the FPA or the FPE. Some also relate the discourse of the BBB to physical attacks against *quilombola* and indigenous groups. The alarming number of reports, made by members of such groups and activists, on usurpation, threats against their lives –especially of political leaders– and even reported cases of murders, point to a parallel growth of human rights violations with an influence of conservative, and often alt-right, sectors of the legislature. According to data published by the National Office of the Ombudsman for Human Rights and the CONAQ, the number of registered murders of *quilombolas* has increased dramatically since 2016.³⁵

Another major impediment to *quilombo* land regularisation is the so-called overlap of interests of municipal, state, federal and even private institutions (Rapoport 2008). This usually refers to areas where two constitutional provisions collide –e.g. in the case of Alcântara: Article 68 of the ADCT/CF and Articles 215 and 216 protecting *quilombolas* on the one hand, and Article 218 on scientific development and technological advancement on

³³ See the final report online at: <http://www.camara.leg.br/internet/comissoes/comissoes-especiais/CPI/RELAT%C3%93RIO%20CPI%20FUNAI-INCRA%202.pdf>, accessed on 20 October 2017.

³⁴ <http://m.agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/politica/noticia/2017-05/cpi-da-funai-finaliza-trabalhos-e-pede-indiciamento-de-liderancas>, accessed on 23 October 2017.

³⁵ Available online at: <https://www.socioambiental.org/pt-br/noticias-socioambientais/violencia-contra-quilombolas-dispara-em-2017>, accessed on 20 October 2017.

the other (to be further explored in Chapter Two). Often, however, more than two areas of legislative ‘conflict’ transpire –e.g. national defence, environmental protection, and *quilombo* land regularisation –as in the case of Marambaia in Rio de Janeiro. In 2014, the Navy and the *quilombolas* of Marambaia reached an agreement that apparently ended the century-long conflict between them, which tried to accommodate all three interests by delimiting three distinct areas on the island: one reserved for the naval base, one recognised as *quilombo* territory, and another designated as Area of Environmental Protection (APA) to which *quilombolas* also have access.

But many land conflicts remain unresolved. To mention but a few well-known cases: *quilombos* in Paracatu, Minas Gerais, are faced with the consequences of large mining projects (primarily for gold) that have detrimental effects on the environment and their traditionally occupied territories; in the north of Goiás *quilombolas* see their territories being trespassed for the realisation of large enterprises; and the area of Monte Cristo in Maranhão, under the jurisdiction of the Navy, is disputed with the local communities (Ayres 2013, Martins, Nunes, and Pereira Júnior 2016: 76). Adding to the cases mentioned above, there are hundreds of others—especially in the Amazon frontier areas and in the Centre-west— that gain little publicity but are experienced by rural residents on a regular basis.

Besides projects of technological, energy, and mining interest, private large agribusiness projects that rapidly deforest vast areas and contaminate the soil and water sources are also considered part of Brazil’s ‘modernising’ plan and an advancement to the country’s position as a ‘global power’ (O’Dwyer 2016: 260) by conservative politicians and capital holders. *Quilombos* that are located in areas of ‘national interest’ (which includes areas of military and even agro-industry interest) are commonly faced with enduring conflicts with the state. Being so, the struggle of *quilombolas* in Alcântara shares common ground not only with the struggle of *quilombolas* and indigenous communities across Brazil, but also with the

challenges faced by countless subaltern groups around the world that struggle for survival against strong land, capital, and power holders.

On global affinities: Fragmented struggles

Alcântara's *quilombolas* have united against (what they perceive as) a state-inflicted injustice that concerns them all –even those whose collective territories have not been imminently threatened. In doing so they are not only protesting what they see as a plundering invasion of their traditionally occupied territories, but are simultaneously reacting against the invisibility imposed on them by the state, which did not only perpetuate their land insecurity but also denied them the status of citizens.

The invisibilisation experienced by Alcântara's *quilombolas* is not an isolated phenomenon. In Brazil, and around the world, communities at the 'margins of nation states' (Scott 2009), face major land threats and are often rendered invisible by state and military authorities and/or large capital holders. To start with Brazil, together with Alcântara, the case of Rio dos Macacos, in the state of Bahia, is another well-known case of conflict between *quilombolas* and military bases (Air Force and Navy respectively). In the early 1960s, the *quilombolas* of Rio dos Macacos saw their community being occupied by the Navy with tremendous consequences; among them: control of daily commutes, restricted access to natural resources, inability to cultivate their land (Rocha 2014: 54, Marcano 2012). In 2015, after several decades of political mobilisation, a small part of the original area that was occupied by the *quilombolas* was officially delimited by the INCRA and the residents state their firm resistance and determination to continue fighting for the recognition of the rest of their territory. The century-long conflict, between *quilombolas* and the Navy, on the island of Marambaia in Rio de Janeiro mentioned above, is another land conflict that gathered

considerable media and academic attention (see especially: Arruti 2003; Yabeta and Gomes 2013).

Maroon descendants' struggles for land rights in the Latin American context have been receiving ever more attention in academic discourses. A growing number of authors, in recent decades, discuss the proximity of the struggles of peoples who self-identify as *quilombolas* with those who self-identify as *palenqueros*, *cimarrones*, *cumbes*, *saramaka*, *garifunas*, and *tongas* (Price 1996, Thompson 2006, Costa 2012, Pizarro 2013).

But besides specifically discussing maroon descendants, anthropologists and historians increasingly engage in debates on the African Diaspora. Abdias do Nascimento, in his seminal text '*Quilombismo*' in 1980, made a direct connection between the situation of Afro-Brazilians and that of Afro-descendants in other American countries (Nascimento 1980). The historical oppression of the non-White population that has its roots in slavery, has transmuted into different regimes of oppression and invisibilisation or social exclusion that continues to reverberate on large parts of the continent's population (Bergad 1990, Hudson 1997; Wade [1997] 2010, 2012). 'Slavery had enduring effects on Brazilian society: it affected the status of free lower-class Brazilians, creating a society in which all depended on the "favour" of their social superiors' (Gledhill 2012: 18, Schwartz 1992).

Leite (2016) draws attention to the fact that despite constitutional provisions for land rights for Afro-descendants, since the 20th century, in such countries as Colombia, Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador, the actualization of those rights has been confronted with strong opposition and setbacks. In these countries too, such obstacles are typically the result of targeted agribusiness interests, or conservative, slow and, sometimes corrupted, bureaucracy of sections of the state public administration (Leite 2016: 289). Tendencies to critically assess

the affinities of such political struggles transcend academia and enter more inclusive³⁶ spaces of debate and discussion. One such example is a 2013 meeting organised by the Centre for Black Culture in Maranhão (CCN-MA) and the Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM) in Brazil, where representatives of such groups from across Central and South America came together in a meeting (Martins, Nunes and Pereira Júnior 2016: 73).

Throughout the Americas, Afro-descendants continue to face persistent violent attempts at eviction, structural obstacles to equal participation in public life, and ultimately denial of their citizenship. Leite (2016) shows that the criminalisation of Black social movements in Brazil—in any form this may take, from physical or psychological violence to legal repressive acts—bears structural similarities with policies affecting the Black population in other American countries (MRG 1995, Dixon and Burdick 2012). The US probably provides some striking examples of this: from targeting the Black Panthers as ‘the greatest threat to the internal security’³⁷ of the country to the violent suppression of peaceful demonstrations of the Black Lives Matter movement, the crushing and silencing of dissident socio-political movements that claim equality and respect for the Black population has been the deplorable pattern of state repression in the US as in Brazil (McIntyre 2002, Kauffman 2017, Allen and Jobson 2016).

Of course, the invisibilisation of economically marginal communities by state authorities and large private capital holders is neither limited to Afro-descendants nor to rural contexts. It has indeed become the rule of neoliberal globalisation politics (however one may define ‘neoliberal’) affecting populations on a global scale (Adnan 2013, Harvey 2005: 159-165;

³⁶ At least for the Latin American context it would be misleading to regard academia as an inclusive space given the still dominant class-circumscription of university students and the restricted access of less privileged social classes to public and private universities (see, e.g., Marteleto et al. 2012; Motta and Cole 2013). In light of this, I consider open social spaces, such as the Centre for Black Culture in Maranhão (CCN-MA), far more accessible to members of the working class and/or socio-economically marginalised youth.

³⁷ Statement of F.B.I.’s director, J. Edgar Hoover, on 16 July 1969.

Petras and Veltmeyer 2002; Herzfeld 2015). In the Brazilian countryside, such politics are more intensely felt by *quilombolas*, indigenous peoples, and landless peasants who see their lands being threatened, or forcibly taken from them. In the cities, *favelados* (residents of slums) instantiate the ongoing effects of social and economic marginalisation by suffering major infrastructural deficiencies, precarious housing, street and police violence, and forced relocation (as happened especially in Rio de Janeiro's *favelas* before the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Rio Olympics –see, e.g. Baena 2011, Livingstone 2014, Gaffney 2016, Richmond and Garmany 2016, Perlman 2010).

Responding to land insecurity, peasants around the world organise in collectives and associations confronting neoliberal agricultural economics, and proving that a sustainable and collective way of organising production is not only possible but necessary for the survival of large parts of the world's population (Moyo and Yeros 2005, Santos 2006). Land struggles of the Aboriginal populations in Australia (Morris 2014), women's resistance to gender inequalities in resource distribution in South Asia (Agarwal 1995), peasant strategies of survival in areas of agro-ecological instability and large-scale displacement in India (Baruah 2016), and small-scale peasant resistance to corporate use of land in Uganda (Martiniello 2015), all share a common resolve to protect non-exploitative uses of land by small peasant groups. Arguably, Latin America presents a particularly rich array of grassroots rural struggles for land. From Mexico's EZLN communities (Vergara-Camus 2014, Weinberg 2002) to Argentina's peasant groups (Brent 2015, Luraschi 2014), and from Venezuelan rural *communes* (Ciccariello-Maher 2016) back to Brazil's peasant struggles (Pahnke, Tarlau, and Wolford 2015, Welch and Sauer 2015) and Landless Workers Movement (MST) communities (Wright and Wolford 2003, Ondetti 2008), Latin America is rife with examples of successful alternatives to land privatisation and large capital accumulation based on an

ethic of collective work and autonomous peasant life. Other social and economic worlds *are* possible, and existing collectivities serve as a reminder and an example of that.

On the flip side, fragmentation is often thought to be the predicament of subaltern struggles. I follow here Spivak's (2006) definition, according to which, to be subaltern is to be 'cut-off from lines of social mobility' (2006: 482). In discussing the 'movements for self-respect' among the Kurmi, Bayly (2012) argues that '[t]heir fragmented protest against the system in the 1920s and 1930s was the protest of a peasantry whose success was constantly being snatched from their grasp by the agents of the colonial government, the state of the world economy or by struggling higher-caste landholders who had a head start over them in the competition for resources' (2012: 308-309). All things considered, the pitfalls of subaltern struggles discussed by Bayly bear similarities with obstacles Afro-Brazilian struggles have faced in the past and continue to face, as 'the traditionalist and asymmetric model of racial relations' in Brazil has 'maintained itself practically intact' and 'will not disappear until the competitive social order is freed in the economic, social, and cultural fields of the distortions that result from the tendency to concentrate income, social privilege, and power in the hands of a single race'³⁸ (Fernandes 1967: 570). Fragmented as they may be, the struggles of *quilombolas* continue to stand strong and resist suppression by dominant political and economic forces.

³⁸ 'Race' is a highly problematic term. I adopt Karen and Barbara Fields' (2014) view that race is the product of racism and, hence, not a particularly useful analytical term. Although its colloquial use in Brazil is rather common, and often innocuous, it was *not* a term frequently used by my *quilombola* interlocutors. Hence, I do not find its use necessary and will avoid it in the text. In the phrase quoted, however, it reflects a rather dated vocabulary use in the social sciences that has been largely abandoned now.

Part B

Quilombos: From territory to territoriality

The debates around the rights of the people studied by anthropologists is a fundamental part of the history of anthropology in Brazil, most emblematically in the case of indigenous peoples and, later, *quilombolas*. In 1994, the Brazilian Anthropology Association (ABA) created a research network, called *Quilombo* Committee —later called *Quilombo* land working group—with a specific focus on *quilombo* territorial rights. Throughout the years, the ABA has taken a clear political stance in defence of those rights. Given the formal requirement for the realisation of a technical report (*laudo, relatório técnico*), anthropologists have always been closely involved in issues of *quilombo* land rights and continue to provide technical assistance to communities entering processes of land registration and regularisation. Technical cooperation agreements with the aim to support indigenous and *quilombo* land regularisation processes, have been signed between ABA and the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office (MPF) since 2007, and between ABA and INCRA since 2011.³⁹ However, the Parliamentary Inquiry Committee's report, discussed above, seriously challenged the nature of technical collaboration between the two parties, since many anthropologists are being accused of fraudulent technical reports.

A steadily growing number of, primarily, Brazilian anthropologists have contributed to what is now a vast literature on *quilombos* in Brazil. Many of those anthropologists have also been engaged in political debates on *quilombos* outside academia, often joining *Quilombola* movements and closely cooperating with local activists for *quilombo* land rights (on anthropological activism see Dullo 2016). Hence, quite often anthropologists are also militants and, conversely, local activists opt for a social science education like anthropology

³⁹ See ABA's website for more information on collaborations and agreements signed: <http://www.abant.org.br/?code=4.0>, accessed on 24 October 2017.

—as, for instance, former national *quilombo* coordinator for the Palmares Foundation Luiz Fernando do Rosário Linhares and Pereira Júnior, *quilombola* from Itamatatuiua and anthropologist.

Alfredo Wagner Berno de Almeida was one of the first Brazilian anthropologists to systematically study *quilombos* and his work has been a major influence in the field of *quilombo* studies —especially for the North and North-eastern regions. Exploring elements that might characterise ‘the *quilombo*’ at a national level—and several years before the Presidential Decree 4.887/2003 opened up any definition of ‘*quilombo*’ to the communities and the people who identified as such, Almeida (1996) was advocating that the term cannot (and should not) be definitively defined. He argued instead that ‘the *quilombo*’ cannot be territorial only nor fixed geographically in one place; it cannot be historically ‘documented’ and archaeologically ‘excavated’. For Almeida (1996, 2006, 2008a) the *quilombo* signifies instead a compound of different elements and *ethos* of living, such as the process of autonomous collaborative work, free of submission to big estate holders.

Some anthropologists and historians have engaged, in their work, in the de-mystification of the *quilombo* and contributed to the deconstruction of two persistent misconceptions about them, namely: fixity/non-mobility and isolation (Reis and Gomes 1996, Almeida 2006, Gomes 2015, Müller 2011, Oliveira and Müller 2016). A popular view of *quilombos* has been that of an isolated community, cut off from the rest of the world, with limited or no communication with its surroundings. This image, largely crafted out of a very narrow view of the history of Palmares, has for many years reinforced the notion that *quilombos* could not have emerged near *fazendas*, or urban centres, or anywhere where capturers were able to reach them.

While a certain degree of autonomy and isolation were essential to the *quilombo*'s survival throughout history, an equal part of its survival was its ability to build strong networks of communication (e.g. with enslaved people in a nearby *fazenda* who would typically alert *quilombolas* to raids and would often also provide them with food supplies) and even commerce. Also, as much as stability was essential for the cultivation of land and growth of a *quilombo*, the ability to relocate and adapt to different environments was equally necessary for survival. In fact, mobility continues to characterise the *quilombo* predicament since these communities today are all too often threatened and even forced to relocate and rebuild their communities (not unlike what happened to the 23 *quilombos* relocated to 7 government-run *agrovilas* in Alcântara). Indeed, it is the permanence on their traditionally occupied territories (that they have been inhabiting for generations) that *quilombolas* are struggling for today.

Myths around *quilombo* formation have largely been debunked by now in the historical and anthropological literature but they continue to fuel popular imagination and are even being used as counter-arguments by voices opposing *quilombo* land regularisation (as in the 'ethnic fraud'). Also, as Arruti (2016) has recently suggested, the stereotype of the rural *quilombo* as 'isolated' has not only crucially limited our understanding of rural *quilombos* but has also invisibilised the urban *quilombo*, usually built in the cities' hills and outskirts (some evolving into today's *favelas*).

The principle of autonomy is of crucial importance not only for understanding *quilombos* but indeed hundreds of communities at the 'margins of nation-states' or 'extra-state' groups. But autonomy does not equal isolation or stability. James Scott, in his well-known work on mountain peoples living in the area he denominates Zomia in Southeast Asia (see Scott 2009: ix), draws attention to what he calls the 'symbiotic relationship' (2009: 28) such groups have always maintained with nation-states. By approaching or distancing (by cutting or enabling communication, remaining in one place or re-settling) themselves from state authorities, such

groups have struggled to maintain a certain level of autonomy (especially with regards to control over land and the means of production) within the structure of a nation-state in which they *de facto* find themselves.

Ramon Sarró (2012) has reflected on the Baga in the mangroves of West Africa from a similar perspective. Indeed, an understanding of what has been largely understood as subaltern societies or ‘cultures of resistance’ (James 2016) has informed much of the anthropological literature on Africa, and especially in rural contexts (see, e.g., Jędrej 1996, 2004; James 2013). Transcending the ‘deep rurals’ (for a critical examination of this concept see James 2016), the claim to autonomy and a certain level of independence from the state has also been a resilient aspect of urban collectivities. In his recent work on urban squatters, Alexander Vasudevan (2017) traces the history of urban squatting in European and North American cities and meticulously shows that the ‘autonomous understanding of shared city life’ (2017: 7) has been a powerful collective way of claiming the ‘right to the city’ and a longstanding alternative to privatisation and state control.

Building on Scott’s (2009) thesis on extra-state communities’ ‘symbiotic relationship’ with state and non-state authorities outlined above, it is important to recognise current networks of communication and collaboration *quilombolas* build with the encompassing society. These networks are imperative to the communities’ efforts to preserve their degree of autonomy from the state and help protect their shared territories. Forging alliances, or ‘support groups to lean on’ (Benot 1984: 81), seem to be essential components of the relationships *quilombos* maintain with the state. Put otherwise, ‘[p]atterns of cooperation, reciprocity, and solidarity constitute the other side of the coin of social being’ in most asymmetrical social relations (Ortner 1984: 157, see also Gledhill 2012: 7).

Especially since the 1988 Federal Constitution, perhaps more than ever before, *quilombolas* have been collaborating with state and federal government agencies for such matters as land

regularisation, welfare programs, or the implementation of infrastructural projects in the communities. Nevertheless, they continue to unequivocally maintain, or struggle for, their sovereignty over their collective territory. ‘Sovereignty’, here refers more to ‘permanent rights over land of a political and social rather than of a directly economic nature’ (MacGaffey 1986: 25). The *quilombo*, as pocket of resistance, emerges as a sort of state-sanctioned autonomous shared territory, not unlike indigenous land reserves in Brazil.

Four main perspectives

Broadly speaking, anthropological literature on *quilombos* can be classified into four large types of work based on the perspective from which they have chosen to look at those communities. I will briefly present the general framework that guides such works and, dialoguing with each one of them, I will comment on how my own research relates to such issues and approaches.

The first, focuses on issues of territoriality. Although distinct nuances of ‘territoriality’ and ‘identity’ have been explored in the literature, *quilombo* identities have largely been attached to notions of a fixed, or ‘specific territoriality’ (Martins, Nunes, Pereira Júnior 2016: 80), usually space-bounded, which is typically also made synonymous with ‘territory’. Relatively less attention has been given to the importance of mobility as an essential mechanism of survival, let alone exploring relations between meaning and designation of ‘territory’. Stuart Elden’s recent work, *The birth of territory* (2013), is an attempt to explore the genealogy, ‘understood as a historical interrogation of the conditions of possibility of things being as they are’ (2013: 8), of the concept of territory. In probing into the semantics of the term, he identifies two main approaches from which territory has been analysed in literature: first, as the outcome of territoriality (hence missing the historical dimension of such notions) and,

secondly, as a bounded space (hence not examining the conditions that enabled this to become possible). Elden stresses that any definitions of territory and territoriality, as well as that of land, need to be historically specific and contextualised to the area we are looking at and the ways people identify and describe such notions. Following Elden's urge to treat 'territory' and 'territoriality' as open definitions and not to take their meaning as given, I wish to analyse how Itamatatiua's territorial/spatial configuration has been made possible and how it plays out in everyday life. I intend to do that by examining practices of space-making and the historical dimension that enabled the cultural configuration of contemporary perceptions of territory. Although notions of land, space, and territory run throughout the present thesis, I examine them more closely in Chapter Four, as well as in the two core Chapters, Five and Six.

The second large group, in the literature discussed, looks at the *quilombo* as a socialist microcosm *par excellence*. Eschewing the assumption that capitalism has penetrated every single aspect of the world we live in and study, such works give a refreshing and positive view of the plurality of relations of power and economy in existence still today. Hence, importantly, to my mind, the value of such works lies in that they pay attention to the importance of collectivity and *ethos* of sharing, common in so many *quilombos* across the country. By doing so, however, many tend to exaggerate the 'socialist reality' in such communities and often fail to see how these relationships have been affected by an ever-growing influence of the global market and new capital relations in which they are, in different degrees but inevitably, embedded. In the present thesis, without minimising the vital role of collective autonomy and collaboration for the *quilombolas* of Itamatatiua, I show the structural modalities of specific hierarchies of power and the fundamental role they play in communal life. This is not to repudiate a specific *quilombo* utopia, but any account that

presents a living social space under a monochromatic light. Even the most ‘bounded field-site’ (Candea 2007), is never a uniform microcosm but a complex cosmos in its own terms.

A third focus of analysis has been that of culture in the *quilombo*. Such works contribute to the exploration of *quilombos*’ rich and diverse cultural traditions. Some of them, however, tend to see *quilombos* as ethnic enclaves of cultural resistance, preserving ‘African’ elements outside of national and/or global influences. Focusing on culture and cultural references considered ‘Black’ and ‘Afro-Brazilian’, there is an underlying danger of seeing culture as ‘inherent’ in such communities, hence naturalising differences, something that is fundamental in the construction of social inequalities as Leite (2016: 299) has stressed. Some of those works tend to romanticise or essentialise aspects of life in the *quilombos* preserving a rather fixed image of what a *quilombo* is and sometimes even reducing it to anachronistic clichés. Chapter Five of the present thesis delves into the cultural universe of Itamatatuiua and discusses local, national, and global perceptions of heritage and, more specifically, *quilombo* heritage. In my discussion, I strive to focus on local categories and understandings of cultural heritage and explore what exactly do they signify for Itamatatiuenses today and in relation to the community’s land struggle.

A fourth main focus in the literature on *quilombos* has been on the relationship of such communities with the environment. Such works often regard *quilombolas* as ideal guardians of the natural resources that surround them, by virtue of the environmentally sustainable lifestyle they have. According to this line of thought, ‘traditional knowledge’, typically seen as preserved by the elders and currently being threatened to be lost, especially due to external/global influences, is ideally formulated in order to maintain a balanced relationship with the environment. Anthropologists who have emphasized such aspects of *quilombo* life have often also suggested that *quilombo* land demarcation is another way of implementing environmentalist policies. Although I do generally agree that *quilombolas* tend to protect and

preserve the natural environment in which they live, I also try to show in this thesis that the environmental question may not always be as straightforward as it may initially appear to be, and that *quilombolas* are faced with environmental challenges and tensions around the use of natural resources from within and beyond the community.

As a general observation, all four large groups in the literature outlined above tend to look at *quilombos* from a specific ‘ethnic perspective’. Although this largely derives from a racialised/ethnic-based legislation that classifies ‘*quilombo* remnants’ as a distinct ethno-racial group alongside indigenous peoples (see, e.g., Müller 2011: 37-39), approaching *quilombolas* from a nearly exclusive ethnic perspective has left little space for a more plural comprehension of *quilombo* life (see also Boyer 2009: 149). As I will argue next, in the ethnographic context of Itamatatiua, I have identified the need for amplification or a more inclusive approach than that of the ‘ethnic group’. A need, in other words, to *think beyond* this narrow classification.

The existing legal description of *quilombo*, as especially exemplified in the Article 68 of the ADCT/CF and the Decree n. 4.887/2003, articulate an ethno-racial definition of *quilombo* that has laid the foundation for an ethnic-based land reform and has decisively influenced the ways the subjects affected (*quilombolas*) articulate their claims over land.

The Article 68 of the 1988 Federal Constitution attached the word ‘remnant’ (*remanescentes*) to *quilombo* communities, by means of which descent from specific historical groups is ascribed to existing groups. The 2003 Presidential Decree, as mentioned earlier, intended to do away with the ‘archaeological paradigm’ and leave the definition open to the people and the groups who self-identify as such. Nevertheless, even if it did assign ‘self-ascription’ as its main criterion for *quilombo* identification, it also explicitly codified *quilombos* as ‘ethno-racial groups’ (*grupos étnico-raciais*; Article 2).

As MacGaffey (1986) argues, ‘both “descent” and “slavery”, it is important to note, are ideological concepts’ (1986: 9). The ethno-legal *quilombo* framework has had a decisive impact on the academic literature on *quilombos*. The *quilombo* territory, its physical and imagined borders and the social world it contained, became central to the work of anthropologists who sought to provide technical assistance to *quilombolas*. It is no wonder, therefore, that the work of Fredrik Barth, with its emphasis on the ‘empirical characteristics’ of boundaries (Barth 1969) has been key to the bulk of anthropological literature on Brazilian *quilombos*. Barth made a break with so-called primordialist theories of ethnic groups that attached ethnicity to a common origin or other ascription given by birth, and suggested that ethnicity is not preordained nor fixed but rather malleable and shaped by historical forces. In other words, ethnicity is ‘the product of a social process rather than a cultural given, made and remade rather than taken for granted’ (Wimmer 2008: 971). At the same time, Barth placed great emphasis on a given group’s identification as an ethnic group and in the ways it conceived its differentiation from other groups. As he specified in the introduction to his seminal book, the ‘critical focus’ of his analysis was ‘the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses’ (Barth 1969: 15).

However, the relativistic approach to ethnic groups, and the predominant emphasis, in *quilombo* ethnographies, on how such groups see themselves in relation to others, has given less space for a theoretical discussion of other pertinent issues. In discussing questions of ‘indigenous identity’, Pacheco de Oliveira (1999) had argued that the emphasis on a group’s situational identity did not pay enough attention to the larger, encompassing category of ‘indigenous’ and its relation to juridical and administrative processes at a national or even global scale. According to this argument, ‘politico-administrative’ objects, such as indigenous or *quilombo* groups, are transformed into an organised collectivity that unites under a shared identity in order to enter ‘a series of mechanisms’ that influence the ways they

represent themselves and restructure aspects of their culture (Arruti 2006: 41; citing Oliveira 1998: 55). Oliveira (1998) calls this process ‘territorialisation’ (*territorialização*). Arruti (2006) argues that the same can be said for the ‘*quilombo*’ question. However, he criticises Oliveira (1999) for overemphasizing the role of the state in those processes at the expense of ‘organised collectivities that antecede’ the state’s ‘objectivisation’ (Arruti 2006: 41-42).

What he suggests instead is to:

reintegrate to the analysis of ethnic groups and to the theory of ethnicity, the remarks on the macro-contextual processes (in which the state plays an inescapable part) that are beyond the context of local definition and against the ‘frontiers’, but without making all anthropological analysis go back to a perspective from which the state is at the centre.

Arruti 2006: 42

Such criticisms point to a need for a more balanced focus between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ processes of ‘territorialisation’ –here conceived of as the compound of actions initiated by *quilombolas* in defence of their shared territory. Nevertheless, the weight Brazilian legislation has given to ethnicity continues to shape anthropological literature. I tend to agree with Arruti’s criticism and I am drawing on it in my analysis of Itamatatua’s ethnographic context. However, I suggest that more emphasis needs to be given to the internal dynamics of a given group. By that I mean that *quilombo* ethnographies can be more attentive to the specificities of each community (their ways of identifying as a group in relation to the encompassing social world) without automatically ascribing to them pre-determined notions of belongingness to any specific ‘ethnic group’.

While we certainly need to look at each *quilombo*’s political and territorial struggle in relation to the national *Quilombola* movement—and even to global subaltern movements in defence of land rights—I argue that anthropological analyses of *quilombos* will benefit from paying closer attention to the specificities of each *quilombo*’s struggle that may or may not fit

in, or correspond to, currents at the national or international level. In other words, the trajectories, histories and present, of *quilombolas* and *quilombo* political organisation cannot be ‘reduced to one neat, seamless story’ (Vasudevan 2017: 11). My own ethnographic research among *quilombo* communities points instead to the need for a more encompassing view of *quilombo* land rights that includes, but transcends, the monolithic category of the ethnic group.

One of the main findings of my research, is that residents take grassroots actions in defence of their collectively inhabited territory, while they await the official issuance of land titles. They actively engage in formal channels of political mobilisation, and participate in the national *Quilombola* movement for land rights. At the same time, they also attempt to tackle land antagonists on the ground. In that particular ethnographic context, land tensions primarily articulate as religious tensions between Catholics and Evangelical Protestants that often also manifest as an opposition between *quilombolas* and non-*quilombolas*. Catholic residents (historically being the single major religious group in the area) are trying to fight back the emergence and growing influence of Pentecostal churches and reinforce Catholicism and religious ties among Catholic residents. In defending and maintaining a Catholic identity, residents are simultaneously defending their communal territory, intrinsically regarded as Catholic since its foundation as a *quilombo* during slavery.

At the same time, and given that the entire state procedure of land regularisation is based on the group’s collective identification as *quilombo*, in patently ethnic terms, the opposition between Catholics (first and long-established residents, and legitimate heirs of the Saint’s lands) and Evangelicals (outsiders or recent converts from within and deniers of Santa Teresa’s land ownership) often also takes the form of an opposition between *quilombolas* on the one hand, self-identified as Black, Catholic, and practitioners of traditional cultural expressions—i.e. ceramic work, dances, music—and non-*quilombolas* on the other, who self-

identify as Evangelicals, abstain from and even brand ‘demonic’ any form of ‘*quilombo* culture’ and its practice, and do not necessarily see themselves as Black.

While the opposition between *quilombolas* and non-*quilombolas* directly relates to issues of ethnic identity (as do the cultural expressions attached to those identities), the opposition between Catholics and Evangelicals is less implicated in notions of ethnicity and more to local, Catholic, perceptions of family and community. In the ethnographic context where my research develops, *quilombolas* take grassroots action in defence of their land cause which mainly unfolds on two levels: one that is more locally bounded and for which notions of family bonds are more relevant (religious activism) and one that is more outward-looking, in fact aiming at reaching out as far as possible and raise awareness of their land cause nationally and even internationally, and for which notions of ethnicity attached to a *quilombo* identity are explicitly employed by *quilombolas* and become the primary modalities of land struggle (cultural activism).

In the Weberian tradition, O’Dwyer (2016) argues that the ‘ethnic element’ can be found in the ‘self-identification of each group with a presumed common origin, as in the donation of the “land of the saint” to the residents of Conceição das Crioulas’, a *quilombo* in the state of Pernambuco (2016: 269). Similar to Itamatatua, the foundation narrative of that community places its creation, well before the abolition of slavery, in the donation of their lands by Nossa Senhora da Conceição to the first inhabitants (Souza 2002: 127). If, following O’Dwyer’s argument, we too trace the ‘ethnic element’ in this ‘common origin’ in the case of Itamatatua, then this shared descent is strikingly manifested in Itamatatua *quilombolas*’ adoption of the Saint’s name as their own. Through this act, they did not only make their kin relation with Santa Teresa explicit, but they also made visible, or concretised, their pact for future generations. ‘Everyone who is a child of the land is “de Jesus”’, Dona Maria Cabeça, one of the residents, told me and continued: ‘when you see that someone has a different last

name, then you know they are from someplace else'. Bearing the Saint's last name is, hence, simultaneously an indication of kin and territorial association.

What I am suggesting here, and will be developing throughout this thesis, is that the defining element in the formation of Itamatatiua's distinct group identity is a special kin relation rather than an 'ethnic element'. In other words, what tied Itamatatiuenses together, ever since the foundation of their community, was not that they belonged to a different 'ethnic group' than other *quilombolas* in Alcântara, for instance, but that they became, and have been ever since, Santa Teresa's children.

In fact, this is one of the major mobilising forces that unites residents across the 40 *quilombos* of the Saint's lands in defence of their territory against Pentecostal expansion. It is worth stressing here that most Evangelicals in my main study area are recent converts and, in most cases, they are intimately related as kin to the Catholic inhabitants. Less than ten people currently identify as Evangelicals (of different congregations) in Itamatatiua. Although it is rather impossible to calculate the precise number of Evangelicals in the other communities that comprise the lands of Santa Teresa (due to continuous conversions and reconversions), I would not estimate this number to be over 200 people. This is a rather small fraction of the population that inhabits the Saint's lands. However, their perception as a significant threat to the Catholic community and their sovereignty over land, as I will show in this thesis, is directly linked to their distinct religious affiliation and, consequently, the effective severing of kin ties with the Saint and her children.

Weber's views on ethnic groups may have been to some extent discarded by contemporary social scientists as 'antiquated' (Banton 2007: 19) but I find some of his insights to be extremely relevant and analytically useful to my ethnographic context. In discussing ethnic and kinship groups, Weber (1978) argues that the key difference between the two is on communal *action*. In the words of Raum (1995): 'A kinship community is characterised by

communal action (*Gemeinschaftshandeln*), an ethnic group exhibits only a potential for communal action at most' (1995: 83; citing Weber [1921]1976 WuG: 235f., esp. 237).

Based on the significance of the shared religious-kinship identity that mobilises collective action in the lands of Santa Teresa, I suggest it is useful to see Itamatatiua as a 'kinship community', in the Weberian sense, circumscribed by specific religious affiliation (Catholicism) via their kinship ties with the Catholic Saint. Borrowing again from a Weberian vocabulary, it is the differences in the 'mores' (*Sitten*) –as in the manners, or moral attitudes (Raum 1995: 80), with respect to land and territory that delineate the boundaries between Catholics and Evangelicals in Itamatatiua. Such differences are evidently manifested in the way land is being used and appropriated –i.e. collectively versus privately.

What I am drawing attention to here is the limitations of approaching *quilombos* (or any other subaltern group for that matter) solely from an 'ethnic perspective'. While *quilombos* across the country may share elements of social organisation and be politically united under a common struggle (predominantly) for land rights, they are also a very diverse synthesis of local communities. Emphasis on this 'unity out of disunity' (Herzfeld 2003: 297) may be advancing their land struggles, but an ethnographer's role is to be attentive to local particularities as well. Anthropological research on *quilombos* cannot be limited to the ethno-legal framework applied to *quilombolas*, but needs to amplify its analysis and pay attention to the internal dynamics and particularities of each group. In the case of Itamatatiua and, by extension, the lands of Santa Teresa, the land question seems to unfold on two main levels: one that directly relates to issues of 'ethnic' identity and the national *Quilombola* movement and one that relates more closely to notions of territoriality as embedded in the community's specific religious and kinship history.

Elden has argued that 'territory is not simply an object: the outcome of actions conducted towards it or some previously supposedly neutral area. Territory is itself a process, made and

remade, shaped and shaping, active and reactive’ (2013: 17). Seeing the lands of Santa Teresa as a territory that is constantly reaffirming its limits and constituency (religious and ethnic), will lead us to an understanding of the importance of clay-work and the annual *festa* of Santa Teresa for the affirmation and maintenance of ethnic and religious/kinship identities.

Seeing the *quilombo* not as ‘a category of sameness, but an “affirmation of singularities”’ (Jeffrey, McFarlane and Vasudevan 2012: 1249; citing Hardt and Negri 2009: 124), I have suggested that the anthropological study of *quilombos* will benefit from broadening its scope of analysis, so far significantly limited by a predominant ‘ethnic’ focus. While nearly every *quilombo* is struggling to secure their land rights and a certain level of autonomy from the state, there are manifold ways they are trying to achieve this. Unpacking ‘the *quilombo*’ is necessary in order to further explore and understand *quilombo* land struggle and its nuances for the very protagonists: the *quilombolas*.

Thesis Layout

Chapter Two is divided in two parts. In the first, I will be discussing the history of land occupation in Alcântara from the Portuguese colonial regime to this day. Drawing largely on archival documents, historical, and anthropological literature, the part’s main goal is to place Alcântara’s contemporary land struggles into historical perspective and highlight the distinct history of *quilombo* formation in the municipality that has been given surprisingly little attention in the literature. In the second part, the analysis focuses on the historical specificities of Itamatatua’s formation as a *quilombo* community and what accounts residents prioritise when discussing their collective land occupation.

In Chapter Three, I will discuss current land tensions in Alcântara and the influences they have had on its nearly 200 *quilombo* communities. The installation of the Alcântara Launch

Centre (CLA) will be examined as an experience of violent and unjust state intervention by the great majority of *quilombolas*, especially those forced to relocate permanently losing access to previously available natural resources. Furthermore, I will explore *quilombola* political mobilisation, the growth and spread of activism in the Black rural communities, and the establishment of structures of participatory democracy that continue to shape *quilombolas*' involvement in local, regional, and national politics.

In Chapter Four, my focus will once again shift to Itamatatiua. It will be argued that while the conflicts between *quilombolas* and the CLA have had a major impact on all Alcântara's *quilombos* and the kinds of political initiatives they took (e.g. forming community associations and local social movements, joining regional and national *Quilombola* movements), not all *quilombo* communities in the municipality have been equally affected by the CLA. While there is a rich and growing body of literature on Alcântara's *quilombos* from Brazilian and few foreign scholars, the focus of such works rarely shifts from the conflicts with the CLA and the Brazilian state. While I am not denying the significance of the installation of the CLA for all Alcântara's *quilombolas*, I am suggesting that it has been experienced in radically distinct ways by different *quilombo* inhabitants. More specifically, I argue that the large area locally denominated 'lands of Santa Teresa', and of which Itamatatiua represents the symbolic core, has been largely outside the sphere of influence by the CLA. I will attempt to show instead that the *quilombolas* of the nearly 40 communities that comprise the Saint's land identify other primary land antagonists.

In Chapter Five, the analysis will delve into the 'hidden transcripts' (Scott 1990) of Itamatatiua's ceramic production. Drawing on participant observation of clay-work among the female makers of the community, I will suggest that the ceramic production plays an important role for the communication of Itamatatiua's land cause. It will be argued that pottery is being used by the makers and other residents as a channel for the dissemination of

information about their struggle. Drawing largely on anthropological literature on heritage, and pointing out the specificities of ‘*quilombo* heritage’ in Brazil, I will explore the nuances of ceramic work in the *quilombo*. Although recent literature on heritage studies has drawn attention to diverging conceptualisation of heritage between national policies and under-represented groups within nation states, as well as to internal fissions among such groups, little attention has been given in anthropological literature to creative appropriations of culture, and cultural heritage, as a vehicle for social change (see, e.g., Clifford 2004: 6-8; and Watts and Ferro 2012, Urano 2002 from related disciplines). Even less attention has been given to politically-minded uses of cultural heritage by Brazilian *quilombos* (Kenny 2009, 2011).

As opposed to widespread and largely romanticised views of Afro-Brazilian cultural expressions (such as artisanal production, dances, and religious festivals) as residues of an African past, and moving away from an approach that sees such expressions solely as (cultural) resistance, or a mere reaction to dominant cultures, I am interested in the ways Afro-Brazilian groups mobilise themselves politically through acts of promotion and communication of their heritage production. I shall argue that these, far from being reflexive reactions to ‘sweeping forces of globalisation’, are active and consciously organised initiatives by Afro-Brazilian groups aiming at ensuring their territorial rights. My aim here is to delve into an underexplored aspect of Afro-Brazilian heritage and identity politics, which is the employment of *quilombo* cultural heritage as a channel for the promotion of land rights. This chapter contributes to the main argument of the thesis by illuminating some of the strategic uses of Itamatatua heritage by residents and collaborating agents that are directly related to their land cause.

In Chapter Six, I will explore what I have identified as the second major stream of grassroots *quilombo* mobilisation, namely religious activism in defence of the lands of Santa Teresa.

Itamatatiua, officially within the administrative borders of Alcântara, is the administrative centre of an informal zone denominated ‘lands of Santa Teresa’ a geographic association that resonates strongly with the history of the community, as many residents perceive it. In that particular ethnographic context, land tensions primarily articulate as religious tensions between Catholics and Evangelical Protestants. Catholic residents (historically being the single major religious group in the area) are trying to fight back against the emergence and growing influence of Pentecostal churches and reinforce Catholicism and religious ties among Catholic residents. In defending and maintaining a Catholic identity, residents are simultaneously defending their communal territory and their cultural and religious traditions.

Conclusion

As a way of introduction to the main themes this thesis will further explore in the following chapters, I have here looked at the *quilombo* in its historical and contemporary nuances and identified some of the main perspectives from which it has been explored in the anthropological literature. Although *quilombos* do necessarily enter the ‘ethnic’ debate when undergoing the state processes of land regularisation, I have suggested that ethnographies cannot be limited to the ethno-legal framework applied to those communities, and their land struggles, but need to amplify their analyses and pay attention to elements that may not, at least not at first sight, count as ‘ethnic’ only.

The anthropological study of *quilombos* will benefit from broadening its scope of analysis, so far dominated by an ‘ethnic’ focus. In the present thesis, my analysis will be shared between two main features of *quilombo* land mobilisation as they transpired in my ethnographic context. I will be looking at Itamatatiua as both an ‘ethnic group’—by virtue of its participation in formal land regularisation processes, its political mobilisation in *Quilombola*

movements, and its creative use of notions of *quilombo* heritage in the ceramic production—and a ‘kinship/religious community’—by virtue of its members’ strong identification as children of Santa Teresa, who they believe to be the owner of the lands they inhabit, comprising a large area denominated locally as ‘lands of Santa Teresa’.

Finally, I would like to sum up this thesis’s central themes and main contributions to ethnographies and anthropological theory on *quilombo* land struggle, and the politics ‘from below’ more broadly, in three points: first, it shows the importance of *quilombo* cultural and religious heritage as a vehicle for political struggle and land reform strategy; second, it draws attention to the need to unpack ‘the *quilombo*’ and explore its nuances from the *quilombolas*’ own perspectives, beyond the rubric of the ‘ethnic group’; third, it identifies and explores non-traditional land threats to *quilombo* ethnic territories, such as religious antagonists. My ethnography sheds light on a largely unexplored threat to *quilombola* notions of territoriality, which is the growing presence of Evangelical Christianity.

Chapter 2. **Histories of land occupation in Alcântara**

This chapter is split into two parts. The first explores records of land occupation in Alcântara from colonisation to the present day. Its main objective is to lay the historical groundwork for a discussion of deep-seated contemporary convictions, among Alcântara *quilombolas*, of collective land ownership. It seeks to emphasize that despite the lack of legal title deeds (which were inaccessible to them in the first place), *quilombolas* have effectively established their free communities in Alcântara since, at least the 18th century –often on lands that legally appeared to be a White landowner’s private property. The long history of peasant land occupation in Alcântara has been given surprisingly little attention in the historical and anthropological literature. Despite some exceptions (see, especially, Almeida 2008a, 2006, Linhares 1999, Andrade and Filho 2006), the existence of a large body of free Black peasantry several decades before the abolition of slavery has been understudied. My intention here is to enter into a productive dialogue (in light of my own ethnographic data) with those works that shed light on this historical phenomenon, which, in my view, is crucial in order to comprehend *quilombola* struggles for land rights today.

The second part of the chapter focuses on Itamatatiua and its distinct historical trajectory. More specifically, the discussion will centre around the histories that are privileged in narratives told by the local population today vis-à-vis their collective land occupation. Such narratives give historical depth to Itamatatiua’s struggle for the establishment of land rights and marshal historical evidence that attests to the legitimacy of their collective land occupation. By exploring the ways Itamatatiuenses choose to legitimize their land possession, one can better understand the central place the community’s patron saint continues to hold – especially in relation to land disputes and challenges to the role of the land custodian. Furthermore, the second part will also discuss some of the widely circulated narratives about

Santa Teresa's divine intervention aiming at protecting her land and her children from parties ill-disposed to them.

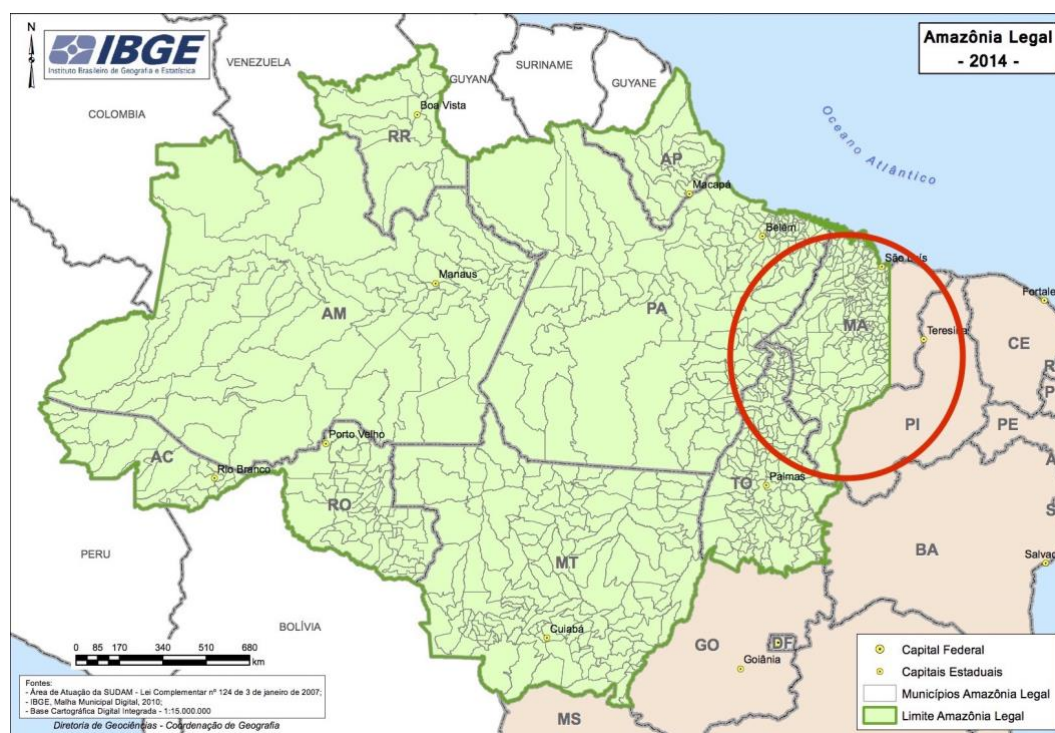
Maranhão on the map

Maranhão is a state in the North-eastern region of Brazil, with a population of a little over 6.5 million people (IBGE, 2010 census). The state is situated in a geographically transitional, or 'frontier' area, bounded by an extremely diverse set of ecoregions. From the equatorial forests of Amazonia to the west to the dry tropical savannas (*cerrado*) to the south, and xeric scrublands (*caatingas*) to the east; and from the mangroves and moist broadleaved forests (*restingas*) along the north coast, to the Pindaré river and tropical moist forests to the north-west and west, and the Maranhão Babaçu forests to the centre and east of the state, Maranhão presents a unique topography.



Map 4: Ecoregions in the state of Maranhão (source: Google Maps)

Alcântara is located near the eastern frontier of the Legal Amazon (*Amazônia Legal*) administrative region. This area, comprised of nine Brazilian states, was created in the early years of the military dictatorship, as part of an Amazon development strategy. Given its location, hence, Alcântara ‘is considered a strategic entryway to the Amazon by military strategists’ (Mitchell 2008: 181).



Map 5: Legal Amazonia region showed in green. The red circle is around Maranhão (source: IBGE)

São Luís, the state’s capital city, numbers about one million people, whereas Alcântara, a municipality in the state’s north-west, has a total resident population of nearly 22,000 people (IBGE, 2010).⁴⁰ According to the latest national report on the country’s population based on people’s racial self-identification, the North-eastern Brazilian region, where Maranhão is situated, has the largest percent of the country’s population self-declared as Black (*pretos*)

⁴⁰ In the last national census, in 2010, Alcântara’s total population was 21,851 people. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), the estimate total population in 2017 is of 21,673 people. See online at: <https://cidades.ibge.gov.br/brasil/ma/alcantara/panorama>, accessed on 3 November 2017.

(9.5%).⁴¹ In the North-east, Maranhão is home to one of the region's largest Black and Brown population (71.9%), ranking third after the states of Bahia (73.1%) and Piauí (72.3 %). The same report also presents results on Brazilians' racial self-identification, by state and municipality. In Maranhão, the percentage of the population that identifies as Black and Brown/mixed descent (*parda*) is over 72%. Maranhão's non-White population is largely comprised by indigenous, Black, and 'mixed race' people, encounters that go back to Brazil's colonial occupation.

The first significant European presence in Maranhão had as a result the short-lived French colony of 1612-1613 (Assunção 1995, Viveiros 1999). Unlike the Portuguese, the French seemed to have had established relatively peaceful relationships with the indigenous Tupinambá groups.⁴² After several attempts, the Portuguese finally succeeded in curbing indigenous, and French, resistance and the area of Maranhão was brought under Portuguese colonial control. On 13 June 1621, the Portuguese colony in the Americas was divided in two states: that of Brazil and that of Maranhão. By the mid-17th century and the establishment of the Portuguese colonial regime, the indigenous population had been decimated and significantly reduced 'by the combined effects of war, slavery and disease' (Assunção 1995: 266-7, Hawthorne 2010).

⁴¹ 'Socio-demographic studies and space analyses with reference to the municipalities with *quilombo* communities', Preliminary Technical Report, IBGE, 2007.

⁴² There are several accounts of the alleged 'friendly colonialism' of the French, especially in Maranhão. See, e.g., Assunção (1995) and Dubois (2006) for a more general discussion of Enlightenment ideas' influence on late French colonialism. Viveiros (1999) cites João Francisco Lisboa (1901) who writes about the relations established in early 17th century between French colonizers and indigenous Tupinambá groups in the area that is today Alcântara: 'The Tupinambás of the Cumã district used to live in numerous *aldeias* (indigenous village settlements), quiet and submitted to the government of Matias de Albuquerque, son of the Captaincy's Chief, and always missing the French, their good friends and old allies' (Viveiros 1999: 19).

From anonymised multitudes to kin-based communities

Of various origins, they were all transformed –in the eyes of Europeans– into *Africans*, as if there was any homogeneity in the numerous peoples, languages, cultures and religions.

Gomes 2015: 8; emphasis in the original

In the long and ferocious years of the slave trade, the ocean became a vigorous receptacle for what was considered human merchandise (Mintz and Price 1992, Klein 1986, 2012). In this forceful encounter, a stream of immensely diverse cultures, cosmologies, and ways of living were to shape one another decisively. The massive influx of enslaved Africans in the Americas, and the ongoing transit of people and goods between Africa, the Americas, and Europe⁴³ during colonisation, are the ‘founding conditions’ (Matory 2005: 3) of the ‘black Atlantic’ (Curtin 1969, Eltis and Richardson 1997, Mann and Bay 2001, Palmié 2014, Richardson and Silva 2015).

There are certainly different ways to think about the trans-Atlantic experiences and realities and I am by no means attempting to discuss such issues at length here. But what is perhaps worth emphasizing is that from whatever perspective we approach the ‘black Atlantic’ we need to consider the diverse ethnic and cultural identities (Yelvington 2006, Miller 2003, Gilroy 1993, Hertzman 2009:720, Palmié 2008) among the African populations, which informed distinct diasporic cultural dynamics in the different destinations in Brazil.

Early enslaved Africans in Maranhão, as in the rest of Brazil, would mostly come from Central Africa as ‘Kongo-Angola provided a significant majority of the early Brazilian slave population’ (Heywood 1999: 16, Geggus 1989). In later years, Africans would still be taken

⁴³ For a small indication of the literature on return migration to, and the impact of the slave trade on, Africa, see: Castillo (2016), Law (2004), Bay (2001), Rodrigues (1962), Soumonni (2001), M’ baye (2006), Matory (1999). On Portugal, see indicatively: Marques (2006), Maxwell (2004), Lahon (2004), Silva and Grinberg (2011).

mainly from Kongo-Angola but the Upper Guinea Coast would become an important source of ‘slave extraction’ (Assunção 1995: 271; citing Eduardo 1966, Hawthorne 2010, Miller 2003). In the second half of the 18th century, with the establishment of a new maritime line, most enslaved people sent to Maranhão would be shipped directly from West Africa, as the journey was significantly shorter. However, even though most Africans shipped to Maranhão would embark from the ports of West Africa (with Bissau and Cacheu being the main ones – see, e.g., Hawthorne 2010), not all of them originated from West African ethnic groups, but they formed a rather multi-ethnic and astonishingly diverse compound of peoples (Silva 2008, Albuquerque and Fraga 2006).

It goes without saying that upon arrival in Brazil, and throughout the existence of the institution of slavery, enslaved people constituted a very diverse population, not always –and certainly not exclusively– of African descent. In Maranhão, and especially in Alcântara, the relatively small number of White colonists had as a result an extensive interaction between indigenous and African groups. Nevertheless, as enslaved people were largely excluded from colonial or other registries, we can only create an approximate idea of the backgrounds and histories of the enslaved population.

As anywhere else, enslaved individuals in Alcântara, when in a position to escape their slave condition, fled captivity and formed free group settlements, or joined the ones already formed in the forests since the early days of slavery. By the end of the 18th century, a robust free Black peasantry had been formed in the backwoods of Alcântara and continued to grow in the following decades.

Of course, these *quilombos* did not emerge simultaneously nor in a uniform way. Some arose at, or near, the abandoned *fazendas*. Others, built their communities in the areas formerly in the possession of the Christian orders. Many more were gradually formed in areas that had no, or not known, legal owners. This latter case was frequent where legal owners had for

many years ceased to visit, or effectively control, their properties. Not uncommon was the phenomenon of donation (usually verbal or otherwise informal) of property by the legal landowners to the former enslaved people of their *fazenda* or colonial house (*casa grande*). What perhaps especially foregrounds the proliferation of *quilombos* in Alcântara, as I will show in what follows, is the ‘periods of retraction’ of colonial powers. During those times – extraordinarily long in the case of Alcântara— the Black and native population was able to reorganise and re-create itself, as has been the case for several indigenous societies throughout colonial history (see, e.g., Viegas 2012: 538, Fausto and Heckenberger 2007). Hence, it should be emphasized that the discussion of the historical record that follows looks at history not as external (the ship that arrived to the people), nor only for what it did to the people, but mostly for ‘what people did to history’ (Viveiros de Castro 1999: 165; see also Viegas 2007: 61). It was through the people’s determination to escape their historical predicament, imposed on them by the European colonial project, that they successfully managed to shake off the condition of anonymous slave subject and create autonomous affective communities where they could lead free and decent lives.

The first century of European colonisation in Maranhão

Since the early days of Portuguese dominance, efforts were made to divide the vast area of Maranhão into captaincies by donating large terrains to Portuguese settlers.⁴⁴ In 1624, an area of fifty-nine leagues was given the name Cumã Captaincy (*Capitania de Cumã*) and donated to Antonio Coelho de Carvalho. On 15 March 1639, it was expanded by sixteen leagues. Alcântara, which was a growing centre of the Cumã Captaincy, numbered less than 300 residents at the time of its foundation (Viveiros 1999: 28). It was officially given the

⁴⁴ Originally, the two main captaincies of the state of Maranhão were those of Maranhão and Grão-Pará, which were then sub-divided into smaller captaincies.

administrative status of a Vila⁴⁵ on 22 December 1648, date that marks the town's anniversary to this day.⁴⁶ Antonio Vieira, the 'emperor of Portuguese language' as the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa famously called him,⁴⁷ set foot in Maranhão from the Captaincy of Bahia (state of Brazil) in 1653 (Bosi 2009). He quickly managed to get significant concessions of land from the Crown which helped him organise and expand the Jesuits' mission in the region. The indigenous Tupinambá population would gradually come under the control of Jesuit priests who formed mission villages in the interior (Schwartz 1978). Alcântara and its mainland (within the Cumã Captaincy) was one of the regions in the state of Maranhão where a sizeable area was controlled by the Jesuit Order.

Although enslaved Africans had reached the region of Maranhão since the early days of the colonial era, their population was relatively small –no more than 3,000 people across the state– until the first half of the 18th century. More than a century after the establishment of the Portuguese colonial presence in the state of Maranhão,⁴⁸ indigenous people in Alcântara would still significantly outnumber people of African descent. This also explains why first colonial reports of communities formed by enslaved runaways were described as 'aldeias (indigenous village settlements) of fugitive slaves' since the presence of indigenous people was still predominant (Almeida 2006: 118). The first *engenhos* (mills)⁴⁹ had already started

⁴⁵ In a hierarchical arrangement of settlements based on their population, the Portuguese Vila is equivalent to a town (larger than a village, smaller than a city). For further reading on the phases of urbanisation in colonial Brazil: Gosling (2001).

⁴⁶ Celebrations for Alcântara's anniversary are held every year, accompanied by cultural and musical events in various parts of the town, and usually culminating in a large concert held on the night of the 22nd at the main square, *Praça da Matriz*.

⁴⁷ From the work *Mensagem* (Part three: *O encoberto*, II. *Os avisos*; *Segundo*: António Vieira). Pessoa (1934).

⁴⁸ The name of the state was changed from Maranhão (1621) to Maranhão and Grão-Pará (1654), to Grão-Pará and Maranhão (1751), with the last renaming accompanied by the transfer of the state's capital from São Luís to Santa Maria de Belém do Grão-Pará (Belém). For further reading: Gomes (2015).

⁴⁹ Stuart B. Schwartz, in the introduction to the book *Tropical Babels* (2004), traces back the origins of the English term 'plantation' arguing that using it to refer to 16th century Spanish and Portuguese production estates is a neologism, as the term as such 'did not exist in its present meaning and was never used as such' (2004: 2). Instead, the Portuguese word *engenho* (literally the mill, or sugarcane processing machine) was used, which was even adopted by the English (using its Spanish equivalent *ingenio*) when they first established sugarcane estates in Barbados. According to Schwartz, the English term 'plantation' was initially used to describe an established

to make their appearance in the forest areas of the peninsula where Alcântara is situated.

Nevertheless, and with the exception of Christian missions, colonial presence was still unsystematic, scarce, and relatively loose.

The first large trade company in the state was the Maranhão Commerce Company. The company only lasted for two years (from 1682 to 1684) and brought a rather small number of Africans to Maranhão. This situation would drastically change in 1755, a year marked by the end of indigenous slavery in the region⁵⁰ and the creation of the General Commerce Company of Grão-Pará and Maranhão (*Companhia Geral de Comércio do Grão-Pará e Maranhão* –hereafter the *Companhia*).⁵¹ The *Companhia* would be granted the ‘exclusive right to supply slaves to the eastern Amazon region’ (Carney 2004: 13-14; Hawthorne 2010; Carreira 1983, 1969; Dias 1970) and a direct connection with West Africa, as the journey was significantly shorter.

The establishment of the *Companhia* prompted the proliferation of plantation sites and marked the beginning of an intensive trade era in the state. In Alcântara, this period was characterised by prosperity for many colonists and was subsequently typified as the town’s ‘golden era’ (Viveiros 1999). The economic prosperity of Portuguese settlers was founded on, and sustained by, the forced labour of incoming enslaved Africans, the number of whom would significantly increase in the following decades. The great changes that occurred in the

colony (in the 17th century), then became a synonym of any sort of farm (18th century), to finally come to mean a large agricultural enterprise.

⁵⁰ Law of the liberties of the Indians (*Lei das Liberdades dos Índios*), of 6 June 1755. A 1680 writ (*Alvará Régio*, and not Law, as commonly cited) first recognised certain liberties to the indigenous population and laid the basis for the official abolition of indigenous slavery 75 years later. However, indigenous liberty was far from being established and the provisions of the 1680 writ were little observed. For further reading: Moreira (2010), Cunha (1994). The reasons commonly alluded at the time to explain the substitution of indigenous slave labour with African are clearly illustrated in the following account: ‘The native race is weak for rural service. The Black has been a slave in all eras. For the organisation of work in the colony the servile hand cannot be spared. May the African, hence, be sacrificed to the benefit of the Indian’ (João Lúcio de Azevedo cited in Viveiros 1999: 56).

⁵¹ Also known as the General Company of Grão-Pará and Maranhão (*Companhia Geral do Grão-Pará e Maranhão*).

organisation of Maranhão's plantation economy were the result of intensive interventionist policies implemented by Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo, first Marquis of Pombal.

Alcântara was directly and greatly affected by the changes brought about by the Pombaline administration, as described below.

Alcântara's 'golden era': The Companhia (1755-1775)

Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo served as Secretary of State of the Kingdom of Portugal and the Algarves, under King José I. He initiated and realised a series of economic, religious, and social reforms that had a tremendous impact on both Portugal and Brazil. One of the major changes his administrative initiatives brought, was the expulsion of the Jesuit Order and, consequently, the persistent persecution of all religious orders in general.

As in Portugal, the Jesuits were expelled from Brazil and their properties were confiscated and passed to the Royal Exchequer (*Real Erário*). There are divergent approaches to Marquis of Pombal's resolve to expel the Jesuits (and, later, the clergy in general), some highlighting his embrace of Enlightenment ideas and his will to secularise society and de-catechise education (see, e.g., Maclachlan 1979, Maciel and Shigunov Neto 2006). Others however, point to Pombal's dedication to economic reforms and his determination to boost the Kingdom's commerce and industry, and thus attribute the persecution of the Jesuits more to practical reasons of control over natural and human resources than anticlericalism (Roehner 1997, Vasconcelos et al. 2008).

A second important reform of the Pombaline era was the 1755 prohibition of indigenous slavery (see footnote 50), which marked a turning point in Maranhão's colonial history. Only a day after issuing the *Lei das Liberdades dos Índios*, the Companhia was created. Part of the Pombaline administration's plans for the radical reorganisation of commerce and trade in the

colonies (Carreira 1969, 1983; Dias 1970, 1968; Maclachlan 1974; Raymundo 2006), this trading company was based on monopolistic exploitation of resources produced in the state, and required a (slave) labour force that could no longer be sought among the native population. Over the following two decades, the Companhia would be the steering wheel of a forced massive influx of Africans to Maranhão, brought to undertake slave labour in the colony. From about 3,000 in 1755, enslaved Africans in Maranhão would be almost 12,000 by 1777, with the number skyrocketing to 35,000 between 1778 and 1800 –due to a British cotton market opening created with the outbreak of the American Revolution– and further increasing to ‘at least 48,000 between 1801 and 1820’ (Assunção 1995: 267, Hawthorne 2010).

In order for the Companhia to effectively initiate a transatlantic trade based on extensive monoculture, a major land reform also needed to take place. With a Charter (*Carta Régia*) in July 1754, the Governor of the Captaincy of Maranhão, Gonçalo Pereira Lobato e Souza, ordered the seizure of the lands of the Cumã Captaincy and their return to royal administration. The Coelho de Carvalho family, legal heirs to the lands of the Captaincy, were compensated for their property loss in Maranhão with lands in Portugal (Viveiros 1999: 31). Pombal’s plan was to redistribute the confiscated land by granting concessions to wealthy individuals.

Confiscated lands in the state were split into 1,164 shares, called *ações*, owned by 144 shareholders (*acionistas*) (Dias 1968). It is important to underline, however, that *ações*, or any other land colonists would make use of in Alcântara, were not *stricto senso* private property but a *concession* granted by the Royal House. Among the 144 individual land holders and traders, only five of them resided in the colony (Almeida 2006: 97; citing Carreira 1988: 75).

To be eligible for land concessions, known as *sesmarias*, individuals needed to demonstrate possession of at least six enslaved Africans. The Companhia would not only guarantee the trade of crops from the plantations, and finance the mass import of enslaved individuals from Africa, but would also facilitate initial capital input by granting loans to the legal occupiers (*sesmeiros*) (Almeida 2006: 97). Since the Companhia was granted the monopoly of slave trade to the Portuguese colony, it also facilitated acquisition of a large number of enslaved workers for the *sesmeiros* by allowing payment in instalments –which they could settle up with within a period of two to three years– and barter (*ibid.*).

The creation of the Companhia and the reforms implemented by the Pombaline administration were giving colonial settlers the structural support they needed in order to hold sway over the lands of Alcântara controlled by the Catholic Christian Orders. By confiscating the territories under Jesuit control and redistributing it to rich colonisers, and by bringing an excessive number of new work force (enslaved Africans), Pombal's reforms for the initiation of a new commercial era in Maranhão directly aligned with many *colonos*'s⁵² (non-religious colonisers) interests (Almeida 2006: 96-98). The same reforms, however, were in diametrical opposition to, and brought catastrophic consequences for, religious colonists.

The diversion in the settlers' approaches to their activities in the colony, created a 'permanent confrontation between two irreconcilable colonisation projects' (Assunção 1995: 267) and marked the early colonial period in Maranhão. On the one hand, the Catholic orders, once warmly invited to the colonial project in Brazil, were under attack. On the other, the new royal administration seemed more determined than ever before to undertake large-scale

⁵² '*Colono*' (pl. *colonos*) is a term that mostly refers to owners of land holdings that arose from the period of Maranhão's Commerce Company corresponding to 'modest exploration units, without the application of voluminous resources, mostly using indigenous work force and whose production was mainly directed to the local market' (Almeida 2006: 99). This term would eventually be substituted by '*lavradores*' (farmers, in some contexts also cattlemen), a term commonly used by Alcântara's *quilombolas* today to describe the nature of their occupation (mostly as smallholders).

commercial activities in Maranhão and Pará, and was not willing to negotiate with any party impeding its plans.

Soon after the disintegration of mission villages (some of them later became hubs for runaways), in June 1760, the Jesuits were evicted from Alcântara and were forced to leave all their land possessions behind. Alcântara's plantation farms would be mainly created in areas formerly under the jurisdiction of the Jesuit Order. Given that the other three Catholic Christian orders in Alcântara (Franciscans, Mercedarians, and Carmelites) did not occupy either as much territory, nor in equally privileged locations (in terms of access to the sea), as the Jesuits,⁵³ they were able to maintain their properties for a few decades more.

The Carmelites, whose *fazenda* Tamatatiua⁵⁴ roughly occupied the area of the present-day *quilombo* of Itamatatiua (where fieldwork for this thesis was conducted), were the last to formally relinquish their estates in Alcântara. Perhaps, one of the reasons they were able to maintain formal possession of their properties for longer is that their *fazendas* were located in an area of little or no interest to the Pombaline administration's monoculture farm projects. The swamplands of Tamatatiua were mainly propitious for the raising of cattle and cultivation of sugarcane, and not especially for cotton plantations.

The Companhia owned forty-two vessels of different types and tonnage, with twenty-seven being used for the connection with the African coast (Almeida 2006: 99, Carreira 1969). The primary export product of the Companhia was cotton, with a large and growing demand boosted by the development of the English textile industry (Beckert 2014). The production of

⁵³ For further information on the former Jesuit lands in Alcântara, see the research project entitled '*Dinâmicas da vicinidade: negros e caboclos em contextos rurais*', coordinated by Emilia Pietrafesa de Godoi (UNICAMP).

⁵⁴ There are a few different names under which the Carmelite *fazenda* is registered in the archival records. In my research at the Public Archives of the State of Maranhão (APEM), I encountered the terms 'Tamatatuba' and 'Tamata-tiua' both referring to the same establishment registered as property of the Carmelite Order in Alcântara.

rice was also intensified, remaining however of less importance in Alcântara, where cotton dominated the cultivation in the local *fazendas*. Cattle ranges were also created –especially in the south-east of Alcântara– which were closely connected to the *fazendas*, furnishing them with products (mainly animals to operate the machines and carry cargo). With Maranhão being ‘the second-largest Brazilian cotton producer’ (Assunção 1995: 267), most enslaved people would work in the cotton fields, while others would be working in the region’s rice plantations, saline seeps, and sugarcane fields, or become domestic servants.

The end of the Companhia and later attempts to rekindle Alcântara’s economy

In 1774 the twenty years of the Companhia’s exclusive use of the slave commerce had come to an end, and by 1778 the Companhia was extinct. This led to a steep decline of the local cotton production and exportation.⁵⁵ By 1819 the cotton commerce in Alcântara was practically concluded when the prices reached their lowest level. The American War of Independence had a major effect on cotton production in the south, allowing Maranhão to briefly emerge as a significant cotton producer in the world market. However, after the end of the war, the plantations in the US south were quickly reorganised, producing cotton in more quantities and better quality than that of Brazil, thus leading to a disastrous fall in cotton price in Maranhão (Assunção 1995). The United States would increasingly expand their share in the world market of cotton and successfully dominate it by the early 19th century (Beckert 2014).

Sesmeiros were already deep in debt to the commerce men due to purchases of slave labour workers, the price of whom –with the collapse of the commerce– they could no longer afford

⁵⁵ Among the reasons the activities of the Companhia did not continue is the dismissal of Marquis of Pombal from his position and the overall political change in Portugal, known as *Viradeira* (see footnote 56).

to pay. Eventually, the introduction of Africans would diminish and the price for the purchase of slave labour force would increase, making the acquisition of new slave labour increasingly difficult for colonists.

In June 1777, amid political upheaval in Portugal (with the death of King Don José I, the removal of Marquis of Pombal from office, and the political turmoil known as *Viradeira*)⁵⁶ and a year before the final extinction of the Companhia, the *sesmeiros*, assessing the critical political situation and fearing loss of their lands, urged for the registration of their rural properties (*sesmarias* and *cartas de datas*).

It was a period of critical political and economic transition, and the *sesmeiros* needed the formalisation of their land possessions in order to secure them from possible confiscation. The end of the monopoly and the transition from mercantilism to free trade, with the end of the Companhia, appeared promising to both *sesmeiros* and small traders. The former were aiming at having their debts absolved, while the latter were eager to finally get a share in the commercial activities with European markets once the monopoly was over.

Since 1774, Maranhão had been incorporated into the state of Brazil (previously distinct administrative regions). In 1807, political upheavals and the menace of a Napoleonic invasion required Portugal's Royal Family to move to Brazil. The ports were opened, by Royal decision, in 1808 and commercial agreements with England were signed in 1810 (Almeida 2006: 49). In 1815, Portugal and Brazil were united in a common Kingdom (with Brazil no longer being a colony) and in 1822, Brazil became an independent empire (Imperial era: 1822-1889). These major political changes in Brazil may not have had particularly direct

⁵⁶ The *Viradeira* is a political era initiated on the aftermath of the death of King Don José I on 24 February 1777 and the enthronement of Dona Maria I, followed by radical changes in the Kingdom's administration. For further reading: Brito (1990), Maffre (2005).

implications in Alcântara, but did affect the formation and survival of *quilombos* and *mocambos* in the mainland, as well as the political empowerment of the local White elite.

After the end of the Companhia, and having ensured the registration of their land holdings, *sesmeiros* began to abandon their estates usually appointing someone (commonly a trusted ‘slave’) to look after their properties. With Alcântara having reached an economic stalemate and becoming an ever more peripheral and commercially marginalised region in the colony, business prospectors sought opportunities elsewhere.

With the decline of cotton commerce, Alcântara’s White seigneurial elite became ever more involved in local and state politics. As Almeida (2006) shows, a long series of key roles in state institutions were occupied by *sesmeiros* from Alcântara who, having nothing more than the legal concessions for their land (but no involvement in its use nor effective control over it), found a way out of the economic crisis by starting a political career (see also 2002a, 2008a). Such roles included the President of the Province of Maranhão, senators, high-end bureaucratic positions, as well as key roles in the administrative, ecclesiastic and military sector (Almeida 2006: 112).

In the meantime, self-emancipated and enslaved people in Alcântara, as well as in other areas in Maranhão that had been severely affected by the economic crisis, would gain relative freedom and the opportunity to live independently in their own communities due to a striking weakening of the repression of the work force from colonial powers. The abandoned, ‘ownerless’ estates would be largely taken over, and effectively occupied, by their keepers: the former enslaved, freed, or runaway population in Alcântara. However, despite the presence of, and effective land possession by, the local population over several decades, *sesmeiros* would endeavour to maintain the formal right of possession throughout the Imperial period, as land possession was the only way one was allowed to vote and participate in politics (Holston 2008).

State incentives aiming at boosting sugarcane production in Maranhão, by improving the process with technological innovations, gave *sesmeiros* a good reason to go back to their landholdings in Alcântara and try their luck in that new endeavour. By the end of 1850 small sugarcane mills had been built in Alcântara and were concentrated in the parish of São Matias. By that time however, *quilombo* communities –formed usually (but not exclusively) in the vicinities of the abandoned local *fazendas*– were so widespread and well established, that it would become a real challenge for the imperial administration to tackle.

Quilombos and *mocambos* had proliferated during the decades of the economic decay and were found scattered in great numbers across the forests of Alcântara. In the long years of virtual absence of seigneurial control over Alcântara's mainland, the formerly enslaved population found fecund ground for the creation and organisation of their communities in a relatively free and unconstrained way.

Sesmeiros (eventually also called *lavradores*) and their associates would soon realise that 'slaves' were indeed a scarce resource in mid-19th century Alcântara. Most Africans and their descendants lived in rural settlements that colonists found increasingly difficult to reach. Furthermore, the combining effects of the economic crisis and the pressure exercised by the United Kingdom for the end of the slave trade, rendered the introduction of new forced labour ever more complicated (Hawthorne 2010, Command Papers 1845). By the end of 1850, the slave trade would be officially banned and only clandestine ports would supply merchants with new enslaved labour force from other parts of the country and/or Africa. To gather the slave labour force needed for the initiation of the sugarcane industry in Alcântara, meant that workers needed to be retrieved from those rural communities.

Desperate to find a workforce for their new *fazendas*, *lavradores* launched an extended manhunt all across the mainland, with the help of private militia (*capitães-do-mato*) and police forces. During that time several *mocambos* were fiercely attacked and often destroyed.

The state Law n. 236 of 20 August 1847 brought the creation of sugarcane mills under government policy. The law was created under President of the Province Joaquim Franco de Sá, son of the *sesmeiro* Romualdo Franco de Sá and relative of Antônio Pedro da Costa Ferreira who also governed the Province in 1834-5 and instituted the rural police force. Unsurprisingly, all of them had property titles in Alcântara (Almeida 2006: 108, 124, 130). Arguably, therefore, the law was created to comply with the interests of landowners and assist the work of police forces in attacking and dismantling *quilombo* settlements (*aquilombamentos*).⁵⁷ At that moment of severe workforce scarcity, the state definition of *quilombo* was revised: from group settlements to ‘any type of union of more than two slaves’ (Almeida 2006: 131).

Despite such efforts, the creation of a sugarcane industry in Alcântara failed to yield the desired profits. The small –both in size and number (13 in total)– sugarcane mills in Alcântara did not manage to compete with the large and industrialised mills of the North-eastern Brazilian coast and from the end of 1860s would go bankrupt. An official communication to the Commandant-general informing him about the state of ‘the residents of Alcântara, who declare only having enough cattle for the maintenance of their slaves’ (RDHEM, Vol II: 1348 and 1823), is revealing of the impoverished financial conditions in which the White local elite found itself. The new *fazendas* would be added to the older abandoned ones and their legal occupiers would soon flee, once again, in search of more lucrative business.

For the second time in Alcântara’s history, the owners, or *brancos* (literally the ‘Whites’) as they are referred to by the local rural population, left their properties and the non-White

⁵⁷ One might even dare to say that this approach to legislation is not much unlike what is currently happening in the country (see discussion in the Introduction).

population continued their lives as free peasants in their own communities, in a nearly uninhibited way.

The consolidation of a free Black peasantry in Alcântara

As seen so far, the disintegration of the cotton *fazendas* was followed by a period in which *quilombos* and *mocambos* in Alcântara, that already existed (usually intermittently) throughout the second half of the 18th century, proliferated. State authorities responded by launching violent attacks aimed at their extinction. The combat against runaways and *quilombo* communities especially intensified as a result of the initiatives to resuscitate Alcântara's plantation economy (with sugarcane *fazendas*). However, attempts for the suppression of *quilombos* were largely unsuccessful.

There are certainly many elements that contributed to this, but three appear to have been more influential, as we shall see in a moment: The first is the depths of recession in Alcântara after the decline of the cotton industry. On the one hand, this was propitious to escapes and the rapid growth of *quilombos* due to lack of need for slave labour force in the *fazendas* and the abandonment of estates. On the other, it caused state mechanisms to become inefficient due to lack of funds. The second is the outbreak of the Balaiada rebellion (1838-1841) in Maranhão.⁵⁸ It concentrated provincial police and military forces in the rebel areas, significantly reducing the police presence in the rest of Maranhão. The third, and perhaps most important, is the perseverance of *quilombolas* whose communities had grown in size and numbers and who were often able to organise their strategies of defence and attack. In what follows, I will examine the latter in relation to the elements outlined above –i.e. the

⁵⁸ In 1821, the Captaincy of Maranhão became Province of Maranhão.

shortcomings of plantation projects, the inefficiency of repressive state apparatuses and the influence of larger events on Alcântara.

Among the first mentions of enslaved runaways in Alcântara is an 1804 police report demanding the public punishment of fugitives when captured (RDHEM, Vol I: 388). From that point onwards, police reports on continuous escapes (*fugas*) and *quilombo* formations (*aquilombamentos*) appear to have been piling on the desks of state bureaucrats, as Maranhão's State Archives still preserve a long series of correspondence received by the government of Maranhão from various local state authorities based in Alcântara and nearby municipalities.⁵⁹ Reports and communications about insurgencies of enslaved people (RDHEM, Vol I: 402 from 1811, 896 from 1829), runaways stealing horses and raiding *fazendas* (RDHEM, Vol I: 417 from 1812), urgent calls for the recruitment of slave hunters for the immediate capture of enslaved fugitives and the destruction of *mocambos* (see, e.g., RDHEM, Vol I: 481), would only proliferate throughout the 19th century and until the official abolition of slavery in 1888.

The economic crisis faced by the municipality had a major impact on available resources and the coordination of those already in hand. Municipal and state authorities' ill-equipped mechanisms for the maintenance of state order, together with drastic expenditure cuts, are evident in reports and communications between authorities. A prison breakout in 1845 is a case in point. In a relevant account, the lack of oil for the illumination of the prison is pointed out as the reason why five prisoners managed to make a hole in the wall and escape. The same account mentions the general poor state in which the prison was found at the time (RDHEM, Vol II: 2341, from 12 February 1845). The condition of Alcântara's prison in the

⁵⁹ Index: Collection of documents for the history of slavery in Maranhão (*Repertório de documentos para a história da escravidão no Maranhão* – RDHEM), Vols. I and II; Public Archives of the State of Maranhão (APEM). See indicatively: n.1288, 2 October 1819, Cx. 0060, bundle 00338. In Archive 1 – Secretary of the Government (1728-1914), Series 5: Correspondence received from different authorities of the government of Maranhão (1790-1914); Subseries 1: Municipal Chambers (1790-1840).

first half of the 19th century mirrors the general condition of municipal and state institutions at the time, having a direct influence on the combat of escapes, revolts, and the formation and growth of effectively free peasant communities in the mainland.

Alcântara's 'golden era' –i.e. the years of cotton production and the short-lived sugarcane industry– did not last for more than seventy years overall. The disintegration of the cotton estates took place between 1778 and 1819 and that of the sugarcane mills between 1870 and 1882 (Almeida 2006: 82). The confiscation of all property belonging to religious orders started in 1758 and was practically concluded in 1821. When fleeing Alcântara in search of more profitable places, the Whites did not only leave their estates behind, but also their slave labour force, an integral part of pre-abolition 'properties' in the area. By doing so, they were also escaping their accumulated debts (from previous 'slave' purchases, among other reasons). Colonists in great debt, and in need of capital for their next investments, tried to sell any part of the equipment of the premises of their *fazendas* showing no intention to ever go back. Unlike other regions, where it was common for 'slave owners' to move together with their work force, former enslaved people in Alcântara stayed, and continued to live, in the abandoned *fazendas* which fell into disuse and quickly transformed into ruins.

With the combined effects of the economic crisis and the poor management of available municipal and state resources, authorities were hardly able to maintain control in the municipal seat, let alone the vast areas of Alcântara's interior where *quilombos* were constantly increasing in size and number. Reports of the inability of armed forces to capture runaways, due to a severe lack of slave hunters and soldiers in the municipality, make their appearance in the early 1830s.⁶⁰ Many of the soldiers deserted and joined those living in the *quilombos*. In Maranhão's state archives there are several reports of soldiers joining

⁶⁰ See RDHEM, Vol I: 1672 and 1673 of year 1832.

mocambos in the south, as well as one report on the arrest of a former soldier who had deserted the state armed forces and joined enslaved fugitives in the same area (RDHEM, Vol I: 1345; 31 May 1823). By 1840 it had become nearly impossible for state authorities to recruit soldiers for the persecution of runaways and other *quilombolas*. The impasse reached by the armed forces in the recruitment of soldiers is partly explained due to the great delays many had experienced in receiving their payments, and many did not receive any payments at all.

The Balaiada rebellion (1838-1841), a massive popular uprising that briefly united freed and enslaved, Whites and non-Whites, against Maranhão's elite, was another variable that contributed to the continuation of Alcântara's *quilombos*.⁶¹ The Balaiada was a revolt against the concentration of wealth produced in the region in the hands of very few, leaving the majority of Maranhão's population destitute. Rebels comprised a very diverse crowd: from impoverished White peasants to enslaved people. Despite their many differences (the Balaiada was never conceived of as a unified rebellion by the insurgents) what united them was their shared indignation at their place in society, which –despite the end of colonialism– was perpetuated by elitist and exclusionist structures. With the enslaved and Afro-descendant population being in a more deplorable condition, occupying the least desirable social ranks, the Balaiada instigated mass enslaved workers' escapes across the province leading to the formation of many *quilombos*.

Cosme Bento das Chagas, a self-emancipated enslaved man and one of the leading figures of the Balaiada, is said to have led three thousand enslaved people out of their captivity (Tshombe 2012). To be sure, this was not an isolated phenomenon. There are other examples of mass peasant insurgencies in pre-abolitionist Brazil, especially in the North and North-

⁶¹ There is a rich literature on the Balaiada rebellion. See indicatively: SMDDH and ACONERUQ (1998), Santos (1983), Janotti (2005), Assunção (1998, 1999).

east, such as the Cabanada (see, e.g., Carvalho 2012), and the Cabanagem (see, e.g., Ricci 2012, Machado 2016, Mota and Barroso 2017). Flávio dos Santos Gomes (2015) notes that Clovis Moura was the first to draw attention to the connections between peasant revolts in the Regency era⁶² and the proliferation of *quilombos*.

Peasants and urban poor joined the Balaiada in great numbers. However, the rebellion did not directly affect Alcântara, nor is there any indication of its *quilombola* population joining the insurgents. Perhaps Alcântara's *quilombolas*, having organised their lives as free peasants in their ever-growing communities, had more at stake and were not equally impelled to abandon their lands and community life and join the uprisings. After all, they already had what the rebels were asking for: a free and decent life. Nevertheless, the Balaiada *did* have indirect repercussions on the *quilombos* of Alcântara since attempts to control and hinder the formation and expansion of *quilombos*, were significantly curbed with the outbreak of the rebellion. The provincial state, previously engaged in attacking *quilombos*, concentrated its armed forces in brutally tackling the uprisings. Hence, the Balaiada rebellion considerably, if indirectly, helped Alcântara's *quilombolas* maintain their control over land, which they managed to keep until the official abolition of slavery.

Even after the steep decline of the cotton trade, the number of Africans disembarking in the ports of Maranhão would continue to increase in the first quarter of the 19th century.

However, there were barely any plantations to absorb the incoming slave labour. With a growing number of Africans and Afro-descendants (born in Brazil inside, or outside, *quilombos*) and a shrinking number of White colonists in Alcântara (most of them seeking new commercial and/or political interests in urban centres or other provinces), Alcântara's Black rural peasants were able to resist numerous attacks and preserve their freedom.

⁶² The Regency era (1831-1840) was an interval period during the Imperial era. For social movements and uprisings during this period, see Reinhart (1960), Andrade (1989), Morel (2003).

The Black rural communities' historical trajectory narrates the economic and political history of the region and evidently explains why Alcântara today is the municipality with the largest number of *quilombo* communities in Brazil (Gomes 2015).

Considering the history of the formation of Alcântara's *quilombos*, we observe the emergence of an under-explored 'anti-narrative'. In discussions with the local population about Alcântara's abandoned crop *fazendas*, Linhares (1999) and Almeida (2006: 72) observed that people would frequently use the term 'escape' (*fuga*) to describe the phenomenon of the White landlords abandoning their *fazendas* and never returning to their lands. Unlike common narratives of enslaved runaways, in Alcântara we see that it was the seigneurial White elite that 'ran away' and the formerly enslaved people who stayed. By narrating the 'White escape', Alcântara's villagers do not only tell their *quilombola* history but they also place emphasis on the fact that it was the White owners who 'ran away', not their ancestors. In other words, it was not the Black but the White 'fugitives' that shaped Alcântara's *quilombo* formation.

Quilombolas in Alcântara had been able to maintain a significant degree of sovereignty over the lands in which they formed and sustained their communities for so long, that they effectively became the 'owners' of the land (Filho and Andrade 2012, Almeida 2008b, Sá 2007) –even if they were not (and still are not) in possession of legal proof of their land possession. Their ability to remain free in the lands of Alcântara for many generations has allowed them to establish deep-rooted notions of belonging in the lands they collectively inhabit and use. It is hence important to underline, as rural residents in Alcântara often remind us, that throughout the 19th century many people born in the *quilombos* never experienced slavery and had always lived free (despite the existence of the institution of slavery).

In my conversations with residents in Itamatatuiua, and throughout the months I spent living in the community, there was only a handful of mentions of slavery. And these would usually be in response to my curiosity about the ‘histories and memories of slavery’ only to stumble across, again and again, the ‘emptiness’ of memories Borges alluded to in when discussing the history of slavery in Alcântara (see p. 33). There were no ‘memories’ of slavery, nor histories passed down from previous generations. There were no stories, only emptiness.

Soon I realised that this was not due to some sort of reluctance of residents to discuss a scarring past, but there was an obvious reason (previously unclear to me): Itamatatuiua, as well as most of Alcântara’s *quilombos*, was formed as a free community. Slavery was simply absent from the lived experiences of the generations that laid the foundation of Itamatatuiua. This is the reason why stories ‘about slavery’ resound through distant narratives residents themselves have learned about the past in pretty much the same way I have: from non-direct narratives, history books, and numerous other sources one can learn about the existence of slavery.

‘I never knew anyone who had been a slave’, said Dona Colô when I asked her about slavery and the *quilombos*. Originally from Itamatatuiua, Colô, in her early 80s, currently resides in Bequimão. ‘I only know of some stories the old people used to tell every once in a while. Few stories really. They said there was this old woman; when the news of the abolition arrived, she got so emotional that threw away the seeds she was grinding and started dancing ecstatically. Funny you’re asking. It’s the first time I see a White person being interested in the lives of Black people’, continued Dona Colô.

The former, freed, and self-emancipated slaves who occupied the estates of the former cotton, rice, and sugarcane *fazendas*, as well as those of the Catholic religious orders, defied the monoculture production imposed by colonial mercantile economy and developed a small-scale agricultural economy of subsistence and trade. As Almeida (2004, 2006, 2008a)

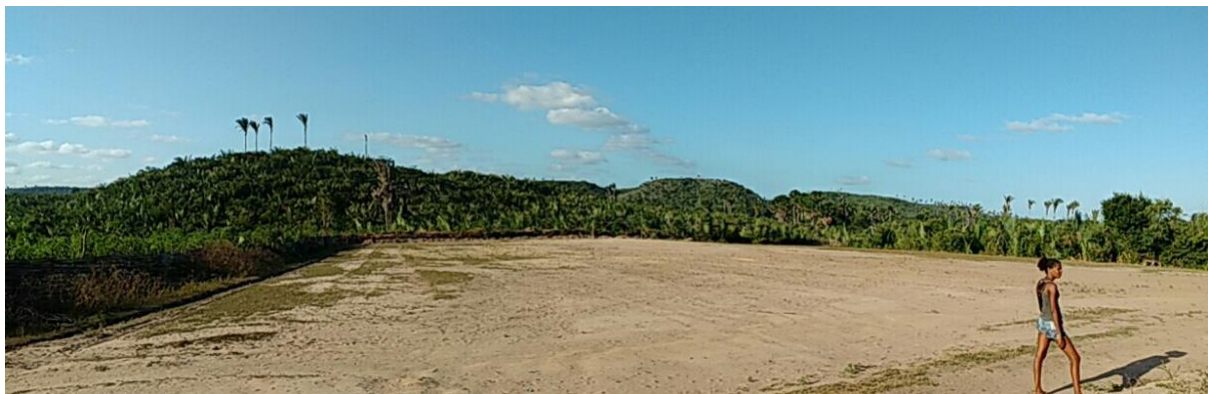
highlights, unlike most of the North-eastern region in Brazil, in Alcântara, with the disintegration of the *fazendas*, a new economic system prevailed: a peasant economy based on the production of family units that comprised the region's *quilombos*. This phenomenon took place across the interior of Alcântara from the late-18th century onwards and gave shape to its contemporary rural Black peasantry. Free labour in Alcântara, in this sense, was carved out of the negation of colonial slave economy (Almeida 2006: 59). And free peasantry was born out of the extinction of the local *fazendas* and on the very antipode of their social and economic organisation.

This economic system would essentially be maintained throughout the 19th and for most of the 20th century to this day. Alcântara (and Maranhão, in general) never really overcame the economic crisis. The general lack of interest for investments in the area further facilitated the continuation of *quilombos* in the interior. It was largely only with the Alcântara Launch Centre (CLA) that Alcântara's *quilombolas* faced a major threat to their sovereignty over land. Before then, *quilombolas* had faced only relatively minor threats –mainly by trespassers and local landowners who sometimes bought or forcibly occupied land within the communities' territories.

We hence begin to see that slavery was far from being the dominant condition in the history of Alcântara's peasantry, but rather the exception which was realised by interrupted periods of coercive slave labour followed by long breaks of relative freedom. In light of this, we can understand why the *quilombolas* of Itamatatua and residents of other Black rural communities in Alcântara today do not refer to memories of slavery or captivity but their imaginaries of the past are rather constructed around memories of freedom, community life, and unity. Radically breaking with slavery as the single defining history of rural Black peasant communities, the *quilombolas* of Alcântara offer a counter-narrative to slavery. The history of *quilombo* formation in the area seems to have shaped the stories of *quilombolas* as

free and uninhibited people, consolidating a narrative of the ancestors being the true masters of the territories they inhabited.

Similar to other Alcântara communities, the people of Itamatatiua look back at histories and memories of their ancestors to get inspiration for their contemporary struggles, reinforcing a multifaceted collective identity as free and resisting people, united as *quilombolas* and an extended family. In what follows, I will explore some of the narratives that Itamatatiuenses privilege when discussing their establishment on the Saint's lands. I will also discuss some of the stories narrated by residents of the land of Santa Teresa that highlight the Saint's interventions in everyday life. It will be argued that their reproduction serves both as an indicator of the centrality of the trinity land-saint-people for the residents of Itamatatiua, as well as a form of subtle warning to those who disrespect one or other of the components of this trinity.



Picture 1: View of the lands of Santa Teresa⁶³

⁶³ All pictures are taken by the author, unless otherwise noted.

Itamatatua: A kinship/religious community

I think that this community never experienced slavery.

I think this is what the elders had been told about from the older ones. ...

My aunt was saying that this is how it was. And her mother was saying that this slavery existed; it existed. That many children (*filhos*) died in it, right? That they were working really hard during slavery. If you just look at these large stones we see in Alcântara; how many children must have died there. [My aunt] was saying that here [Itamatatua] was [property] of the Carmelites. There were the Carmelites here, and that since she remembered herself they were saying that these Carmelites had been here ...

Then time went by, it went by, I think they just went away.

Maria dos Santos, resident of Itamatatua

The over 50,000 hectares of Santa Teresa's land encompass approximately 40 *quilombos* with Itamatatua being the zone's symbolic and administrative centre. This area largely corresponds to the *fazenda* Tamatatiua, former property of Carmelites in Alcântara, dating back to 1745. Today, it remains property of the state of Maranhão while in the process of land registration as *quilombo* territory, by the INCRA. Despite several mentions of the existence of *quilombos* in the vicinities of the Carmelite *fazenda* in colonial archives,⁶⁴ tracing the exact period of foundation of the *quilombo* that is today Itamatatua is virtually impossible. However, since collective memory 'always supposes an authoritarian beginning' (Fernández Bravo 2008: 161), Itamatatua's foundation narratives place their own not at a specific point in time but at a specific event: a holy agreement between residents and their patron saint, Santa Teresa de Jesus.

According to those narratives, Santa Teresa invited the 'Black people of Itamatatua' to live on her lands and promised to protect them. In exchange, the people, who hence became the Saint's children, promised to revere her and take care of her land. In addition to such stories,

⁶⁴ As mostly found in the RDHEM, 1754-1840 (Vol. I) and 1818-1852 (Vol. II). See below for some examples.

archives, and some residents, point to the (organic) acquisition of land by former enslaved people of the *fazenda*, who were later joined by other individuals and families, eventually forming the communities that now comprise the lands of Santa Teresa. Indeed, the south of the municipal area of Alcântara (where the *fazenda* Tamatatiua and nearby *quilombos* were located) appears to have been a stronghold for runaways in the region. Itamatatiua, or rather the Carmelite *fazenda* Tamatatiua, together with the Carmelite convent in Alcântara, make recurrent appearances in police reports, state, and provincial communications. The reason for their frequent mentions was the existence of a large *mocambo* (another word for *quilombo*) in the vicinities of the *fazenda*.

Starting in November 1835, official communication between military, religious, and political parties becomes frequent in the following months and years, revealing the numerous –largely unsuccessful– attempts to attack and dismantle the *mocambo* that existed near the *fazenda* Tamatatiua. Urging for an armed police force raid, and the further supply of soldiers, friars, the bishop, the mayor, and military officers in Alcântara, seemed especially preoccupied with the particular *quilombo*.⁶⁵ In an 1835 letter, the President of the Province of Maranhão ordered the Justice of the Peace of the district of Tubarão (currently a neighbouring *quilombo* of Itamatatiua and part of the Saint’s land) to take all actions in order to ‘end with the state of disobedience and revolt in which the slaves of the *fazenda* of Tamatatiua, belonging to the Convent of Carmo of the Vila of Alcântara, are found’ (23 November 1835, RDHEM, Vol I: 1016). The President also recommended the immediate confiscation of ‘all arms found in the control of the above-mentioned slaves’ (ibid.).

⁶⁵ See communications sent to the prior of the convent of Carmo in Alcântara (RDHEM, Vol II: 925), the Bishop (RDHEM, Vol II: 1047), and the Justice of the Peace (*Juiz de Paz*) (RDHEM, Vol II: 988 and 999), regarding escapes from the convent of Carmo and the Carmelite *fazenda* and urgent calls for the immediate capture of *quilombolas* near the *fazenda*.

The empowerment and growth of *quilombos* in the south of Alcântara continued in the following decades. Measures taken by police forces to attack and destroy such communities were increasingly fruitless especially after the widespread armament of *quilombolas* who frequently attacked and disarmed the police forces sent against them.⁶⁶ There was a growing number of armed fugitives who started attacking and killing their persecutors. Reports from São Bento warned Alcântara's authorities about 'fugitive slaves roaming the area at night armed' (1832-1835, RDHEM Vol I: 1670 and 1732). It is worth noting the persistence of these phenomena, as the reports cover a period of four years. It was not until 1853, however, that the town hall in Alcântara took measures against the commerce of fire guns and 'other war articles found with Black *quilombolas* in the municipality' (RDHEM, Vol II: 2325), revealing both the perseverance of *quilombola* resistance and the inefficiency of municipal authorities to tackle such phenomena. There are no indications, in the archives or oral memories, that the *quilombo* adjacent to the Carmelite *fazenda* Tamatatiua was ever severely attacked or destroyed.

In 1835 the Carmelite Order in Alcântara, which 'no longer effectively controlled its *fazendas*, all of them dotted with villages, donated its goods to the government of the Province of Maranhão' (Almeida 2006: 78). Despite the donation however (registered in the Annals of the Legislative Assembly of Maranhão), friar Caetano de Santa Rita Serejo, who was making an inventory of the properties of different religious orders in Alcântara in 1868 (33 years after the donation), included the *fazenda* Tamatatuba (Itamatatiua), and '160 slaves', which he registered as property of the Carmelite Order (ibid. see also Pacheco 1969).

The apparent contradiction becomes clear when one takes into consideration the general disorder in which land registries were found in Maranhão and Brazil. Since I could not get

⁶⁶ See, e.g., an 1849 report illustrating the state of despair in which police forces were found in Alcântara due to continuous persecution and disarmament (RDHEM, Vol II: 1908).

hold of the above-mentioned archival sources, I reached out to Alcântara's major anthropological 'authority', Alfredo Wagner Berno de Almeida, who has been working in the region for more than 30 years. It turns out the contradiction was simply the result of bureaucratic chaos. Until 1822, all land registers were being issued by the Royal House in Portugal. From 1822 onwards, Brazil remained with no land registries until the introduction, in 1850, of a new land legislation (*Lei das Terras*). As Almeida explained to me, given that the 1835 donation 'was not accompanied by documents proving ownership', after 1850 all religious orders tried to legally reclaim their former properties (November 2016, personal communication). In light of this, therefore, the 1868 registration was but an attempt by the Catholic Christian orders to settle pending, or non-formalised, land issues with the state government.

Besides the religious orders that, in many cases, attempted to claim ownership of lands they had purportedly donated to the state decades earlier, *sesmeiros* too wanted to legally register their lands even if they had no effective control over them and *quilombos* had been formed in them (as seen already).

The Order's complete lack of control over the *fazenda* Tamatatiua is registered in the very inventory of friar Caetano, which explicitly mentions that the people at the time living in the *fazenda* (whom he registered as slaves) were cultivating the land and leading free lives. So distraught was he, by what he was witnessing, that he wrote that, despite them being 'insubordinate and immoral', they saw themselves as 'moral, content, and satisfied' (Almeida 2006: 78; citing Paula and Silva 1922: 468-9).

The stone of rights

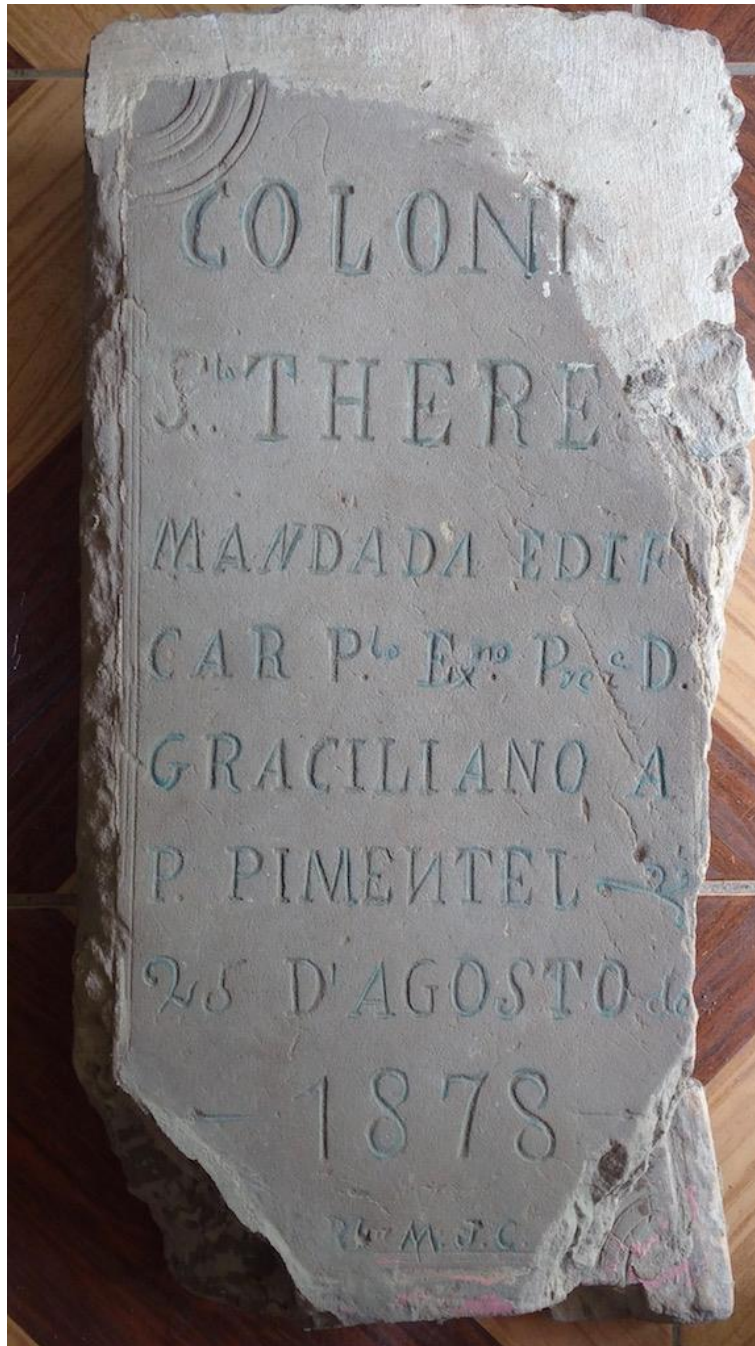
Out of this context of land insecurity and chaos with land registries emerges a large engraved stone, known locally simply as the ‘*pedra*’. This is a thick rectangular plaque which bears the following engraving: ‘Colony of Santa Theresa, requested to be erected by His Excellency the President D. Graciliano A. P. Pimentel – 25 of August 1878; ... M.J.C.’.⁶⁷

Engraved 10 years before the official abolition of slavery, the stone is generally regarded by Itamatatiuenses as tangible proof of their long-established presence on, and of the legitimacy of their collective rights to, the land of Santa Teresa.⁶⁸ According to Dona Heloísa, it was given directly to her family, whose members have ever since been the land custodians. Designated by Pereira Júnior (2012: 27-29) as ‘*pedra do direito*’, or stone of rights, the stone has indeed been used in the past as proof of land possession.

A locally well-known case of this has been the time, in the 1970s, when *quilombolas* took the large stone to Alcântara’s notary’s office in order to settle an issue of land grabbing. The leaders and other residents of Itamatatiua and nearby *quilombos*, that are part of the Saint’s territory, carried the stone to Alcântara in their attempt to show that they are the legitimate occupiers of the disputed area. The conflict was successfully resolved for the *quilombolas*, with the notary’s endorsement, who managed to recuperate the usurped land.

⁶⁷ The original reads: ‘*Colônia S^{ta} Theresa, Mandada edificar P.^{lo} Ex.^{mo} Pres^e D. Graciliano A. P. Pimentel – 25 D’ Agosto de 1878. [ca?]rga M.J.C.*’. See Picture 2.

⁶⁸ I am using ‘land(s) of Santa Teresa’ here as coterminous to ‘land(s) of Itamatatiua’ as this alternation is frequently employed by local residents. See discussion in Chapter Four of the different uses and designations of the terms land, territory, *sítio*, Itamatatiua, and Saint’s land(s).



Picture 2: The ‘stone of rights’ kept by the land custodian’s family.

Once prominently displayed in the community, after having been damaged around the edges (see picture above), the stone has been kept with the family of the land custodian and is not exhibited for no good reason. The last part is not clearly discernible but it seems possible that the letters c and a are missing, thus forming the word ‘*carga*’. If that is the case, *carga* also

has the meaning of ‘responsibility attributed to persons entrusted with objects of value’⁶⁹ in administrative law. In that case, the engraving at the bottom of the stone would assign to the person with the initials M.J.C. custody of the colony.

Large prints of pictures of the stone are found inside the church of Santa Teresa (Picture 3) and the Centre for Ceramic Production of Itamatatiua. But information about its origin is very limited among residents, even among members of the land custodian’s family. Most information about the stone focuses on the fact that it is important, and that it has been used in the past as proof of land ownership at the municipal notary’s office. Hence, most Itamatatiuenses acknowledge that this ‘very old stone’ has great value, and that they need to preserve it, at least until they get their land titles.



Picture 3: Interior of the church of Santa Teresa in Itamatatiua. Note a large print of the ‘stone of rights’ hanging on the wall (on the right).

My questions intending to find out more about where the stone came from, to whom was it handed to and by whom, for what purpose exactly, and so forth, were met with genuine uncertainty about the validity of such information by my interlocutors. ‘Even Dad didn’t

⁶⁹ See Michaelis On-Line dictionary of Portuguese language.

know really’, said Dona Heloísa when I was pushing for more details. ‘In the old days nobody paid attention to those things, you know. It was just an old stone. After they took it to the notary’s office and it solved that confusion there, then we kept it carefully because we know this stone shows that this land is ours’, she said to me.

On many occasions, when it came to historical knowledge about their community, many Itamatatiuenses encouraged me to ask Father Haroldo who ‘knows all about Itamatatiua’. Father Haroldo, a Catholic priest who lives in São Luís, first visited the *quilombo* in 1958 and has been returning ever since, forging strong friendships with many of the residents. When I asked him about the stone, he told me that he too did not know much and that, as far as he knew, Pimentel (the name engraved on the stone) was a Jesuit priest or missionary.

In a conversation with Neura, however, a young teacher from Itamatatiua who has graduated in History and lives in São Luís, she corroborated my own hypothesis that Pimentel was not clergy but a politician. Indeed, Graciliano Aristides do Prado Pimentel (1840-1899) was Governor of Maranhão from May to November of 1878, the year the stone was carved (see also, Almeida 2008a: 139, 195-196). One scenario Neura suggested, is that the Governor gave the *quilombolas* of Itamatatiua a tactile –albeit symbolic and not legally binding– proof that the former *fazenda* was under their custody; possibly with the intention to halt, or prevent future, land disputes.

All lands that were abandoned by their legal owners, or simply found without legal deeds – like those of Itamatatiua, were considered ‘unoccupied lands’ (*terras devolutas*). In 1891, 13 years after the stone was carved, the first Republican Constitution allocated the so-called unoccupied lands to the administration of state governments (Article 64).

The *quilombolas* of the land of Santa Teresa, however, *did* occupy that land and continued to live in their communities to this day. The effective control of the territory that belonged to the

Carmelite Order in Alcântara by the *quilombolas* is the reason the land occupied today by residents of Itamatatiua, and adjacent communities, is simultaneously characterized as ‘*terras de preto*’ (literally ‘Black people’s land’) and ‘*terras de Santa*’ (Saint’s land).

In the years of the military dictatorship, a 1969 state law that became known as the Sarney Law after the then governor of Maranhão, José Sarney, would leave the door open for massive land grabbing in the interior of the state. According to this law (*Lei de terra* n. 2.970), all lands that were not officially registered would be expropriated by the state and made available to the market. Lands like those of Santa Teresa, and in fact, all ‘traditionally occupied’ territories, including *terras de santo/a* and *terras de santíssimo* (lands formerly owned by religious orders) and *terras de preto* (common denomination for *quilombo* lands in Maranhão) were considered unoccupied lands. Unsurprisingly, following that law, cases of land grabbing took place in the lands of Santa Teresa.

In response to land grabbing, residents from the *quilombos* within the Saint’s territory united against *grileiros*. Itamatatiuenses take pride in those events, that culminate in the story of successful recuperation of usurped land mentioned above. Before bringing the stone to the local notary’s office, the *quilombolas* of the Saint’s land took the matter into their own hands and directly confronted the trespassers.

A group of men, armed mostly with courage and love for their lands (and any defence object at hand), invaded the disputed area and knocked down nearly 15 km of wire that was unlawfully delimiting an area within their territory. According to Almeida (2002b), that has been the ‘unique registered case of a recuperating process of usurped domains’, adding that these mobilizations configure a collective existence which has as a reference the so-called Saint’s land, a reference that constitutes one of the essential identity factors for those small-farmers (2002b: 229).

I asked Zé Roxo, a man in his late 60s, to tell me about the ‘fence teardown’ (*derriba*⁷⁰ *da cerca*), as this story is commonly known. This is what he told me:

When they opened this paved road here [MA-106], then they started [grabbing land]. Have you been to Bequimão? You know where that *fazenda*, or something like that, on the left-hand side when going from here to there is, right? Well, they were fencing out a lot of land over there and we decided to destroy all of that. So we went. I went. I did. Eurico was still alive. Lorentino, Tolentino, Severo, there was a bunch of people that came along, Chico...we all went...so many people did. Nobody from the Boca [da Salina] because they couldn’t, but there were so many people. The guy [the land grabber] was fencing out land over there, knew nothing about the whole situation, he was earning his money, right? When he turned and looked at us arriving, oh I remember very well, this guy started running...poor guy, right? [laughing] And we got there...so many of us...and we started...with machetes, sickles, rifles, everything. As we were approaching we were cutting his fence, we cut a lot, a lot of that fence. I went, I did, but man, I am not going anymore. If this was to happen today a lot of people would have died there. Because now people are no longer as they used to be, you know? I am sure that if this was to happen today there would be many deaths. But then we went, cutting fence and more fence. There was this guy. They used to say he was very rough, so rough and violent that we should watch out when approaching his house, that we should be careful because this guy could kill us. But when we invaded his house, this guy was shaking like a leaf. [pausing for a moment] You know what happened to that guy? It seems that he was trying to cobble a well and he died. He and his son fell inside that well. They said he and his son died...

The story of the *derriba* is often told today and remains a reference to unity and grassroots collective action that, according to some, should set the example for today. The unity among all the Saint’s children, that many residents suggest is lacking today, is for many the natural consequence of a growing number of people sharing the same territory. I will return to this point in the Chapter Four. Nevertheless, Itamatatiuenses’ love for their land and

⁷⁰ Local elocution of the verb *derrubar*.

determination to protect their communal lifestyle continues to gear them up to successfully tackle threats and persevere with their struggle for the acquisition of collective land titles.

The stone may have been used as tangible ‘proof of legitimacy’ of occupation, but it has been the residents’ own determination to stay and defend their lands that has permitted them to overcome problems and maintain sovereignty over the Saint’s territory. Some say this has only happened because they have never stopped receiving a helping hand from their patron saint and *true* owner of the lands. And there are countless stories that narrate exactly that: Santa Teresa’s direct intervention in order to protect her children and her territory from land predators. I am now turning to those stories.

Santa Teresa: A divine matriarch

A few months before the annual religious feast in honour of Santa Teresa, usually in July and August, the festive period officially opens. This marks the beginning of a long series of preparations for the *feita*. Among the most important ones are the outings of the *batuque* for the collection of donations for the *feita*, called *joia*. The *batuque* is a group that tours the communities within and outside the lands of Santa Teresa, collecting donations from the Saint’s devotees for the organisation of the annual feast. It is comprised by the Saint (in the form of a figurine), two *caixeiras* (adult women who play the drums of Santa Teresa), two *bandeiras* (young girls who carry the flags of the *feita*), one custodian of the Saint (carrying the statuette), one guide who has great knowledge of the area, the villages and people, and makes arrangements for overnight stays and meals, and one or two men who assist by carrying donations in livestock and food, firing petards to signal the *batuque*’s location (so that nearby villages know where they are and if they are approaching), and who also act as guardians of the *batuque* throughout the visits.

Forming the *batuque* is one of the many responsibilities of the people who organise the *feira* each year.⁷¹ Four *caixeiras* and four *bandeiras* (they alternate between themselves so that only a pair of each goes to a *joia* expedition), as well as the accompanying members of the *batuque*, are invited to join. The guardian of the Saint, who can only be a woman, is typically a different person in every outing.

In the outings for the collection of *joia*, that go on for months, the *batuque* physically maps out, and walks through, Santa Teresa's territory. From north to south and from east to west, the Saint, accompanied by her *batuque*, pays a visit to all communities within her lands.

In one of those outings I was accompanying, the sun was shedding its warmest rays on the perambulating crowd. It was lunch time and the *batuque* had stopped in the house of Dona Gracinha and Zé Rodrigues in Mocajitumba II, one of the communities attached to Itamatatua. They received the Saint and gave their *joia*, and then offered water, food, and hammocks to the *batuque* and all those accompanying it so they could wait for the hottest hours of the day to pass while getting some rest under the shadow. As we were sitting comfortably in the cool shade, Zé Rodrigues, visibly happy to have us all in his house and knowing I would love 'a story to jot down', started narrating one about the 'mighty' (*poderosa*) and 'miraculous' (*milagrosa*) Santa Teresa; two epithets commonly given to the Saint by her devotees.

There was this guy who came [outsider], it's been a while now, and he planted sugarcane. As quick as he came he also left [meaning the residents and the Saint encouraged him to do so]. But then he went: 'I like it there, there is so much land, why should I leave? That's not right!'. He went to São Bento and said: 'Oh man, I was so well in Itamatatua but there they have this Saint and we must do away with this Saint'. Then

⁷¹ As with all activities that have to do with the Saint and her territory, the main responsibility for the *feira* is in the hands of the land custodian. However, Neide (in recent years also with the help of Irene) may decide to assign the *feira* to people who are eager to organise it either as a form of payment of a promise to Santa Teresa, or because they want to have the honour to do so. Neide, of course, is always near at hand even when she, or a member of her family, is not organising the feast. But having someone else to carry the main work for its organisation is both a physical and financial respite for her, as she has often told me.

this guy from São Bento who was very vulgar said: ‘I will go there and do away with the Blacks of Itamatatiua’.

The story goes on. The men from São Bento resolved to go back to Itamatatiua to carry out their plan to ‘end with the Saint and the people’. They walked for a week until they got really tired and could not continue anymore. When they sat by a water source to freshen up and get some rest, a priest came by. The men were talking to each other: ‘Oh! I am so tired’, said one of them. ‘Why is that?’, asked the priest. ‘We couldn’t do away with the Blacks of Itamatatiua’, the man answered. ‘Well then this must be some miracle!’, said the priest. ‘A miracle?’, said the man and continued: ‘If this is a miracle then we must do away with this church!’. Zé Rodrigues arrived at the end of the story (my emphasis):

They finished drinking water and never again left that place. They died on that exact spot. And today they call that area ‘the priest’s sugarcane field’, which is to remind everyone to *let go of the things of others*.

As Zé Rodrigues was telling this story, we were joined by his wife, Dona Gracinha, Dona Irene, who was one of the *caixeiras* on that day’s outing, and Denise, Neide’s daughter, who was also accompanying the *batuque*. They all nodded their heads in agreement with the story Zé Rodrigues had just finished narrating. The time around the *feira* is propitious for story-telling, and the women sitting around seemed keen to partake. ‘My father always used to say: “People, Santa Teresa is alive!”. There are people who say, ah Saints don’t exist and I don’t know what, but I believe [in them] very, very, very much. I say, look, for me things happen...they [prayers] come true. Santa Teresa is very miraculous’, said Dona Irene. The group gathered agreed and some said that Santa Teresa is feared and respected and one should not try to interfere with her in ways that she would not approve of. Zé Rodrigues, in a convivial mood, told yet another story that exemplified this belief:

Pontaense⁷² was cutting wood over there, on the other side of the river that comes here from São Bento; a salt water inlet, in the bay. He was *crente*⁷³ [at the time]. We were there fishing and we wanted to be back by the 6 [of October]. And he says: 'It's not *Santa* man, it's Teresa. Teresa is just a common name'. Right at that moment he was holding an axe cutting the edge of a trunk. He made one move and ah! he cut his foot open. Then he went: 'Oh man, it's not Teresa, it's *Santa* Teresa!'. The other guy said: 'Now there's nothing you can do; she's already cut you. That was her punishment to you'. 'Oh man, I will stop being a *crente* and unfollow their disgraceful rules'⁷⁴, he said then. 'I will stop being [a *crente*] and drink cachaça and beer and eat fish with her'. Then he jumped into our boat: 'Let's go! Let's go to the hospital!'. He left the [Evangelical] church and never again did he call her Teresa.

Stories like this one are countless: about the arrogant man who 'wanted to show' that Santa Teresa was neither alive nor owned land but fell off the boat on his way to Itamatatuiua and his body was never found; or the aspiring thief who confessed not being able to overcome an invisible barrier that prevented him from getting anywhere near the church despite his willingness to enter and steal the Saint's figurine, and so forth. What all of them have in common is a narrative about arrogant and disrespectful people, usually 'outsiders' and non-natives of the Saint's lands, who typically threaten to trespass on the land of Itamatatuiua, or discriminate against the 'Blacks of the Saint'. Consciously breaching the customary law dictated by Santa Teresa, wrongdoers, according to these accounts, have found themselves in dreadful situations as a result of the Saint's intervention aimed at protecting her territory and her children.

There is no doubt that in these accounts the Saint has an active role in everything that happens in her territory; she intervenes when sees fit and physically protects her devotees and punishes offenders. From biblical perceptions about the divine ownership of land (Kay and

⁷² The second city councillor from Itamatatuiua (see discussion in Chapter Three).

⁷³ Common epithet given to Evangelical Christians.

⁷⁴ The original reads: '*vou sair da lei de crente, essa lei de desgraça*'.

Brown 1985) to spiritual understandings of the non-human environment as alive (Muir 2011), land and the surrounding environment has commonly been endowed with agency, often by non-worldly entities. If we accept that an ‘actor’ is not only someone or something that performs an action but also ‘the moving target of a vast array of entities swarming towards it’ (Latour 2005: 46) then Santa Teresa is certainly one. Indeed, some residents have even had personal encounters with the Saint and argue that they have seen her (as a physical entity) in different parts of the *sítio* (centre of Itamatatiua where the church is located) and beyond.

In all these accounts, Santa Teresa is portrayed by residents as having similar physical traits: pale white skin colour, blue eyes, and long blond hair. ‘My white one’ (*minha branca*) is how most devotees used to call her in the past, though less so nowadays. For so many of them, Santa Teresa is not just any Catholic saint but one who lives and walks among them and actively protects them from harm, a White matriarch of a Black nation. In the words of Pereira Junior: ‘the Saint is alive, and frequently walks along the boundaries of her lands, defending them from invaders and personally protecting the people’ (2011: 95). Such stories, that circulate widely well beyond the limits of the Saint’s lands, demonstrate both the vitality of Santa Teresa and her willingness to protect her children at any cost. The circulation of a plethora of such stories reproduced by young and old, contribute to the dissemination and crystallisation of knowledge of the qualities and power of Itamatatiua’s patron saint.

These stories do not simply narrate the special relationship the *quilombolas* of Itamatatiua have with their patron saint but, most importantly, as Zé Rodrigues emphasized in his story, aim at reminding everyone ‘to let go of the things of others’ –i.e. the lands of Santa Teresa and, consequently, of her heirs: the people of Itamatatiua. The stories create a sense of the Saint’s ubiquitous presence everywhere across her territory. Something that is also reinforced by residents’ accounts about physical encounters with the Saint (inside the church, in the fields, by the water spring, and so on).

The same stories also teach a thing or two about how one is expected to live in those lands if they want to be allowed to do so. The right way to live in the lands of Santa Teresa, *with* her and her children, is to be humble, respectful of her rules and her people. As Zé Rodrigues explained to me: ‘You have to approach [Santa Teresa] and talk to her. In that case, you will be fine. You may even get rich [in her land]. But if you start saying “I am the king, Santa Teresa isn’t a Saint”, then no...’.

Having personally experienced the Saint’s presence is not a precondition for having faith in her existence. Indeed, more often than not, Santa Teresa’s divine interventions happen without anyone witnessing her apparition. ‘Proof’ of the Saint’s existence seems to lie instead in the personal spiritual relationship between a devotee and the Saint, and it is tangibly manifested in the fulfilment of wishes.

I once asked Alessiane, a high-school teacher from Itamatatua and one of the people in charge of catechism in the community, if she believed the Saint is alive. She laughed discreetly trying to divert the slight discomfort caused by my straightforward question and said (my emphasis):

Well ... they tell many stories, right? Sometimes there are people who doubt and say ‘aah no, she isn’t [alive]’ ... others come here, they find the *festa* so nice, they go close to the altar and say ‘I don’t want to leave this place’. Once there was this guy who came, found it so beautiful and interesting he said he no longer wanted to leave, he wanted to stay here forever. So, he approached the altar and asked her [Santa Teresa to stay]. When the *festa* ended, before leaving he died...[laughing at my reaction] it happened, it did! He never left. They buried him right here. Everyone heard him saying that [he no longer wanted to leave].

Then there are also other cases...sometimes the person doubts ... this issue of not having [strong] faith, you know? So, they ask for something and then suddenly it happens. There are also people who, you know, say bad things when they go to the church and so on, and then, all of a sudden, they fall, they break a leg...in the same week, you understand? This is why they [people] believe, and they say she is alive. So, we believe in these things.

Sometimes we are *afraid to doubt*, you know? Because there were people who doubted ... *they doubted and then something happened*.

Whether one wholeheartedly believes in those stories, or ends up believing out of fear of doubting, as Alessiane pointed out, the great diffusion and popular reproduction of these stories about Santa Teresa's divine intervention powerfully reinforce Itamatatiua's foundation narratives. They remind and inform everyone of the special relationship between the Saint and the *quilombolas*, based on their pact to live freely on the Saint's territory under her protection in exchange for their devotion and taking care of her lands.

Such stories, hence, not only ward off outsiders from the lands of Santa Teresa but also serve as a reminder of the children's obligations to the shared territory and the patron saint for all Catholic residents. By inducing a subtle sense of awe and fear even to those who may otherwise question the existence of the Saint, these stories ultimately create a cloak of protection above the Saint's land. Anyone who breaches her rules knows that he challenges not (just) the residents but the Saint herself.

Going back to Zé Roxo's story about the tearing down of the fence, we now see that he did not imply that the *grileiro* was killed by residents. What he suggested instead was that his unlawful actions were punished by the '*Santa vingadora*' (the avenger saint), as Santa Teresa is also commonly known. As I have shown already, and will further explore in the following chapters, Santa Teresa is not known for taking actions that turn against her children, her territory, or herself, lightly. Hence, the sudden and unreasonably clumsy death of the land grabber and his son are attributed by many to the divine intervention of the Saint who wished to punish him by setting an example to be avoided.

Concluding the second part of the chapter, I suggest that stories that reinforce Santa Teresa's divine intervention ultimately: a) contribute to the consolidation of the kin relationship between Santa Teresa and her children, the Catholic *quilombolas* living on her land; b) set an example of how one is to approach the Saint and her children; and c) caution people about the potential consequences of transgression of land regulations and of discrimination against the *quilombolas* and/or their patron saint, as well as their religion, rituals, and customs.

Although, it is not explicit, nor is the case for all wrongdoers in the stories, in recent years, more often than not, it is implied that infractors are Evangelicals. As I will explore in the course of this thesis, contempt for Catholics and their rituals are commonly associated with Evangelicals as many, overtly or covertly, express their scorn for any religious expression that does not comply with their church's doctrine. For many Catholics, Evangelicals are blasphemous against saints, offend Santa Teresa and her children, illicitly appropriate her land, and knowingly discard the rules by which they live on those lands. Hence, a growing implication following from such stories about Santa Teresa's divine interventions is that 'disrespectful people', like Evangelicals, often get severely punished for their behaviour.

Conclusion

In the first part of the present chapter I examined the emergence of Alcântara's Black rural communities since the early days of Portuguese colonial presence in the region. It has been suggested that in order to better understand why Alcântara's *quilombos* share a particularly uncommon (compared to other regions in the country) narrative of free Black communities' formation decades before the abolition of slavery, we need to consider three main variables. First, the colonial project in Maranhão started nearly a century later than elsewhere in the Portuguese colony in the Americas. Colonial presence in Maranhão started in the mid-17th century, and the great majority of Africans were brought to Maranhão in the mid-18th century. Second, the work at the local plantations was greatly interrupted and mainly lasted for no longer than a few decades overall. Third, Brazil may have been the last country to abolish slavery in the Americas (officially abolished in 1888), but already long before that, the rural population in Alcântara was relatively free, physically and socially reproducing in their communities.

In the second part of the chapter I have explored Itamatatuiá's main foundation narratives and discussed why and in what ways they are privileged vis-à-vis the legitimacy of their collective land occupation. Finally, the divine intervention of Santa Teresa was discussed through some of the stories that widely circulate throughout her lands. It has been suggested that such stories aim at protecting the shared territory from intruders and instructing outsiders to respect and observe local land rules.

Chapter Three delves into current tensions over land between Alcântara's *quilombolas* and the Brazilian state (represented by the CLA). Forms of *quilombola* political organisation across the municipality will also be discussed.

Chapter 3. *Quilombola* land struggles in Alcântara

[looking at the map of Alcântara and discussing the zone disputed with the launch centre]

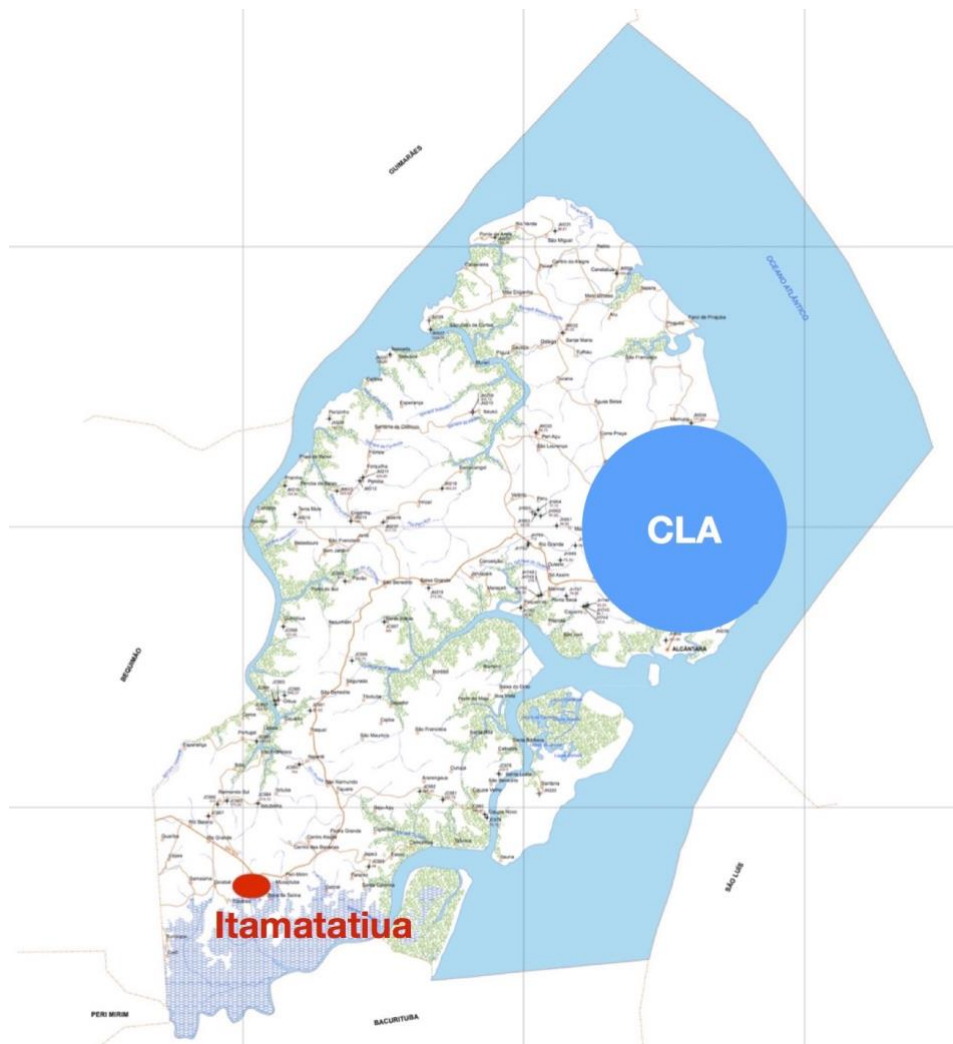
Itamatatua isn't part of this territory. It is right here, it is outside. Itamatatua is a territory, an area of a *fazenda* of the Order of Carmelites. In Alcântara we had four orders ... They had cattle, sugarcane fields, in other words, they had slaves. The Church always had slaves. It's somewhat contradictory, right? But the [Catholic] Church always had slaves. In 1993, when I started doing this work [raising awareness of *quilombola* land rights] I started from Itamatatua. Until 1993 they were known as the 'Blacks of Santa Teresa'. Santa Teresa d' Ávila. The patron saint...the owner of the lands. With the expulsion of the religious orders from Maranhão and Alcântara, the area of Santa Teresa –she has 57,000 hectares that cover a part of Alcântara and another that is today in the municipality of Bequimão– went to the people. The meadow is the division. You will see White people there and Black people here. In Bequimão many Whites, in Alcântara many Blacks. There is this division that is interesting.

The common use of land remains on this side.

On the other side, where there are more Whites, there is a different way of holding land. It is individual. 'I want my terrain, this is my terrain' ... there is no collectivity. This is the land reform of the White man of [the state of] Rio Grande do Sul. Over there, a man has 4 hectares and lives off these 4 hectares. We don't. Because this is linked to a society mounted more than 300 years ago, since Zumbi who creates a large *quilombo* territory where there existed a nation; the first Brazilian socialism is in the *quilombo*. The Black man gets organised in order to survive in the system. He runs away from the slaveholding system of oppression and creates his own far from it. He cuts the relations, depending on the moment. There are moments of coexistence, when it is important to be close to the White man, right? And there are moments that this is not happening. ...

You now go in one of these *quilombos* and if you don't speak things straight, things are going to get ugly (*o bicho pega*), you know? People are like 'No, this [land] here is ours, we are *quilombolas*, we have rights, this is ours', you know? In the past no my friend. In the past you'd get there, you'd do as you pleased (*deitava e rolava*) and nobody would say anything because nobody knew. Knowledge. This is the word: knowledge. If I don't know myself, if I don't know my rights, if I don't know the society in which I live, if I don't know this mechanism, if I don't know the instruments I can have access to, I can do nothing. I cannot change this society all on my own. It is we together who need to change things.

Sérvulo Borges,
syndicalist and political activist



Map 6: Itamatatuiua and the CLA.

The blue circle approximately indicates the area actively occupied by the latter.
(source: IBGE)

This chapter delves into *Quilombola* political organisation in Itamatatuiua and Alcântara in general. It seeks to illustrate the conditions of possibility for the political mobilisation across the *quilombos* of the peninsula and the main reasons their struggle is ongoing. The relation between discourses of ‘decay’ versus ‘apogee’, as exemplified in contemporary views on the future of Alcântara, is also discussed in relation to ‘official’ narratives of the town’s heritage and history. After discussing political organisation and the emergence of *Quilombola* social movements in the municipality, the focus of this chapter shifts to Itamatatuiua and the community’s own political mobilisation through formal channels of representation.

Decay and the *quilombolas*

The first Brazilian launch base, the *Centro de Lançamento da Barreira do Inferno*, was built in 1965 in Natal, state of Rio Grande do Norte. Due to Natal's urban development a future expansion of the launch base was rendered impossible. Therefore, the construction of a new launch base, somewhere close to the equator line but at a safe distance from urban centres, appeared necessary. The nearer to the equator satellites and spacecraft are launched, the better the advantage in fuel efficiency is. Brazil's northern states are great options for geostationary launches, with Amapá lying right on the equator. Alcântara, 2.18° south of the equator, is certainly not better situated than areas in Amapá for the construction of a launch base. Despite that, however, Alcântara was selected by the Air Force, and government planners at the time, for the construction of the new space port.

Indeed, it was portrayed, by those who put forward its selection, as the best possible location in the country for this purpose. Besides its near-equatorial ground site, among the main geo-strategic advantages Alcântara was considered to offer were: immediate access to the open sea, distance from urban centres and simultaneous vicinity to the state's capital, São Luís (located only 22km across the bay), and, very importantly, vast, 'uninhabited' rural areas –the so-called 'demographic void' I discussed in the introduction.

Given that neither were its rural areas uninhabited, nor was it closer to the equator than other areas in Brazil, journalists, academics, and a large part of local citizens, have suggested that choosing Alcântara for this project was more the result of political clientelism than of a fair technical/strategic decision. José Sarney, a powerful and influential politician and media owner from Maranhão (former state governor, senator, and President of Brazil), has been identified by critics as the main agent behind Alcântara's selection (see, also, Mitchell 2008: 83-84). In the years of the military dictatorship, when the project was conceived, José Sarney was allied to the regime, and was hence, according to his critics, able to pull strings with

government and military officials in order to bring the base to his home state.

Those who criticised Sarney's political shenanigans and exposed the faultiness of the 'demographic void' pretext, suggested that the existence of *quilombos* in Alcântara provided ideal grounds for the implementation of the project. The space port's planners did not foresee any complications with the communities' forced dislocation, precisely because of their precarious land situation. In the words of Yara Oliveira Braga (2011), an attorney-at-law who worked for several years at the CLA: 'it was the region's invisibility in the eyes of government institutions that resulted in the selection of Alcântara for the launch base due to the idea of the demographic void' (2011: 46).

Despite early criticisms and opposition to the construction of Brazil's space port in Alcântara, the military regime proceeded undisturbed with its plans. From 1979, when the (now extinct) Aeronautical Ministry formally communicated to Maranhão's state government its interest in using an area in Alcântara, to the expropriation for 'public use' of 52,000 ha. in 1980, and from the memorandum (*Protocolo de Cooperação*) signed between the Aeronautical Ministry and the state of Maranhão in 1982, to the Ministry's acceptance of a list of demands by the communities about to be relocated in 1983, the plans for the launch centre's construction moved quickly.

Expropriating an area of 620 km², the construction and opening of the Alcântara Launch Centre (CLA) displaced 312 households, from 23 village communities, which were allocated to 7 communities built by the federal government –the so-called *agrovilas*– in the years between 1986 and 1988. Most of them were forced to move from the coastal area, where their subsistence economy was based on fishing, to the mainland, where they had no, or very limited (requiring military permission), access to the sea (Oliveira Braga 2011, Mello 2008, Almeida 2006, Silberling 2003).

In 1994, the Alcântara Space Centre (CEA) opened. Unlike the CLA, which is a military base run by the Brazilian Air Force (FAB) and reserved for Brazilian government launches, the CEA is run by the civilian Brazilian Space Agency (AEB) and it is destined for commercial launches. Initially it was planned to operate from a separate launching base but strong opposition by residents and social movements' outrage, led to the operation of both from the same site, confirming residents' claims that the area already reserved for the CLA was more than enough to accommodate both.

Despite not running right through the equator line, the base is of great geostrategic interest to Brazil. Given that the Kourou Space Centre (KSC) in French Guiana, operated by France and the EU, is the only other space port situated close to the equator in South America (at 5.3° to the north), Alcântara's launch centre gives Brazil a geostationary advantage for national launches and a competitive advantage for commercial satellite launches in relation to the KSC. With the existence of the civilian CEA, therefore, the country can sign agreements for commercial satellite launches and make alliances with other countries.

The Alcântara Cyclone Space (2003-2015) was a joint Brazilian-Ukrainian project that aimed at the two countries' long-term cooperation in the use of the Ukrainian carrier rocket Cyclone-4 (Tsyklon-4). The agreement ended abruptly when Brazil pulled out of the deal in 2015. Plans for the space port's use by the US are being discussed at the moment of writing and it seems likely that the US will initiate launches in Alcântara in the coming years. In May 2017, the Temer government's Minister of Defense, Raul Jungmann, affirmed that the Brazilian government will grant permission for US launches from Alcântara.⁷⁵ He also declared that Israel, Russia, and France have shown interest in using the space port. In the

⁷⁵ See an article from one of the major news sources in Maranhão: <http://imirante.com/mobile/oestadoma/noticias/2017/05/31/estados-unidos-usarao-centro-de-lancamento-alcantara-para-lancar-foguetes-diz-ministro-da-defesa.shtml>, accessed on 4 November 2017.

same month, the CLA received a technical visit by delegates of the US Embassy in Brazil as well as a team of the United States Air Force.⁷⁶ In July 2017, demonstrations by various social movements took place outside the entrance to the CLA, protesting a potential use of the launch base by foreign countries.⁷⁷ Only a few months later, in October 2017, Michel Temer visited the CLA and discussed future plans with military officials at the base.

Temer's government has initiated negotiations for the use of the base by the US government with terms that would potentially violate national sovereignty laws.⁷⁸ In order for such an agreement to become effective, however, it would have to be ratified by the national congress. The previous similar agreement (Technology Safeguards Agreement), signed between Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Bill Clinton in 2000, was met with strong opposition, was never ratified, and was altogether discarded by former Brazilian President Lula in 2003.

In the eyes of those who supported the construction of a national space port in Alcântara, the CLA was an ambitious plan to modernise an area on the eastern Amazon frontier that had not seen 'progress' or 'development' since its 'golden era' (as discussed in the previous chapter). In other words, besides filling the 'demographic void', the CLA was also hoped to make up for what many militaries and other conservatives saw as Alcântara's 'backwardness' and 'decay'. It was roughly in those terms that Army General Sérgio Etchegoyen, head of the Brazilian Intelligence Agency, referred to the *quilombolas* of Alcântara who refuse to leave their communities for a future expansion of the base: 'Oh, I don't want to leave because this

⁷⁶ See the announcement on the AEB's website: <http://www.aeb.gov.br/cla-recebe-embaixada-e-forca-aerea-dos-estados-unido/>, accessed on 4 November 2017.

⁷⁷ See press coverage here: <https://racismoambiental.net.br/2017/07/25/movimentos-bloqueiam-entrada-da-base-de-lancamento-de-alcantara-no-maranhao/>, accessed on 4 November 2017.

⁷⁸ See: <https://www.cartacapital.com.br/politica/em-segredo-brasil-volta-a-negociar-base-de-alcantara-com-os-eua>, accessed on 4 November 2017. See also Sean Mitchell's interview on *brasilwire* where he discusses what is at stake for Brazil if an agreement with the US government is signed: <http://www.brasilwire.com/alcantara-spaceport/>, accessed on 4 November 2017.

is where my granny died’, he said ironically during a speech at the Rio Branco Institute in 2017. He further argued that the government should take ‘extreme measures’ in order to remove such ‘obstacles to the country’s progress’. During the same speech, he went on to suggest that behind *quilombola* resistance is the influence of foreign anthropologists who have manipulated the villagers. ‘It’s been 30 years that this [issue] is being discussed and they stay put. And if we don’t get to decide from the point of view of national interest, they will linger on’.⁷⁹

It is worth noting here the similarities of the ‘modernisation’ and ‘national interest’ discourse of the military with that of the ruralist front. The latter also declare that agribusiness will contribute to the country’s progress and break with an ‘old, archaic, model’ and will guarantee the creation of new jobs for the population, as the president of the FPA, Nilson Leitão, said after a recent meeting with Michel Temer.

But the discourse about development and decay in Alcântara transcends the conflicts with the CLA and is closely connected to institutional, or ‘official’, representation of the city’s history. Jerônimo de Viveiros, one of Maranhão’s most prominent historians, who has written specifically about Alcântara and its socio-political past, views the abolition of slavery as the final stroke that accelerated the city’s decay. ‘The 13th of May of 1888 completes the ruining of its [Alcântara’s] fortune’, he wrote in one of the most referenced works on Alcântara (Viveiros 1999: 100).

In an early work, called *Ideology of decay*, Almeida (2008a) argued that notions about the ‘tillage decay’, and the great recession that marked the 19th century, have transformed into a diffused ‘ideology’ that spread across the different social structures and defined narratives of

⁷⁹ See press coverage on *The Intercept Brasil*, here: <https://theintercept.com/2017/10/11/general-que-comanda-a-abin-fala-em-vazio-de-liderancas-e-elogia-feitos-da-ditadura/>, accessed on 4 November 2017.

the political and economic trajectory of Maranhão to this day. Caires (2012) points out that Alcântara as a ‘dead city’ (as, prominently, in Viveiros’s work) appears only in the eyes of those who do not (want to) see the ever-growing non-White free peasantry. According to Caires’s argument, such perspective coincides with that of those who generally see the Pombaline reforms (e.g. introduction of slaves, economic growth for the White colonial elite) as ‘development’ while they identify the end of the Companhia, the formation of free Black peasantry, and the abolition of slavery as ‘decay’. This narrative, having gained much popularity in official discourse, has created a sharp dichotomy between ‘apogee’ and ‘decadence’, between the ‘lost glory’ and the ‘vandalism and poverty of the present’ (Caires 2012: 156).

In a similar vein, in his analysis of the politics of inequality and changing perceptions and strategies vis-à-vis Alcântara’s space port and *quilombos*, Mitchell (2008) argues that the space base, as a modernising mega-project, initially aimed at incorporating and modernising Alcântara’s ‘backward’ population and society. Eventually, however, with the purpose of the base shifting to commercial uses by other countries –and not to a great national technological advancement, as it was initially expected– the discourse by militaries and politicians, and the expectations of many Alcantarenses, also shifted and the disparities between the base on the one hand, and the local population on the other, consolidated. One increasingly identified in opposition to the other.

Once an engine and index of Brazil’s push for techno-economic convergence with the First World, today the base is most often cast as a generator of profit. And while villagers were once incorporated into the project as modernising remnants of a disappearing Brazil, now they are cast as very modern subalterns, with an identity increasingly understood in ethno-racial terms.

Mitchell 2008: 6

Whose heritage? Alcântara's official narratives of heritage and history

As discussed in Chapter Two, Linhares (1999) and Almeida (2006) are among those who drew attention to the use of the term *fuga* (escape) by Alcântara's villagers when discussing the phenomenon of White landowners abandoning their *fazendas*. *Quilombolas* invert the common slavery narrative of the Black fugitive who runs off to hide and create a small community in the backwoods and show that this was *not* the defining element in Alcântara's history of *quilombo* formation. Unlike many other places in Brazil, in Alcântara, with the White colonial population having abandoned the region, the Black and indigenous populations were the silent but overwhelming majority; the sole and effective owners of the lands in the interior and the occupiers of the abandoned elite houses in the town.

Such accounts of history are obliterated when discussing heritage in Alcântara and the way it is being presented by the town's official registries of culture and history. In 1948, when the National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN) registered Alcântara as a national heritage site, the entire town became a 'living museum'. Owing this recognition to the preservation of a part of its colonial and imperial architecture, Alcântara is commonly advertised as a tourist destination where one can 'travel back in time'.⁸⁰ In this presentation, Alcântara's colonial past emerges in a purified way, where the 'barons' and the *fazendeiros* are the people who gave glory and opulence to the city (by virtue of the European-style edifices they erected, and the money they had accumulated) and not the same people who were forcing thousands into slave labour in abhorrent conditions.

To illustrate this dominant 'official' narrative of Alcântara's history, I will discuss two main attractions in the city. One is a museum and the other is the town's best-known festivity.

⁸⁰ This is often advertised as one of Alcântara's main tourist attractions. See, indicatively, the state government's tourism website on Alcântara as well as that of a popular private tourism website: <http://www.turismo.ma.gov.br/roteiro-sao-luis/>, <https://www.feriasbrasil.com.br/ma/alcantara/>, <http://www.360meridianos.com/2015/06/alcantara-roteiro.html>, accessed on 4 November 2017.

They both attract tourism from within the municipality, the state, and the country. And they both serve as platforms for the dissemination of official heritage narratives about Alcântara.

The *Museu Casa Histórica de Alcântara* (MCHA), the town's most important and most visited museum, is a *casarão*, or a two-story house, with meticulously polished parquet and furniture. It used to be owned successively by several European families and their (White) descendants before being expropriated by IPHAN in 1986. In the inescapably guided tours – the visitor is at no moment allowed to touch any of the furniture or objects, or even visit the museum without the company of a guide– one walks through the rooms of the house and listens to the museum employee (usually an intern from the local higher education institute, IFMA,⁸¹ studying tourism) talking about the everyday and social life that was taking place in the interior of a 'high society' house of the 'golden era' of Alcântara. I visited and observed several guided visits at the MCHA. The pattern was always the same: a long and detailed description of all porcelain and crystal ware found in the museum, whereas the only mention of the non-White population (and history) of Alcântara was a brief comment on the daily tasks of the 'domestic slaves' and, if someone asked for more information, a reference to the basement floor where the slave quarters used to be.

Célia Corsino (currently the director of IPHAN in the state of Minas Gerais) opposed curators' plans to organise the MCHA in the way it is today. She strongly argued instead that the kinds of questions a visit to an Alcântara colonial house/turned museum should raise, need to address the area's particular colonial past and situate the museum within a larger, inclusive, narrative about the past of Alcântara's inhabitants. Instead of focusing on the (largely imagined or enhanced) customs of the town's White colonial elite, the museum should address the majority of Alcântara's population, which, then as now, is Black/mixed

⁸¹ Stands for *Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia do Maranhão* (Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Maranhão).

race and working class (1987, Audiovisual archives at MCHA). As Caires (2012), historian and employee of the MCHA, has stressed, however, a specific ‘idealisation of the past’ prevailed over Corsino’s suggestions which were therefore not taken into consideration. The ‘decay discourse’, Caires notes, resonated with the governmental organs in charge of the MCHA, transforming it into a place ‘dedicated to the memories of the elite’ (2012: 161). Such discourses, he argues, have mythicized Maranhão’s colonial and imperial past and have recast them out of proportion (2012: 156). In the MCHA, even areas of the house related to the enslaved people (work areas and *senzalas*) that could be visited, were all transformed into offices and administrative or technical areas of the museum and are, therefore, out of the visitor’s reach and view.

But perhaps more than just the ‘decay discourse’, the way the MCHA displays heritage narratives resonated with national heritage policies at the time the museum was created. Or rather, the ‘idealisation of the past’ at the MCHA is an example of how national heritage policies influence the way heritage plays out on the ground. In Brazil, practices for the preservation of what has been largely regarded as ‘national heritage’ (*patrimônio nacional*) were formally initiated in the 1930s. During the government of Getúlio Vargas, in 1937, the National Historical and Cultural Heritage Service (SPHAN) was created as the country’s official organ for the management of cultural heritage. In 1946 it was renamed DPHAN and in 1970 it was substituted by IPHAN. The latter remains to this day the official government body responsible for the preservation, safeguarding, and monitoring of Brazilian cultural heritage (tangible and intangible) but also of those Brazilian cultural items inscribed on the UNESCO heritage lists (21 items in 2017).⁸²

⁸² Of the 21 properties inscribed on UNESCO’s World Heritage List, 7 of them being registered as ‘natural sites’ and 14 as ‘cultural sites’.

The Vargas era's early efforts to institutionalise heritage in Brazil aimed exclusively at preserving the so-called material culture of 'stone and lime' (*pedra e cal*) that is, only tangible, colonial, 'White' heritage (Silva 2012: 110). As will be discussed in Chapter Five, it was only with the Federal Constitution of 1988 that the definition of 'national cultural heritage' was 'amplified' to include 'forms of expression, ways of creating, making, and living' (Chuva 2009: 149). And it was not before 2000 that intangible, or immaterial, heritage was officially registered in Brazil.

State policies on heritage preservation have been criticised by authors and practitioners for conveying and establishing a 'close connection between heritage and nationalism' (Harrison 2010: 169; see also, Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge 2000: 55-62; Smith 2006, Appadurai [2001] 2008, and Allen 2010). Indeed, 'national heritage' has often been seen to 'exclude the histories of subaltern and minority groups in society' who in turn 'have developed a voice to challenge mainstream "national" heritage' (Harrison 2010: 164; see also Hall 1999) and articulate their own versions of history and heritage. Such critics urged a reconsideration of 'official' heritage narratives towards plural heritages. Gradually, national heritage policies moved from singular narratives about the state, the nation, and its culture, to more inclusive narratives of 'cultural diversity' and 'multiculturalism'. In that context, cultural diversity was more 'conceived as being the culture of singularities' rather than associated 'with any presumption of universality' (Machuca 2013: 61).

At an official level a major influence on heritage throughout the 1980s and 1990s was increased recognition of minority voices, which involved a shift of emphasis so that 'histories from below' were perceived to be just as important as 'official' or 'mainstream' histories. 'Whose heritage?' was a frequent query in relation to places that were being conserved as part of the World Heritage Convention.

Harrison 2010: 196

At the time Alcântara became a national heritage site, and the old colonial house was expropriated by IPHAN, national heritage policies still privileged the ‘stone and lime’ architecture. Hence, the final decision of the museum’s curators (despite notable objections) to stick to a narrative that not only romanticised the colonial and imperial past but also obfuscated the area’s Black, and other non-White, history, is perhaps better understood in relation to existing policies at the time. Even though the museum only opened in 2004, and by then heritage policies had become more inclusive, the curators’ decision might reflect a slow adjustment to change rather than an obstinate fascination with the memories of the elite. In any case, the official narratives of local history as exemplified in the case of the MCHA seem to have shaped –either in accordance with or in opposition to them– the way residents perceive history and their place in it.

A part of the local population seems to have embraced narratives about the ‘the golden era’ of Alcântara. Those residents will proudly show the ruins of the old houses and churches in the town, and speak about the past with a tone of longing for what they generally see as a bygone era of prosperity and good life. In their accounts, the town’s supposed colonial opulence and glory is omnipresent and they hail heritage preservation strategies that privilege the maintenance of the town’s colonial architecture. In these expressions of a certain nostalgia for what was and will probably never be again, there will rarely –if ever– be any mentions of the Black, enslaved, population on the back of which this ‘glory’ was built. This part of the population –admittedly small– typically lives in the town, belongs to the local middle and lower-middle class, and identifies as White, although the latter is not always the case. I will come back to this point shortly. Those who express their pride in their town’s ‘glorious past’, in most cases also support and participate in Alcântara’s best-known festivity: the Holy Spirit festival which takes place every May.

In a distinct way from other festivities of the Holy Spirit in the State and the country, the *Festa do Divino Espírito Santo*, or *Festa de Maio* as it is also known, revolves around the re-enactment of an expected, but never realised, visit by the crown prince. Also unlike most other festivals of the Holy Spirit in Maranhão, that are practically embedded in Afro-Brazilian religiosity and take place inside Tambor de Mina religious houses (Ferretti, M. 1987, 1993; Ferretti, S. 1996, Leal 2011), the one in Alcântara is strictly Catholic. Although it does involve some elements of local culture practised by the Black population, such as the important role of the generally Black, elder, and exclusively female, drummers called *caixeiras* who accompany every day of the festivities, the celebration proudly highlights the European history of Alcântara in its most glorified, and fossilised, way: the expected visit by the prince is presented (through re-enactment, oral narratives and written brochures circulating widely on the feast days as well as in tourist tours) as a result of the city's fame and importance in Brazil. Alcântara throws a lavish feast where fancy –if exaggerated– dresses and decoration, brass bands, food and beverages are among the main attractions for the hundreds of people that flock to the town to participate in its biggest annual event.

Gil Lobato, former Emperor (*Imperador*) of the Holy Spirit –a title given to the main organiser of the festival every year– has been an enthusiastic supporter of the feast for years, as have most of his family members who have (co)organised and participated in it for generations. As they proudly say, the *feira* has become a sort of a family affair for them and they strive for at least one family member to participate in its organisation every year. He, as most of the Lobato family, self-identifies as White and strongly relates to the May feast. 'On those days, the whole town relives its golden era; people dress so elegantly and the houses are so lavishly decorated', Gil told me about the *feira*, adding that Alcântara is at its most beautiful during this celebration.

At the other end of the spectrum from the Holy Spirit festival, the far less ‘glamorous’, visited, or advertised, St Benedict festival (*Festa de São Benedito*) in August, is the one called *feita de preto* (‘Black feast’). Celebrating São Benedito, locally regarded as the patron saint of the Black people, the festivities also include what is considered the quintessence of local Black culture, namely *Tambor de Crioula*.⁸³ Lasting only three days, as opposed to the near two-week duration of the *Festa do Divino*, this feast draws a great number of residents from the *quilombos* of Alcântara and nearby municipalities, the great majority of them comprising Alcântara’s Black population. Even though *Tambor de Crioula*, a popular dance from Maranhão, has been gaining wider recognition and was registered, in 2007, as Brazil’s intangible cultural heritage by the IPHAN (*Livro das Formas de Expressão*), Alcântara’s St Benedict’s festival continues to be overshadowed by the Holy Spirit festival and mostly attracts the *quilombola* and the town’s non-White population. Unlike the formal and elitist presentation of the *Festa do Divino*, which is co-funded by state, municipal, and private funds, St Benedict’s feast is a casual celebration, where all are welcome, realised through the collective efforts of residents involved. This is why many participants refer to it proudly as *feita dos pobres* (‘the feast of the poor’), reflecting the level of engagement of Alcântara’s Black and working-class population that contributes in any possible way towards organisational expenses –by cooking, by donating money, food, or beverages; by lending the drums for the *Tambor de Crioula*, and so on.

One night Rogério, a friend who identifies as Black, was throwing a *Tambor de Crioula* celebration at his house. While I was sitting next to Gil (the Holy Spirit festival enthusiast mentioned earlier) who was also attending, he let me know that Rogério was fulfilling a promise to São Benedito to thank the saint for helping him retrieve some items that had been

⁸³ A popular dance in Maranhão. It involves a rotational dance and the beating of three, differently sized, drums, together with two wooden sticks struck against the largest of the three drums. All instruments are typically played by men while the dance is typically performed by women. See further Ferretti, S. 2002, 2009.

stolen from his house the previous week. ‘Have you ever paid a promise to São Benedito?’, I then asked Gil. ‘No, when I ask for favours it is always to the Holy Spirit. You see, São Benedito is more the patron saint of Black people. We rarely ask São Benedito for any favours’, he replied.

This example helps illustrate something I was confronted with, time and again, in conversations with residents of the town: a clear connection between people’s self-identification in racial terms and their preference, or devotion, to one or the other feast/divine entity. Catholics who self-identified as ‘White’ typically made promises to the Holy Spirit (and usually were from the urban centre) and those who identified as ‘Black’, ‘*Moreno*’, or ‘*Caboclo*’⁸⁴, typically made promises to São Benedito (with the vast majority of them living in, or being originally from, the rural communities). Similarly, they also tended to participate in, or identify more, with one or the other feast.

While a great part of the town is involved in one way or another in both celebrations, August’s feast is considered more of an ethnic celebration, organised by, and mainly addressed to, a specific part of the population, rather than the general one. The Holy Spirit festival, on the other hand, centred around imaginaries of colonial and imperial life as experienced by the White economic elite of Alcântara, has been established as the town’s main religious event and the celebration that revives the town’s ‘golden era’. Ironically then, the celebration that speaks to the majority of Alcântara’s population, is not the one considered ‘representative’ of Alcântara’s history (see also Silva 2012 on *congada* practices in Minas Gerais).

⁸⁴ Common self-identifications in Alcântara: *Moreno* is typically used by people of darker skin complex, independently of their ancestry. *Caboclo* is used predominantly by people of African and indigenous ancestry but, sometimes, also by people with African, indigenous, and European descent.

Visions of what counts as ‘representative’ local history also directly relate to local tourism. One of Alcântara’s main –if limited– sources of revenue, tourism, seems to have further contributed in shaping local views of the town’s history and the way it is being reproduced. The only higher education institution in Alcântara (IFMA) offers three courses of technical specialization, one of them, and the most popular one, being Tourism. Young and older residents are enrolled in the course with the aim to work in the small tourism industry in the municipality. Tourism has also created a large number of uncertified local guides to the extent that many, especially male, residents have worked as tourist guides at least at some moment in their lives. The local tourism industry is built around the promotion of the town’s ‘glorious past’, in much the same way it is being displayed at the MCHA and the Holy Spirit festival, and not so much on questioning such narratives. Alcantarenses are, therefore, in one way or another, deeply enmeshed in the reproduction of ‘official’ narratives about their town. But the institutionalisation of narratives about the past do not equally resonate with the local population. While some embrace IPHAN’s actions for the preservation and valorisation of the town’s colonial cultural heritage, others see such efforts as attempts to fossilise a colonial town at the expense of a vibrant lived urban centre (see also Santos 2016 on preservation policies in Ouro Preto, Brazil, and Canclini 2012 on the ensuing tensions between the dynamics of lived experiences and heritage preservation initiatives).



Picture 4: The church of Carmo and the ruins of the old convent in Alcântara.

‘Sometimes I want to set all of those ruins on fire. Just to see what they [local/state government] will do then. Will they care then?’, said Vinicius, a 20-year old man who lives with his mother and 5 siblings and works odd jobs to contribute to the family expenses. As with many local youths, one of his odd jobs had been working as an (uncertified) local tourist guide. Vinicius identifies as Black and speaks critically of the ‘*preconceituosos*’ (racially prejudiced) who eradicate the town’s Black history when admiring all these ‘great colonial buildings’. ‘They never say how many Black people died building them, they never think of how they lived; they just see these ruins and think they’re so important’, he said at one of our gatherings with other friends sitting atop a ruined wall of the old Convent of Carmo, next to the church. ‘You know what these ruins are good for?’, Tássio interrupted playfully. ‘They are the best hideouts to bring your girlfriend at night and make out’, he continued to the laughs and nods of the others.

Many young people in the town had expressed views similar to Vinicius’s. They rarely showed appreciation for the architectonic and historical value of the colonial remnants. On the contrary, these dilapidated buildings caused anger to many because they reflected the state of abandonment today. The feeling of decay was far more evident. But it was not a past decay. The decay these young people were referring to, was the decay they are experiencing today. It is the contemporary decadence of a town where its population faces major social and economic problems, and where the only thing it has to show today is the ruins of a long-gone White elite affluence. What they all wanted to see was changes being made to their town; not a paralysed local reality reminiscing over a past it had never experienced. High levels of unemployment, inadequate or non-existent public services, lack of infrastructure, were at the top of their list for change in Alcântara. They would like to have access to free and good healthcare and education, see jobs created, infrastructures improved, investments being made to their town, and a chance to improve their lives.

From museums⁸⁵ to festivities, White colonial history is not only emphasized, but portrayed in a glorious way. In these narratives, elements of Afro-Brazilian history and culture are confined to the image of ‘slave’, or to the musical part of the *feira*. Places and events where ‘official’ narratives of history and heritage are produced all echo the glory/decay discourse discussed above and remain silent about the population that has been the majority for centuries in Alcântara. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the local population that identifies as White and/or middle class largely embraces such celebrations and heritage that reproduce this discourse. But what seems rather surprising is the part of the urban population that whilst it identifies as Black and/or (at least partially) Afro-descendant, simultaneously adopts the ‘apogee’ discourse. This part of the non-White population seems to have appropriated, and does not see itself excluded from, the narratives of the town’s colonial elite. Instead, they take pride in this ‘glorious’ heritage. They speak of the ‘richness’ of the town and adopt a rather egalitarian view of the past, as one commonly shared by Alcântara’s ‘mixed’ population, a past that belongs to all. It is worth pointing out here, that I have never heard similar views being expressed by residents in the rural areas.

Throughout my field research, I never detected any expression of nostalgia about the seigneurial past among the *quilombolas*. In the town of Alcântara, my younger interlocutors who self-identified as Black or ‘mixed race’ typically also did not express nostalgia, or even admiration, for the ruins. Even if many of them had gained their first pocket money by walking visitors through the town and talking about the ‘golden age’, they would not express the same sympathy for the ruins in casual conversations.

⁸⁵ The second most visited museum in the town, is the *Museu do Divino*, housed in a *casarão* similar to the one of the *Museu Casa Histórica* (MCHA). Visitors are guided through its rooms, where a great part of the festivities take place, and learn about the history of the celebration.

This distantiation between residents of the *sede* and the *quilombos* is especially observed when talking with some of the town's residents. This typically happens with people who take pride in their non-*quilombola* descent and stress that their family has been living in the urban centre of Alcântara for generations. Those '*preconceituosos*', as Vinicius would have it, take pain to show –especially to a White foreigner like me– that they have nothing to do with the peasant population. Irrespective of their skin colour, or their self-identification as White or Black or 'mixed race', those who express such opinions typically also reproduce the glory/decay discourse and completely obliterate the history of the free Black peasant population. Many also talk about *quilombolas* in near-grotesque way, as when an elder resident of Alcântara (who self-identifies as Black), much to my astonishment, told me about Itamatatiuenses: 'They *still* have an animalistic way of being there' (my emphasis; the original reads: *eles ainda têm aquele jeito animal*).

And although differences in such views within urban Alcântara seem to be circumscribed by generation (and not so much by racial or class identification), the distinction between largely adopting or rejecting 'official' heritage narratives seems to lie on the urban/rural division.

Alcântara's urban population seems to share an especially complex relation with its past and ancestors. Even if many of them identify as Black and descendants of African and other non-White enslaved people, it seems that by living in a place where White colonial and imperial history holds such an important place in the cultural and religious calendar, they have developed a great flexibility of dissociation, at times identifying more strongly with the White colonial past, and at others with the Afro-descendant population. This relation with history and the past does not appear contradictory to them, since they also see themselves as a product of the very 'mixture' of this historical couple: the 'masters' and the 'slaves'. I will not here delve into the ways urban Alcantarenses grapple with history, as this goes well beyond the scope of this Chapter, but such a discussion could certainly tap into the rich

historical and anthropological literature on the ‘invention of history’.⁸⁶

On the other hand, the great part of the Black rural *quilombola* population identifies more strongly and unquestionably with what is largely considered Black and/or *quilombola* cultural heritage, and their identification with Alcântara’s colonial architecture and Holy Spirit festival is rather limited if not entirely non-existent. As I realised in the course of my fieldwork, the history that relates to the majority of the (rural) population is the one being told in rural family units and community circles. It is in the *quilombos* of Alcântara where dominant narratives are, once again, inverted and alternative registers of heritage prevail.

From official to unofficial narratives: Reclaiming history and identity

Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998) interviewed 1,453 US American participants in a project in which they invited them to talk about their past, what it meant to them, and the ways it was present in their lives. Among those interviewed, African-American participants’ accounts presented many points in common, especially with regards to the importance of oral family histories. Almost all African Americans interviewed regarded personal and family narratives as most reliable historical accounts since, as opposed to school textbooks or museums, they offered more positive portrayals of the past. These counter-narratives confronted dominant ones and united them in the experience their families had ‘in common with millions of other African Americans’ (1998: 148). In their accounts, the boundaries between ‘the personal and the public, the individual and the collective’ (ibid.: 149) often blurred, and family history conflated with ethno-racial identity. Unlike White respondents who ‘rarely spoke about their family history as a microcosm of the history of the nation, their region, their local

⁸⁶ Indicatively, see: Sahlins 1985, Borofsky 1987, Gow 1991, Palmié 2013; see, also, De la Cadena’s 2015 ethnography on Quechua practices that selectively incorporate and exclude alterity.

community, or their ethnic group ... Black respondents often described their family history as an exemplar of the Black experience in America' (ibid.: 150). In the words of an African American interviewee: '[T]o listen to a grandparent describing the struggle of your family was to listen to a description of Black history' (ibid.).

This approach to history and memory corresponds to Kenny's (2009) argument about *quilombolas*' claims of 'their own history through memory' as they 'challenge dominant narratives and common ways of "reading" and interpreting experience' (2009: 158).

Similarly, Mattos (2005) observes the importance of legal measures (such as Article 68 of the ADCT/CF 1988) 'for the formation of family memories' (2005: 10) among the Afro-Brazilian communities she worked with. The personal and the political merge again, since specific policies and legal measures often shape perceptions of community life and history. As Mattos (2005) illustrates, 'the processes of identification and demarcation of the "Negro lands"⁸⁷ as *quilombo* communities, and the new public portrayal of the meanings of slavery in schools and media, again had an impact on collective memory' (2005: 11).

The 'rewriting' of history through memory and non-dominant narratives, across the African Diaspora, can be seen as a reaction to an all-pervasive focus on slavery as the predominant characteristic of the Black experience (Matory 2005: 288). This has overshadowed, and continues to overshadow, 'the complexity of history and processes of memory', which 'is crafted from a palimpsest of historical, political, social, and economic relations' (Kenny 2009: 158). In *Sarah Phillips*, a 1984 novel by Andrea Lee, the protagonist, a Black woman from Philadelphia, USA, 'struggles to liberate herself from restrictive traditions' while constructing a new identity for herself 'that opens up an entirely different range of

⁸⁷ Mattos translates '*terras de preto*' as 'Negro lands'. As noted earlier, although I do think that this translation is historically more accurate than 'Black lands', throughout this dissertation I use the latter in accordance with its dominant use in bibliography.

perspectives and possibilities' (Enomoto 1999: 210). Like the fictional character, Afro-Brazilians, as well as other Afro-descendants in the diaspora, are trying to deconstruct deep-seated preconceptions, stigmas, and stereotypes, and replace them with identities they have constructed for themselves, through sociopolitical mobilization and different assessments of history.

Throughout my fieldwork in Itamatatuiua, as well as during my visits to other Alcântara *quilombos*, stories of community history, the past, the ancestors who founded the community, and the lives they used to lead, were not marred by a dreadful mention of slavery, but were constructed around the absence of it. The stories I heard were about life in the community, about the values instilled from the elders and the skills and forms of producing (from cultivating the land to making music, to clay work, to cooking) that structured the lives of past generations and shaped the way people today lead their lives in the *quilombo*. They were about their rich cultural traditions (see, e.g., Reis 2010) and not about decadence, or a glory lost. For the people of Itamatatuiua, as for other *quilombolas* in Alcântara, the past proudly emerges through family and, by extension, community memories of freedom and resistance.

Mitchell (2008) similarly observes that 'the planners of Brazil's space program couldn't have known in advance that they would attempt to build their equatorial space port in an area with deeply remembered traditions of winning and holding land from powerful adversaries through resistance and persistence or that villagers would find so wide and influential a network of allies' (2008: 39). The stories told in the *quilombos* of Alcântara are structured around free living and the formation of family and community bonds. The principle of autonomy and free will is particularly underlined. By producing and reproducing these stories, *quilombolas* do not only wish to present their own readings of history and narratives of representation, but they also raise awareness of their collective demands for justice.

Defying invisibility: Peasant political organisation

For those who saw decay and development in the terms discussed above, the free peasantry in Alcântara, if ever visible in their eyes, was not a feature of its past and present to be esteemed but rather a sign of lack of progress. The association of the peasant population with ‘backwardness’ was for many the rationale behind the need for the region to be ‘modernised’ and put back on the national map. The nearly 200 *quilombos* found in the interior posed no considerable problem to those adopting this perspective, as the lands occupied by *quilombolas* were seen as either vacant, or scarcely occupied. What was needed was for the land to be ‘cleansed’ and put in good use –i.e. technology development and/or exploitative agro-industrial projects. Perhaps in this way, Alcântara could regain some of its lost glory. Hence, the CLA appeared for some as exactly the opportunity Alcântara was awaiting in order to regain its illustrious reputation.

In 1980, the Brazilian launch base appropriated, with a state Decree, 52 of the nearly 146,000 hectares of the municipal territory. A part of the local (urban and rural alike) population had initially applauded this plan, despite the downside its construction was to bring to many of them –especially to the *quilombos* that needed to relocate. The planners’ promises of infrastructural development for the whole municipal area, had been embraced by some who saw the advent of the launch base as a harbinger of a prosperous future for all.

Virtually anyone above forty remembers the anticipation of a long list of things to happen in Alcântara with the opening of the space port in the 1980s: electricity to be brought to the municipality, paved roads, efficient coastal transportation (regularly connecting the port of Alcântara with São Luís across the bay), improved health and social assistance services, installation of high-end tele-communication, the opening of a federal university campus, a significant boost to tourism, and the prospect of military training and job opportunities at the CLA were among the promises given, as my interlocutors vividly recall. News about the

construction of a space centre spread all across the town and the rural communities. Those villages that were to be relocated to the government-controlled *agrovilas* were to be especially privileged, as a form of compensation for the loss of their traditionally occupied territories: schools and health stations in every *agrovila*, in addition to the construction of brick houses that would substitute the *casas de taipa* (wood and mud self-build house covered with thatch) in which villagers used to live. The *agrovilas* would also have electricity, as well as piped water and sewage treatment, ‘luxuries’ that many *quilombos* still lack today. The prospect of a final break with poverty and unemployment enticed residents across the municipality into supporting the plans for the CLA’s construction and even made many (mostly male citizens) eager to get a job at the base.

Unfortunately, however, ‘the people of the base’, as many of my interlocutors often say, made many promises they could not keep. Memories of the shattered expectations are still strong in the minds of Alcantarenses and the reality of broken promises has resulted in a growing alienation between the local population and the militaries of the CLA and mistrust of any new plans and promises. I will not discuss at length here the reasons villagers and town-dwellers alike felt disappointed by the CLA (and, consequently, the government in general) as those have been thoroughly analysed elsewhere (see, especially, Saule Júnior 2003; Saule Júnior and Cardoso 2005: 49-64; Andrade and Filho 2006, Almeida 2006, Nunes, P. 2011, 2015, Serejo Lopes 2012). I will, however, sum up some of the main debacles.

Residents of the seven *agrovilas* faced unforeseen hardships, the most important of which was the inability to adequately adapt to their new environment and continue their subsistence economy the way they used to. The land in the *agrovilas* was not only insufficient for the number of people gathered but also the soil was of little use for farming as these former fishermen tried to adapt to their landlocked communities. Allegedly, reports signalling the unsuitability of the designated areas for tillage had been concealed by representatives of the

CLA (Andrade 2006: 17). Not only were the relocated families unable to grow basic staple crops for their subsistence (once barred from accessing the sea on a regular basis) but cramming the region with the relocated population created conflicts over the use of natural resources (which were rather scarce in that area) with the *quilombos* that already existed in the vicinities. Major environmental consequences –such as the ongoing river droughts– were directly caused by the lack of sustainable planning when deciding upon the relocations. Furthermore, the small land plots (15 hectares) allocated to each family unit, were not only insufficient but they also completely failed to predict the family's expansion and offspring, creating significant problems for the younger generations.⁸⁸

Another crucial change was the inversion of the typical *quilombola* system of land use: from land being a common good equally accessible to all, land in the *agrovilas* became individualised and transferrable (Martins 1994, Andrade 1999). Moreover, residents could not modify their houses nor build new ones as the entire *agrovila* is subject to the control of the federal government and needs to remain as initially planned. Many of the younger people were forced to migrate to urban centres (typically Alcântara and São Luís, but also São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro), due to the lack of available space to build a house and cultivate land. Added to this, the non-payment of compensation and the lack of an effective reparations mechanism aggravated the growing tension between *quilombolas* and the base as dislocated people felt they had been let down by the state despite their initial compliance.

The feeling among those people is that promises were never fulfilled and Alcântara saw very few things improving since the early 1980s when the base was installed. The gap between the great technological advances that the launch base represents and the lives of local people whose economy is based on fragile tourism, artisanal fishing and subsistence agriculture, and

⁸⁸ In April 1986, the Presidential Decree n. 72.571 reduced the minimum area allocated to a family unit from 35 (currently 55) to 15 hectares, *only* for the area of the *agrovilas*.

whose salaries rarely go above the minimum wage (R\$ 937 in 2017, amounting to approx. £225 per month)⁸⁹ is deepening the chasm between the two worlds. Especially in the rural zone, families rely heavily on the economic support of cash transfers from federal programs of social assistance. As Kenny (2013) observed for the *quilombos* of the North-eastern *Sertão* where she conducted long-term field research:

Households pool resources from social security benefits, conditional cash transfer programs (*Bolsa Família*),⁹⁰ food baskets (*cesta básica*) from the FCP, and remittances from those who have emigrated to Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Brasília, although there are chronic complaints about insufficient money sent to the grandparents caring for the children of those who migrated.

Kenny 2013: 148

After the first launch of the *Sonia* rocket in 1990, federal resources for the Brazilian Space Programme (PEB) were gradually reduced, especially the financial resources reserved for the launch centres, reaching the lowest point in 1999 (Oliveira Braga 2011: 87-88). This budget cut also had tremendous repercussions for the CLA and its original social responsibility plans for infrastructural improvements and positive contribution to the local communities, including its agreed upon services to the 312 dislocated families in the *agrovilas*. Despite major budget cuts and more moderate plans for the space port's activities, however, a 1991 Presidential Decree increased the expropriated area to 62,000 hectares announcing plans for the expansion of the launch base and the forced eviction of more *quilombos*. Little by little,

⁸⁹ The rural worker's pension, which is the monthly salary many *quilombola* families depend on, is typically equivalent to the minimum wage.

⁹⁰ Social welfare program launched in 2003. Alcântara has a total of 7,160 *families* registered for the *Bolsa Família* social benefit, receiving an average of R\$ 70 (equivalent to £16.30) per month. 6,088 of those families have less than R\$ 85 (equivalent to £20) per capita. (MDS, August 2016, accessible online at: <http://aplicacoes.mds.gov.br/sagi/RIV3/geral/index.php?relatorio=153&file=entrada#>). Although Maranhão, comes sixth in the list of Brazilian states with the larger number of population receiving *Bolsa Família*, in a 2016 article, BBC Brazil called Alcântara 'the capital of *Bolsa Família*' in the country. For further reading: http://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil/2016/05/160510_bolsa_familia_alcantara_dg_cc, both sites accessed on 10 November 2017.

the initially rather limited opposition to the CLA begun to grow considerably, as more *quilombos* started to feel threatened in direct or indirect ways in the face of the same obligation to abandon their land and be relocated in an *agrovila*.

Coinciding with the post-dictatorship period of major political changes nationally, organised *Quilombola* political mobilisation in Alcântara commenced in the early 1990s from the very *quilombos*. Being predominantly rural, as the state itself, Alcântara (and Maranhão more broadly) inverted the typical model of the urban mobilisation that then spreads to the rural areas. As Sérvulo Borges reminded me in almost every conversation, raising awareness of *quilombola* land rights was a ‘little ant’s work’ (*trabalho de formiguinha*), meaning it was slow but firm and effective, and it started from the *quilombos*. Alcantarenses and Ludovicenses (residents of São Luís), who were engaged in Black movement politics and had become involved with the burgeoning *Quilombola* movement, started visiting each and every *quilombo* in Alcântara and initiated a dialogue with their residents about land rights and political organisation.

In May 1999, the Rural Workers’ Union in Alcântara (STTR) together with the Federal University of Maranhão (UFMA) organised a seminar that marked a significant point in the history of *quilombola* political activism for the defence of land rights in Alcântara. Under the title ‘Alcântara: the space base and its social challenges’ (*‘Alcântara: a base espacial e os impasses sociais’*) the seminar brought together various political and social organisations, government representatives, academics, Black movement activists, representatives of the AEB and the CLA and, of course, *quilombolas* and everyone otherwise affected by the presence of the launch base to discuss and confront each other with the aim of finding a viable solution for all.

One of the immediate results of the seminar was the joint refusal of the communities to receive technical visits by members of the CLA. These visits were scheduled in order to operationalise the new planned dislocation. Efforts to delegitimise *quilombolas*' rights are often camouflaged into technical reports (*laudos*) made, or paid for, by the very speculators, the people whose interests will be compromised if title deeds are officially in the hands of *quilombolas*. Such technical reports are known as *contralaudos*, since they intend to have the opposite effect of the anthropological *laudo*. The *contralaudos* typically aim at reinforcing 'ethnic fraud' allegations voiced by conservative political powers, as discussed in the introduction. The CLA has been accused by *quilombolas* of having presented some of those. One such controversial case was when the company Kohän-Saagoyen Consultoria & Sistemas was commissioned by Infraero⁹¹ to produce a report on the environmental impact of the CLA, which 'practically treated the area as a demographic void' (Almeida 2006: 56).

Another major outcome of that seminar was the foundation of the Movement of those Affected by the Launch Base (*Movimento dos Atingidos pela Base Espacial* - MABE), which continues to be the principal voice of the *quilombolas* in their collective struggles against the Alcântara Launch Centre (Nova Cartografia 2007). The Federal Public Persecutor's Office (*Ministério Público Federal* - MPF) came up with the first public civil suit against the Federal State (*União*) alleging irregularities in the above-mentioned environmental impact study and environmental impact report concerning the implementation of the CLA. The MPF also ordered an anthropological survey under the direction of Alfredo Wagner Berno de Almeida with the aim of identifying the ethnic landscape of the municipality of Alcântara. Almeida has called the 1999 seminar a 'watershed' in the history of *quilombo* political mobilisation in Alcântara (2006: 56). He further argued:

⁹¹ Infraero is a government corporation founded in 1973 in order to administer Brazil's main commercial airports. The expansion of the launch base was initially planned to be carried out by this company.

The elements of ethnic identity, which until that moment were kept at a latent state, socially invisible, and undervalued by official land policies, became public; this denoted that the *quilombo* remnant communities were expressing themselves as a collective existence. ... The process of territorialisation, [until then] kept under a juridical and formal invisibility, was made public ... The identity of *quilombo* remnant communities eventually came to characterise the dialogue with government entities, demonstrating other dimensions acquired by the conflict.

2006: 56-57

The Rural Workers' Union (STTR), the Centre for the Black Culture of Maranhão (CCN-MA), the Black Rural *Quilombo* Communities Association (ACONERUQ) and the MABE are the main organisations that have worked closely with the *quilombolas* in Alcântara towards strengthening notions of 'ethnic' and '*quilombola*' identities since the 1990s.

Through political organisation and activism, the *quilombolas* are trying to counteract the disempowerment they experienced by, what seemed to them, a predatory and unjust state, with no interest in protecting *quilombo* communities and their ways of living. Constitutional provisions for *quilombola* land rights, as articulated in –especially– Article 68, have enabled a change in the national discourse on land reform. In the words of Sullivan: '[t]he conditions lent by the contemporary juridical-economic context give rise to a model of survival through "being" a particular ethnicity' (Sullivan 2013: 461). *Quilombola*, an ethno-racial identity that used to have negative connotations, as explored in the introduction, was, after 1988, not only positively affirmed but even privileged since it found new platforms for expression and became associated with territorial rights. With landmark Article 68, 'the State definitively breaks with the stigmatisation of the *quilombo*, since it commits to concede specific and differentiated rights to descendants of fugitive slaves, in particular with regards to their lands' (Boyer 2009: 138). Hence, the 1988 Federal Constitution enabled new channels for political claims and visibility under the '*quilombola*' tag.

This took a powerful shape in Alcântara where villagers and town-dwellers alike ‘have been deeply impacted by the launch base and local politics are intimately linked to changing notions of nationhood, governance, and progress’ (Mitchell 2008: 27). Militants of the Black movement, *Quilombola* land rights’ activists, the Rural Workers’ Union (STTR), academics, NGOs, and *quilombolas* themselves, gradually attuned to a vocabulary that privileged the villagers’ ethnic identity more than others. Their struggle is unequivocally structured on an ethno-legal basis.

It was especially after the 1999 seminar, and the foundation of the MABE, that the *quilombolas* of Alcântara united and are organising their political struggle in opposition to the invisibility and injustice inflicted upon them by the state. Unity in disunity, one might argue (it is after all a very plural group of people), in the face of a common threat. Müller (2005) writes for the *quilombo* of Morro Alto, in the State of Rio Grande do Sul:

Bearing in mind the continuous appropriations undertaken by the local powers and of the impact of the absence of any form of indemnification with reference to the amplification of the first highway, it seems logical that the people of Morro Alto had wished to construct for themselves a political space that, adding to the situation of ‘peasants’ (*camponeses*), promotes them to a new category and allows them to amplify their space for claims: the space of *quilombo* remnant (*remanescente de quilombos*).

Müller 2005: 40

The situation of *quilombo* land insecurity is perpetuated as the state’s decision to consolidate a near-equatorial ground site firmly continues. But so are the communities’ collective struggles to establish land rights. As Serejo Lopes (2012: 1), a MABE political activist, has argued: ‘two significantly distinct realities coexist in an antagonistic relationship ... both claiming the same territory’. The ongoing tension between locals –especially those in the zone disputed with the CLA– and the Brazilian state quickly transcended the specificities of a

local struggle and took a more comprehensive dimension: that of all Alcântara's *quilombos* fighting for the end of land insecurity and uniting their voice with the national *Quilombola* movement for their universal claims for land and other human rights.

In 2004, a great part of Alcântara's communities was recognised by the Palmares Foundation (FCP) as 'quilombo remnant' (*remanescentes de quilombos*).⁹² 2008 marked a significant political victory for the *Quilombola* movement. The INCRA published its technical report for the identification and delimitation of their shared territory. This report recognises an area comprised of 106 *quilombo* communities and equivalent to nearly 70% of Alcântara's municipal territory, as 'unified *quilombola* territory' (*território único quilombola*), and reduces the area under the jurisdiction of the CLA (see Map 7). However, the much-anticipated final distribution of collective land titles was once again postponed when, in 2015, the Secretary for Racial Equality in Alcântara (SEIR) announced the state government's plans for the 'return' of 42,000 hectares of municipal land to the state which were to be 'taken back' from the area already (and still) in the process of regularisation.



Map 7: Alcântara's territorial configuration in 2008.
(source: CLA)

⁹² The expression '*remanescente de quilombo*' is a legal one (included in the 1988 Brazilian Constitution) which is commonly translated into English as 'remnant' of ancient *quilombo* communities (see, e.g., Wade [1997] 2010: 119). Throughout this thesis, I will use the terms 'remnant' and '*quilombo* remnant community/ies' to refer to the Portuguese legal expression '*remanescente(s) das comunidades dos quilombos*'.

The ongoing ‘appropriation’ and ‘return’ of collective *quilombo* land in Alcântara, and the associated *quilombola* protests and demands for the application of their constitutionally guaranteed land rights, gathered national and international attention to Alcântara. This instigated a significant wave of public support for the *Quilombola* struggle by activists, social movements, and civil organisations across the country, as well as that of the Brazilian Anthropology Association (ABA), which recently urged, with an open letter to the Governor of Maranhão, the immediate land titling of Alcântara’s *quilombo* territory. With the spectre of future expansion and further evictions looming large, the CLA emblematically embodies land threats for most of Alcântara’s *quilombos*.

***Quilombola* politics in Itamatatiua**

As seen by now, the construction of the launch base has reverberated importantly in the municipal area. Whether directly or indirectly affected by the military project, the situation of land insecurity addressed all rural *quilombos* in Alcântara and villagers became involved in political initiatives around land rights. Even though Article 68 of the Temporary Constitutional Provisions Act of the 1988 Federal Constitution, as well as Article 229⁹³ of Maranhão’s State Constitution, greatly empowered, reinforced, and helped systematise, local struggles for land rights and recognition of their territories, Alcântara *quilombos* have a long and enduring history of sovereignty over land.

Itamatatiua alone, has its own important figures in a long trajectory of resistance. From its recent past, Seu Eurico de Jesus, former community leader and land custodian, is commonly

⁹³ ‘The state will recognise and legalise, in the form of law, the lands occupied by *quilombo* remnant communities’. The original reads: ‘O Estado reconhecerá e legalizará, na forma da lei, as terras ocupadas por remanescentes das comunidades dos quilombos’.

mentioned by residents as a very charismatic leading figure who dedicated his life to the community and Santa Teresa. Even many years after his death, his reputation in Itamatatua and beyond has almost taken on heroic dimensions and his name is treated with great respect and admiration by different generations. In an expression of Itamatatiuenses' consideration of Seu Eurico as an important figure for the community and its struggles for land rights, the recently founded community school was named after him.

The fence teardown ('*derriba*'), the initiative taken under the custodianship of Seu Eurico that resulted in the successful recovery of trespassed land in the 1970s, marks an important point in Itamatatua's land history. The event reverberated greatly across Alcântara and continues to hold a special place in the memories of many of its residents today. And, finally, it had an influence on Itamatatua's process of land registration and regularisation, and its formal political organisation to this day.

When they opened that road [MA 106] from Taúna to Pinheiro, then the land grabbers appeared. They didn't respect anyone. And especially that area of Black people [*área dos negros*], they thought they could take control of it. ... So this is what they [the residents] did: the community, with the [Catholic] church, the [Rural Workers'] Union, and the state government took action together because they were offended by what was taking place. ... They set out to destroy the fences that were delimiting an area within the Saint's lands. They [the residents] were so audacious that...Alcântara has its own police but they, the land grabbers, brought the police of Pinheiro to arrest them. After that, only women and elders had stayed in the village. The leaders were all hiding. Some went to São Luís...until the whole issue passed. So, what did the government do? It created a Land Identification Act (*Ação Discriminatória*) in order to verify the extension of the land. To check whether it had been registered, and if it wasn't, the state would assume [property rights] in order to initiate all this work [of titling the *quilombo* land]. Since the land was considered land of Santa Teresa –and you know that a Saint is a statue, but the elder ones, like Seu Eurico thought it had to stay this way, as 'lands of Santa Teresa', as it is known today. So, this is what they did. But a Saint cannot [legally] own land, so they had to create an association. And so they did.

This account was given to me by Benita, a woman in her early 60s who had been the notary public in Alcântara for decades. She resides in the town but Neide, Luisa, Irene, main *lideranças* from Itamatatiua, maintain very friendly relations with her. ‘When my marriage broke up and I was having trouble raising the children by myself, Benita took one of my daughters for a few years and raised her in Alcântara. She’s like family to us’, said Dona Irene. Neide and Luisa encouraged me to go and speak with her, as ‘she knows everything about land regularisation’ in the lands of Santa Teresa and ‘also remembers stories our Dad had told her’, the sisters said. It is not that they do not remember such stories. They do and often narrate them in great detail. When I asked them why I should ask Benita for such stories, they both said that it was because Benita ‘remembers all the details’ about those events. ‘She worked at the *cartório* back when the *discriminatória* was issued, and she knows all about it. And Dad used to talk a lot with her when he was alive’, said Neide.

Benita welcomed me warmly at her home, a refurbished *casarão* right in the heart of Alcântara, and laughed when I told her the above comments. ‘It’s because they shy away from technical and legal terms. Besides that, of course they know [the stories] better!’, she said with a wide smile. Schooling plays a big part here. Both Neide and Luisa, as the great majority of *quilombolas* their age, were only able to attend school for some years in their life. Although some of them have later attended classes for adults at different levels of schooling (as have Luisa and Neide) many still feel insecure about their literacy and hesitate to use terms, or speak about issues, that they feel are better explained by people with formal education.

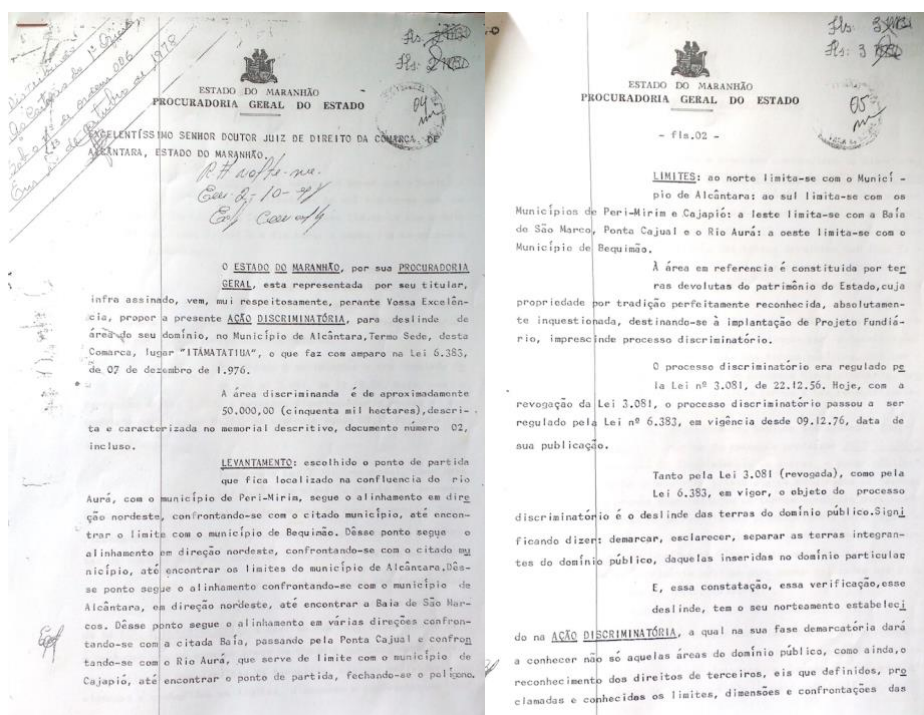
The main purpose of a Land Identification Act (*Ação Discriminatória de Terras Devolutas*), Benita explained to me, is to formally delineate the limits of a given territory and clear any potential juridical conflicts with regards to land ownership (whether public or private). After close examination of all potential claims to the specified territory, the land is declared public

property and goes under the jurisdiction of the corresponding state government.⁹⁴ In the words of Saule Júnior:

To identify (*discriminar*), is to separate public from private lands, verifying the legitimacy of any titles of private property. This procedure is only used in cases where private titles overlap with the Federal domain (*União*) and those titles can be traced back to public origin. This procedure is frequently used to identify unoccupied lands.

Saule Júnior 2006: A38

There are two modalities of the land identification process: an administrative and a judicial one. Both require a public call for all interested parties to present their property titles in order to be evaluated. Once this procedure is complete then the land identification is carried out by area experts. In 1978, only two years after Law n. 6.383 on Land Identification Acts, and instigated by the ‘fence teardown’, Itamatatuiua had part of its territory identified.



Picture 5: First two pages of the 1978 Land Identification Act. Copies are kept by both Neide and Benita.

⁹⁴ The necessity of the identification procedure for the so-called unoccupied territories was prescribed by Federal Law n. 6.383/1976.

As one can see from the first two pages of the Land Identification Act (Picture 5) fifty thousand hectares of land delimit the territory called ‘Itamatatiua’, which corresponds roughly (with two to seven thousand missing depending on the estimate)⁹⁵ to the lands of Santa Teresa. The limits are mainly described in relation to bordering/encompassing municipalities and natural landmarks.

Seu Chico, who also participated in the *derriba* was happy to speak about ‘the conquest’ of the Land Identification Act, which he saw as a direct result of the residents’ intervention.

‘Right after they invaded [our land] we went to destroy the fence; we brought down everything. And after that action, the government created a Land Identification Act that says you cannot sell, you cannot fence out, you cannot do any of these things. Because the government acknowledged that this land is ours’, he said proudly.

Before the 1978 identification, residents could only rely on the Saint’s intervention, the unity among residents and the force of their hands, and on the engraved stone. Benita recalled when after the invasion and the fence teardown residents brought the large stone to her office in Alcântara. It was the most tangible way they had to prove that this land was theirs. Dona Pirixi also remembers: ‘It was this stone that stopped everything. They took it to the notary’s office and it settled everything. They [land grabbers] stopped’.

The 1978 Land Identification Act was the first official document to give legal shape to locally-established land rules since, as Seu Chico said, within the area of 50.000 ha. no resident can sell, buy, or fence out land for private use, nor transfer property rights. Today, after Itamatatiua has earned its official certificate as ‘*quilombo* remnant community’ by the Palmares Foundation in 2006, and has entered the *quilombo* land demarcation procedure by

⁹⁵ According to some *quilombolas*, the lands of Santa Teresa are not 50,000 hectares as mentioned in the Land Identification Act of 1978, but 52,000. Some even argue that it is more than that, suggesting that originally the area stretched out over 57,000 hectares.

INCRA starting in 2012, the Land Identification Act remains the sole official document in support of *quilombola* claims over their collective territory. Of course, given that it was never ratified in a court of justice (the judge declared himself ‘incapable’ (*incapaz*) of reaching a final decision and the case was never decided upon), the many setbacks to final land titling by INCRA, and the ongoing trespassing on their territory, many are deeply worried about the future of their land. I will return to this discussion in the following chapter.

Founding an association: Formal channels of political organisation

A little over 10 years after the Land Identification Act, in March 1989, 29 women from Itamatatiua and Mocajituba (a *quilombo* attached to Itamatatiua) founded the Itamatatiua Women’s Association (*Associação de Mulheres de Itamatatiua* - AMI) and appointed Neide de Jesus as its first president. The previous community association, founded by Neide’s father, Eurico de Jesus, was dissolved due to some technical complications and there appeared a need for a new legal representative body. It was Neide who took the initiative, as Dona Maria de Jesus, Dominga’s mother, currently in her 80s, recalls: ‘It was me, Elena, Pia, Crispiana, Ceci ... it was Neide who invited us all. “Guys, let’s create an association! It is only here that there isn’t one yet”, she said. And we went: “Let’s do it!”. So we did it. And it still exists’.

‘Why only women?’, I then asked Dona Maria who pondered for a bit over the question. ‘I don’t know why. I don’t. It was just women. They didn’t invite men. And men also don’t care about those things. So, if they don’t want to get involved, so be it. Strange, right? With all those men here ... [laughing]’. The AMI became the single legal entity that represents the community as a collective. The initial bar to men entering the Association was eventually lifted and now men can also become members (but not run for president). Elections are held

every two to three years and the members of the Association (in theory all residents) vote for the president and administrative body of the AMI. In order to participate in the elections, members need to be active (having paid a monthly fee of approx. 1 GBP) something that typically drops the number of voters to 60 or 70.

The AMI, as the community's legal entity, is responsible for the introduction and implementation of, among other things, municipal, state, and federal projects in Itamatatiua. As I will show in Chapter Five, the creation of the Centre for Ceramic Production of Itamatatiua, where the work of the female ceramicists has been centralised and put under one roof, is considered a direct victory of the women for the entire community. Besides implementing projects for the community, the AMI is the body that calls for regular community meetings, where all residents are welcome to attend and discuss different issues.

Alessiane, who is currently vice-president of the AMI, tells me that attendance rarely exceeds 45 people. 'Many don't bother coming to the meetings. Not everyone cares to discuss projects and politics. But it is nice when we have a good turnout. It is important to discuss such issues with all of the community'. 'Why do you think that women participate more than men?', I asked, having attended some meetings and witnessed the striking lack of men in the room. 'Well, if there is one couple per household then usually it is just the woman who comes to the meeting. Then she goes home and tells her husband about the topics we discussed and the decisions we've made. Men shy away from those things', she said. Her husband Ribinha, son of Dona Irene, is a city councillor (*vereador*) and one of the few men who never misses a community meeting. He participates actively in political life, whether in his native *quilombo* or the municipality at large. 'Why is it that men don't participate more' I asked Ribinha. 'Oh well, you know how it is...men like to sit at the bar after the meeting is over and talk about what's been said in the morning while sipping a nice cold beer', he said laughing. Others seem to have a different view of men's abstinence. 'Oh you know, they just

can't stand being in the same room with all the women and hearing them articulate their thoughts. They feel emasculated! That's why they don't bother and they prefer to stay at the bar where they can be among themselves', said Malu vehemently.

At one of those meetings I attended, Sérvulo Borges, the *Quilombola* movement activist who had called the assembly on that occasion, opened the session by saying: 'I want to congratulate the men for their attendance today. 23 women; 21 of them Black, 1 White, and 1 child. And 6 men. We have made progress!', he teased the room with a small dose of sarcasm. But six men attending was progress indeed. Luisa later commented that 'It is good to have meetings like that, because we have the chance to talk and discuss matters with men too, and not just among women as usual'. Although Malu's comment must certainly convey some truth—at least for some men and women (see also Cody 2016: 193 and his discussion of men's participation in community politics in south India), I am not sure I entirely agree with it. And neither do many. Some suggest men are simply not that interested in the commons, or do not take political initiatives as women do. 'We like to see our community grow and do whatever we can to achieve that', said Ângela, ceramicist and former president of the AMI. Others accuse men of just being lazy and comfortable with women being in charge of everything—inside and outside the household.

But women being more involved than men in community-level politics was not a phenomenon exclusively observed in Itamatatua. From my experience with other *quilombos* in Alcântara and the Baixada Maranhense, it was rather common for women to have the leading roles in their communities. Although there is certainly not one single explanation for this phenomenon, I tend to look at it as largely the result of women's initiative and important role in the household (often raising their children by themselves and/or with the help of older

women –such as their mother, aunt, or grandmother), which, with the proliferation of political organisation in those village communities, expanded to community life.⁹⁶

Besides participation in community politics, some Itamatatiuenses have been engaged in municipal political representation. What is striking, however, is that while there is a dominant female political involvement in the community, there is a significant absence of women politicians at the municipal and state level. Although this discussion goes well beyond the scope of the present chapter (and thesis), it is worth noting that while women dominate community politics, wider, or ‘higher’ for some, levels of political engagement – predominantly, in Alcântara, at the municipal level– are clearly dominated by men. Only one mayor in the history of Alcântara has been a woman, while very few women get elected as city councillors (while there are many women candidates). To illustrate but one example from the last municipal elections in 2016, all four mayoral candidates were men as were *all* eleven city councillors elected. No woman was running for mayor and none of the 35 women candidates gathered enough votes to enter the town hall (data: IBGE 2016; for an early discussion on women mayors in Brazil, see Blay and Soeiro 1979; for a contemporary analysis of women’s (under)representation in local governments, see Funk 2017, and Santos 2012 for state legislatures).

José Ribamar de Jesus Barboza, commonly known as Ribinha, has been elected municipal councillor on two consecutive occasions, in the 2012 and 2016 municipal elections. In the last elections, José Lindo Ferreira (Pontaense), was the second councillor from Itamatatua in the Council Chamber. Successful candidates from *quilombos* often gather overwhelming support of their communities in the hope that, if they get elected, they will ‘return the favour’

⁹⁶ For a semiotic analysis of gender and political leadership in the Brazilian Northeast, see Taddei and Gamboggi 2009. On female group political representation see Porro, Veiga and Mota 2011 and their discussion of the *babaçu* breaker women. On early women’s political mobilisation in Brazil, see Weinstein’s 2006 historical delineation of the ‘*Mulher Paulista*’.

by ‘helping the community’. This rather common expectation is for some residents the product of a long history of clientelism and voting favours (on clientelism in rural Brazil, see, e.g. Löwy 1996: 89, Santos 2014: 56, Boyer 2016: 29-30). Yet for others it is the exact opposite: it represents the community’s independence from municipal and state politicians and their ability to have their voice heard without the involvement of intermediaries. Having someone ‘from the community’ in the city council is usually associated with having a direct representation of the community’s voice and being able to approach and speak to the councillor on a daily basis. This is why, many *quilombolas* say, they vote for the local candidate, assuming that only who is from, and lives in, the same community as they do will be able to care about and address the issues residents prioritise in their political agendas.

Araken (2012-2016), a controversial political figure in Alcântara who had been elected mayor with a great number of votes in 2012 but was massively unpopular during his candidacy following the first four years in office, had secured great support from voters registered in Itamatatuiua. In fact, the majority of the residents had voted for the PT candidate in 2012. ‘We helped him so much and he didn’t even come to thank us for all the votes he got. He never set foot in the community again’, a resident told me. For many, the mayor’s ‘absence’ was due to the fact that the community had a representative in the city council (Ribinha) who was from an opposition party (supporting the current mayor, and Araken’s main opposition in the 2016 elections, Anderson). According to them, Araken ‘did not do any work in the community’ fearing that it would be presented as the result of Ribinha’s influence and not his. On the other hand, Ribinha would commonly respond to those complaining about Itamatatuiua’s ‘neglect’ by municipal authorities (from the school bus not passing by the community to pick up students to the lack of any infrastructural work since Araken’s election) that he could not do much either, because he did not have the support of the mayor. Even the director of the school, who lives in Bequimão, could perceive the tension around formal politics (and

ineffectiveness) in Itamatatiua and commented in a brief conversation I had with him that ‘politics are a very complicated thing in this community’. Let down by what most saw as a great discrepancy between his campaign promises and what was done during his mayorship, Araken got only a handful of votes from Itamatatiua in the municipal elections in 2016. But Itamatatiuenses decided to give Ribinha another chance to ‘help his community’ and re-elected him. Now that he is allied to the mayor, ‘he will have no more excuses if things continue the same way’, a resident told me.

Before Araken, the mayor of Alcântara was Soares, during whose years in office the second school of Itamatatiua was built. ‘It was the realisation of a dream’, Dona Irene told me, ‘and it started functioning only with staff from the community. Nine people overall’. From the teachers to the cleaning staff, the new school had exclusively hired people from Itamatatiua. ‘Soares cared about the community and used to consult with us on every action he wanted to take with regards to Itamatatiua’, she continued. ‘Then Araken came and removed all the people from the school and assigned his own’ said Cáta who was sitting with us, ‘almost all of them Evangelicals!’.

Cáta had dropped a hot potato. Even if Araken had not declared himself Evangelical, during his years in office he had, at times overtly at others covertly, supported the Evangelical churches in Alcântara, and the Assembly of God in particular, in various ways. It is no coincidence that during his years in office Assemblies of God proliferated in Alcântara’s interior. Although there are no official data on the Evangelical churches constructed in Alcântara in the last five years that I have knowledge of, Araken’s endorsement of Evangelical growth was no secret in the municipality. To the aversion of many residents who felt neglected by his administration, the previous mayor of Alcântara had visited one of the first acts of worship (*cultos*) organised in the house of the newly arrived pastor and his family in Itamatatiua, and promised to help them build their Pentecostal church in the community.

According to the few Evangelical converts in Itamatatiua, Araken had promised the pastor construction materials for the church. The pastor and his wife kept a closed agenda about these issues when speaking with non-*crentes* but it was often implied that ‘with the help of God’, and some useful financial and workforce support from allies within the church and the municipal administration, the Assembly of God would be built in Itamatatiua.

Pontaense, the other city councillor from Itamatatiua, had espoused Evangelical Christianity for a short period but then went back to being a Catholic and a devotee of Santa Teresa (as Zé Rodrigues’s story, in Chapter Two, vividly illustrated). Nevertheless, the majority of his family continues to be Evangelical. His daughter, who works in the community school’s kitchen as *merendeira*, is one of the pastor’s greatest supporters in Itamatatiua and the family as a whole has been instrumental in helping the pastor’s family to settle in Itamatatiua.

Pontaense, on the other hand, as if in an effort to let everyone know he was no longer a *crente*, threw a large number of parties during his political campaign. Besides reiterating his promise to ‘distribute the *vereador*’s salary’ to the people in case he got elected, those parties were occasions to entertain his potential voters in different ways. Once he staged a much-anticipated fight (*briga*) that was only dissolved when the police intervened. His critics argued that Pontaense was one of the candidates who ‘won his votes in exchange for beer’, suggesting that it was the large amount of free beer distributed at such parties rather than his political agenda that tempted many to vote for this candidate. ‘At least in the past they would buy things that lasted longer, like wire or bricks, in exchange for votes; now it’s just beer’, said Pil, a farmer from Itamatatiua in his late 60s.

Maintaining a close relationship with both Evangelicals and Catholics is for some the key to political success, especially given the rise of Evangelical churches in recent years. This seems to be particularly problematic in Itamatatiua as many Catholic residents observe. ‘Politicians don’t want to displease anyone, so they are unable to take action’, said Pil when I asked him

about his thoughts on the upcoming municipal elections in the summer of 2016. Many seem to agree with this view suggesting that with the growing influence of Evangelical churches (and Evangelical votes), local politicians cannot afford to lose the votes of either group. Evangelicals may only be a handful of people in Itamatatua, but they grow in significant numbers in nearby communities that are also part of the electoral pool. Hence, many try to maintain a neutral position and be on good terms with both. This is why, some argue, Ribinha has avoided directly confronting the Evangelicals in Itamatatua and siding with Neide to tackle certain issues. I will explore some of these tensions in the following chapter.

Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed *quilombola* political organisation, in Itamatatiua and the municipality at large, through formal means at their disposal. Narratives of collective heritage and history were also discussed with regards to ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ registers in the municipal town and the *quilombos*.

I tried to show that while ‘dominant groups have set the heritage agendas over time’, ‘unofficial’ narratives of heritage and history are ‘curated within communities’ (West 2010: 1-6). Communities articulate their own narratives against the ‘official’ ones, from which they are essentially excluded (Harvey 2001: 326, Gomes and Yabeta 2016). What is at issue here, as Benton (2010) reminds us, ‘is not only which cultural traditions and their associated artefacts and places should be conserved, but which version of past events should be commemorated – a matter of particular potency in postcolonial societies in which the legacy of colonial government and struggles for independence continue to have an effect for subsequent generations’ (2010: 2; see also Azevedo 2004).

The chapter also aimed to position Itamatatiua political organisation in relation to municipal, state, and national *Quilombola* movements. The following chapter will focus on Itamatatiua’s specific land problems, as identified by the Catholic majority inhabiting the Saint’s land.

Chapter 4. **The land question in Itamatatiua today**

This chapter's broader scope of analysis is Itamatatiua's relation to land and territory. More specifically, it focuses on local perceptions and uses of land as well as on tensions that have arisen in relation to land use by its inhabitants. The role of individual spatial awareness and its relation to notions of inclusion in and exclusion from the community will be discussed. It will be argued that spatial self-awareness has a bearing on land use which also takes a religious dimension. From the point of view of the Catholic majority, two main tensions in connection with land and territory are identified: the community's population growth and the advent of Evangelical churches in the area. The two will be analysed bringing together the overarching themes of religion and land. Finally, the question of the possibility of religious plurality in the lands of Santa Teresa will be discussed.

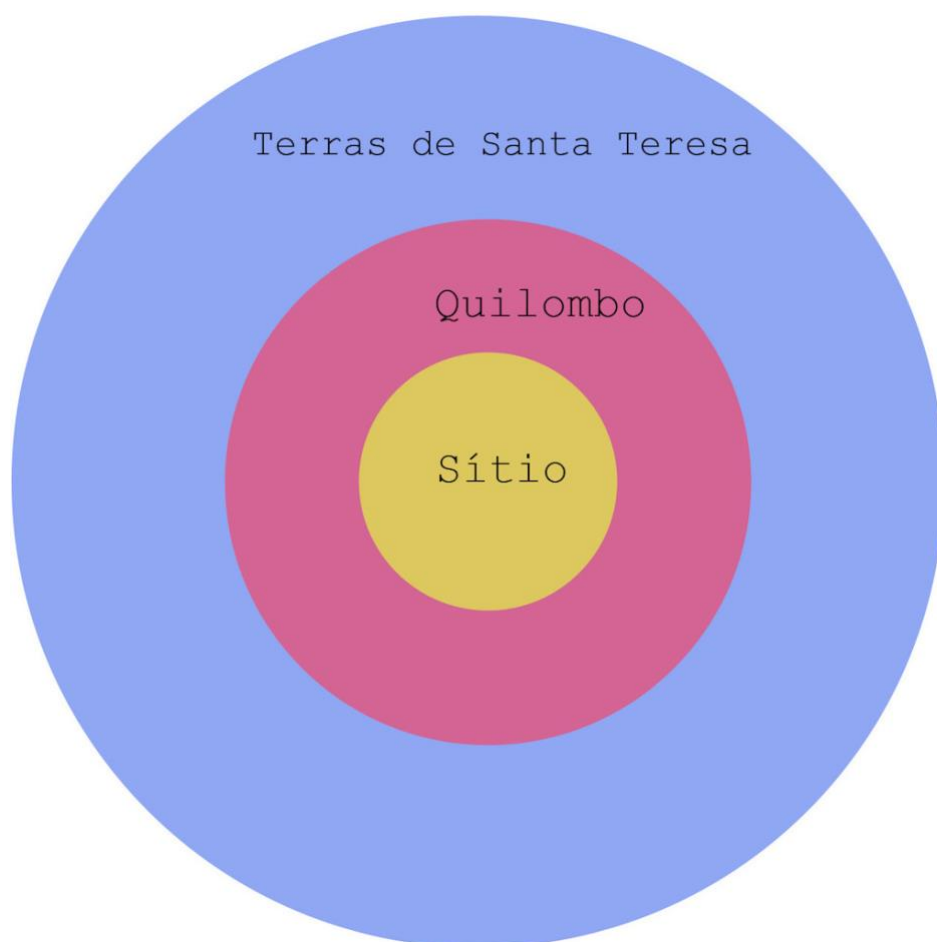
***Sítio-quilombo*-Saint's land: Three concentric zones**

In early October 2015, Evarindo Costa de Jesus passed away at the age of 102. He was Itamatatiua's oldest resident at the time. Dozens of people hastened to the house where he spent the last decades of his life, by the MA-106, the main roadway that cuts through Alcântara's peninsula connecting many villages with towns in the Baixada Maranhense, from where the procession departed for the cemetery. He used to live on the main site (*sítio*), in the house where Neide and her family live today, but moved to that house by the road as he was getting older and wanted to have quick access to bus services (and, hence, facilities such as hospitals in the towns nearby). A dear and well-respected member of the community, his loss, even at this age, was deeply felt by his neighbours, friends, and big family –he had more than 20 children and 'impossible to know how many grandchildren' as someone commented in one of the circles formed by visitors outside his house on the day of the funeral. At the

ceramic centre, the intense works due to the forthcoming *feira* of Santa Teresa were suspended on the morning when the news arrived. ‘Usually, when someone dies kids don’t go to school, nobody goes to work, and the community spends a day or two mourning’, Ângela, one of the ceramicists, explained to me. In the afternoon however, some of the women went to speak with Luisa to see whether they should resume their activities. They had a firing planned for the next day and there was still much work that needed to be done if they wanted to be ready for the *feira*. Given the time constraints, they decided to breach the typical conduct for the occasion and go back to work. ‘Well, the old man lived outside the *sítio* and there is so much crockery to scrape before tomorrow that we don’t have much choice’, said Luisa, as if trying to justify an unusual decision. The grounds for her justification intrigued me. Besides the work that needed to be done in time for the *feira*, Luisa suggested that since the death was not of someone who lived in the *sítio*, the observance of rules regarding death and mourning could be slightly curbed. I eventually realised, that this decision reflected not an occasional exception but rather a more general view of the different social spheres, or zones, of what is regarded as ‘Itamatatua’.

Three concentric zones of territorial awareness transpire in the lands of Santa Teresa (see Graphic 1). The first, the smaller and central one, is the *sítio*: the epicentre of religious and political life of Itamatatua and, by extension, the lands of Santa Teresa as a whole. The second, encompasses the *sítio* and extends to the limits of neighbouring communities; this is the *quilombo* of Itamatatua, a ‘*terra de preto*’, a community like any other in the interior of Alcântara. The third, is the largest in size and includes the other two, as well as any other community that falls within the limits of the more than 50,000 hectares of the territory that is designated as ‘lands of Santa Teresa’ or, simply, for some, Itamatatua.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ According to some popular accounts, Itamatatua took its name from the union of three indigenous words, that characterise (or used to characterise, before the river dried) the area. They translate them as: ‘Ita’—stone (*pedra*),



Graphic 1: Concentric territorial zones.

The use of Itamatatiua as a synonym for ‘lands of Santa Teresa’ most likely comes from the time of the Carmelite *fazenda*. Since this land was donated to the first residents by the Saint, the entire area of the old *fazenda* was henceforth simply called Tamatatiua and, later, Itamatatiua. As other *aquilombamentos* within this area started to grow, they were differentiated by the nucleus where the church and the cemetery were (Itamatatiua/*sítio*) with distinct names and eventually each one grew as an autonomous community. Nevertheless, the affiliation with Santa Teresa, and her church in Itamatatiua, has remained to this day and many continue to conflate the two, alternating between the use of ‘Itamatatiua’ and ‘*terras de*

‘Mata’ – fish (*peixe*), ‘Tiua’ – river (*rio*). Iban Ayesta, an anthropologist who visited Itamatatiua in 2006, produced a fiction film with the title ‘*Pedra, peixe, rio: Itamatatiua*’.

santa'. Indeed, the area of 50,000 hectares delimited in the Land Identification Act of 1978 (mentioned locally simply as '*discriminatória*' –see Chapter Three), corresponding roughly to the lands of Santa Teresa, is designated 'Itamatatiua'. This is also the area delimited in the current *quilombo* land demarcation petition at the INCRA.⁹⁸

The *sítio* is unquestionably the core of both Itamatatiua and the lands of Santa Teresa however one defines the former. Two gates, that prevent cattle from entering, mark the limits north and south of the *sítio*. The first one is placed where the *ramal* (the dirt road that links the *sítio* with the main road, MA-106) ends, at the limits of the cemetery (see Map 8). The second marks the division between the roads that lead to the adjacent areas of Campo and Bacurizeiro. In between the two gates, the *sítio* extends over a large piece of flatland where the main institutions of Itamatatiua are found and community life vibrates. The church (and figurine) of Santa Teresa, the door to the cemetery, a kindergarten and a primary school, the communally owned and run club, guesthouse, and *casa da festa* (exclusively used during the *festa* of Santa Teresa), a basketball/football court, a communal computer room, and some houses, are all found around the main 'plaza' of the *sítio*. Moving past this area, and along the narrow road that stretches to the southern gate, one finds the church/house of the Evangelical pastor and, next to it, the Centre for Ceramic Production of Itamatatiua. Among other people, the city councillor, Ribinha, lives on that road, as does his mother, Dona Irene, and three of the four daughters of Eurico (Luisa, Neide, Ceci), while the fourth, Pirixi, lives next to the club on the plaza.

⁹⁸ It should be noted however that the area designated as 'Itamatatiua' for the INCRA process of land registration and regularisation is still under negotiation. Although community leaders aim for the inclusion of as large an area as possible (taking as a guide the area outlined in the Land Identification Act of 1978), parallel processes of land regularisation at the INCRA from nearby communities have designated parts that are included in the Saint's lands/'grand Itamatatiua' as independent *quilombo* areas. The need for the final emission of land titles has grown so big (given the ever-frequent land grabs) that 'even a small piece' (*mesmo um pedacinho*) of titled community land, as Dona Luisa told me recently, would suffice for many. Hence, when (and if) the final land titles are issued, Itamatatiua may lose part of its 'original' territory (the lands of Santa Teresa) as the area may be reduced to the limits of the *quilombo* (see Map 9).



Map 8: Satellite view of Itamatatuiua with the *sítio* (approximately) highlighted in green. (source: Google Maps)



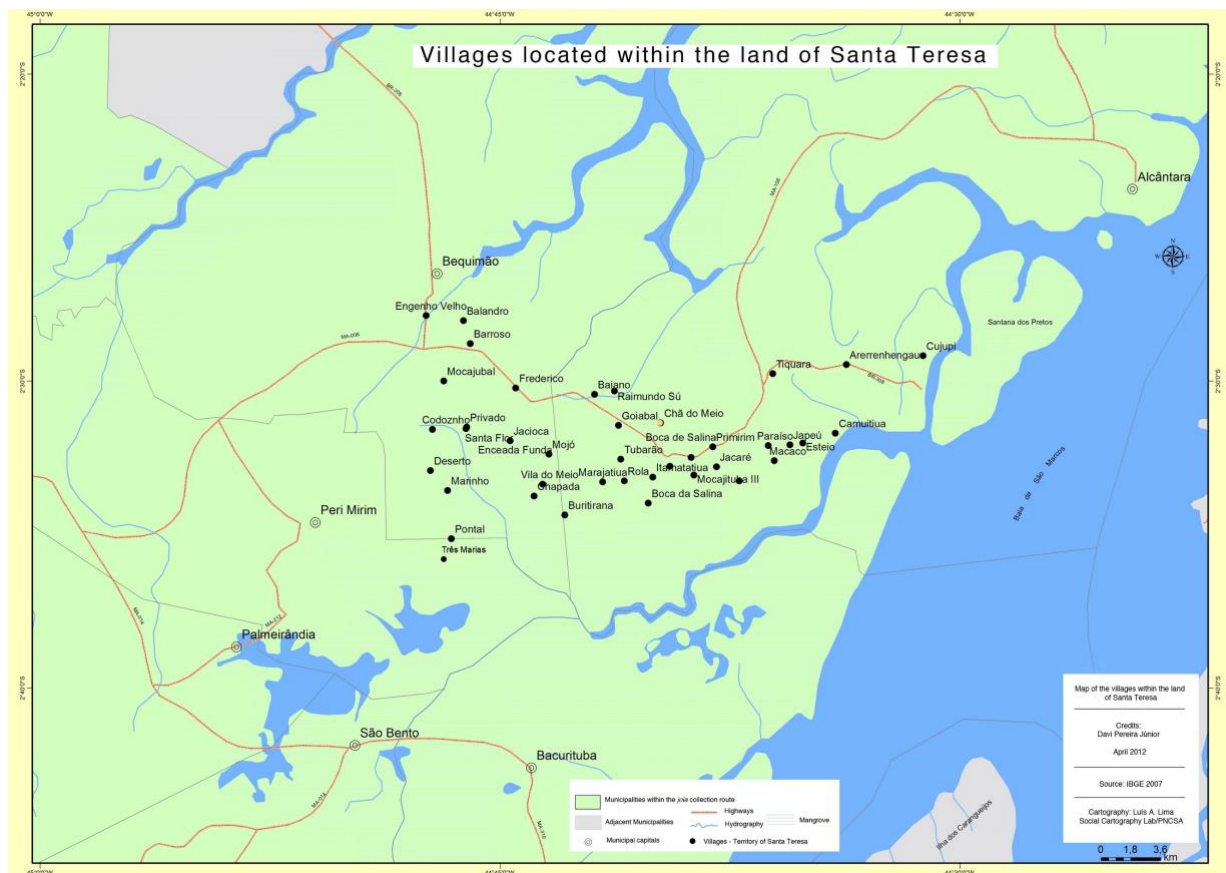
Map 9: Satellite view of Itamatatuiua with the area of the *quilombo* (approximately) highlighted in orange. (source: Google Maps)

The community, or *quilombo*, of Itamatatiua, extends beyond the *sítio* and includes the *ramal*, Itamatatiua da beira da estrada (situated across the main road to the north and essentially comprised of one extended family; it also includes the houses built along the MA-106), Bacurizeiro (a residential area on the outskirts south of the *sítio*), Boca da salina, Campo, and all the forest and other areas around the *sítio* until the limits of bordering communities (such as Mocajitumba I and II to the east and south-east and Tubarão to the west). The point where the *ramal* meets the roadway (MA-106) is considered the ‘entrance’ (*entrada/saída*) to Itamatatiua. On that same spot, one finds a large concrete pot (approx. 1m high) placed atop a tall concrete base (approx. 1.5m high). Next to it, on a taller pillar, there is a statue of Santa Teresa behind metal railings (see Picture 6). Both the pot and the Saint’s statue mark Itamatatiua’s (as a *quilombo*) northern limits and serve as a landmark for the entrance and a main reference to drivers and visitors to the community.



Picture 6: The entrance to Itamatatiua and the landmark concrete pot and statue. Note the dirt road (*ramal*) that leads to the main site (*sítio*).

The lands of Santa Teresa include Itamatatiua as well as some 40 other *quilombos* scattered across the south-east of the municipality of Alcântara and the bordering municipality of Bequimão (see Map 10).



Map 10: South-east of Alcântara. Most of the villages that are part of the Saint's land are shown. (source: Davi Pereira Júnior 2012)

Although it is a sizeable territory, virtually all residents of Itamatatiua and other communities within the Saint's land have a good idea about the territorial limits of this area. Many, especially elders, like Seu Chico in the Introduction's opening vignette, can delimit the territory in great detail, orienting themselves by reference to natural landmarks (such as rivers and hills) which help them draw a mental map of the greater territory. Neide, Luisa, Cecí, Seu Reginaldo, Zé Roxo, to mention but a few, can equally delimit this area from memory in the blink of an eye. Some younger people too have taken interest in knowing exactly how far the lands of Santa Teresa stretch out, or have simply memorised them from casual

conversations. Put otherwise, there is hardly a resident of the lands of Santa Teresa who does not know of these limits, at least roughly. Even people who are not from that area may have good knowledge of this territory, especially the syndicalists of the Rural Workers' Union (STTR), or those from the different organisations campaigning for *quilombola* land rights, or people who work in the municipality and the notary's office. This same territory is physically mapped out, and walked through, in the outings for the collection of donations (*joia*) for the organisation of the *feira* of Santa Teresa that will be discussed in detail in Chapter Six.

As seen already, for most devotees, the Saint is alive and lives among them. Her residence is the church of Itamatatua (in the *sítio*) and she is commonly thought to be embodied in a small statue that is placed on the church's altar. In fact, even though there are three statues of Santa Teresa in the same church, only one of them is considered to be the 'real' or 'original' one – i.e. the one handed down to the community by its founders (see Picture 7). There are numerous stories about how the statue was found, the most popular ones telling that: 1. It was found at the *Chora* water spring; 2. It was found right where the church was built; 3. It was brought by the first Black people who inhabited the community after running away from Alcântara together with some priests; 4. It was (accidentally) left by the Carmelites when abandoning the land and running away. This is the same statue, or rather, it is the Saint herself in the form of this statue, that visits each and every community to collect *joia* for the organisation of the *feira*. I will return to this point in Chapter Six. The *sítio*, for being the site 'where it all begun' holds a symbolic place in the religious imaginary of the Catholics who inhabit the Saint's land, and remains the administrative centre for all the communities that are part of it (by virtue of the land custodianship).



Picture 7: The altar of the church of Santa Teresa in Itamatatuiua (on the right) and a detail of the ‘original’ statuette of the Saint (on the left). Note the other two statues of Santa Teresa (both tiers in the middle of the altar).

Hence, besides being the place the Saint chose as her residence, the *sítio* is distinguished for the following main reasons: it contains the statue and church of Santa Teresa (where services are held and devotees from across the area visit regularly); Itamatatuiua has the cemetery which used to be the main necropolis in the area; this is also where the large ‘stone of rights’ is being kept –treated, as seen already, as proof of collective land possession. Furthermore, land custodians are always drawn from the same Itamatatuiua-based extended family and, finally, its residents have adopted the Saint’s religious name ‘de Jesus’ as their own.

Given the growth of population in the villages that comprise the Saint's land, the cemetery can no longer attend to the needs of all residents and priority is given (besides the residents of Itamatatiua) to residents from the communities in the immediate vicinities and to those families who have requested to be buried there (in agreement with the land custodian). Until recently, graves would not bear any engravings or embellishment and the bodies of the dead would simply be buried under the earth. New burials would hence be easily added to existing graves and, despite my persistent attempt to find out, the years of the first burials in Itamatatiua's cemetery seem to be only roughly estimated. In recent years, bricks and cement are increasingly used to mark the area where a person has been buried but even most of those graves lack an engraving of personal details other than the date of burial or initials curved out by hand with a wooden stick before the cement solidifies. Even today there are very few graves that bear a full name, date of birth and death, let alone a picture of the dead person. A striking exception to this simplicity of form is the grave of Eurico de Jesus, Itamatatiua's acclaimed patriarch, whose body is placed right behind the church in an elevated tomb with a tile roof covering a small surrounding area. However, even this distinguished grave bears no inscriptions or pictures. His wife, Cipriana de Jesus, is buried on the side.

While the cemetery, the church, and the figurine of Santa Teresa are three elements that serve as convergent points and poles of attraction for all Catholic residents of the Saint's land, the guardianship of the 'stone of rights', the institution of the land custodian, and the adoption of the Saint's name, refer to aspects of the relation with the patron saint exclusively enjoyed by Itamatatiuenses. This distinction underpins Itamatatiua's key administrative role within the shared territory. Indeed, Itamatatiuenses speak fondly of their unique relationship to the Saint. Dona Irene, one of the leading figures (*lideranças*) in the community, told me:

My name is Irene de Jesus. My mother was Silva. But when she came here, and got married to my father, she inherited my father's name who was Raimundo de Jesus. Because here everyone is 'de Jesus', right? It's a heritage (*herança*) we carry from Santa Teresa de Jesus. Santa Teresa d' Ávila who is of Jesus (*de Jesus*), and well, everyone here has the name 'de Jesus'. This is the last name of everyone. ... Take Domingas, for example. Her name is Domingas de Jesus Jesus. Because she got married with a husband who is also 'de Jesus'. The people at the notary's office thought it was really funny. Domingas de Jesus Jesus!

Even people who are not native of Itamatatuiua are very well aware of this characteristic. Like Dona Isabel, who is from São Luís but has visited Itamatatuiua for many years now (we will return to Dona Isabel in Chapter 5). 'Everyone who is from here has the last name "de Jesus". Who doesn't have it isn't from here. They are outsiders like these insects [sic] here [pointing towards the Evangelical house] and others who come along', she said to me.

It is mainly for the centrality of Itamatatuiua's *sítio* within the Saint's shared territory that 'lands of Santa Teresa' is still regarded, by some, as synonymous with 'Itamatatuiua'. While it must have become clear by now that what 'Itamatatuiua' stands for (the *sítio*, the *quilombo*, the Saint's land) varies according to the resident who speaks and the occasion, I have not yet explored what may shape the way they define Itamatatuiua.

There seems to be no doubt, in my conversations with residents of the Saint's land, about the limits of the *sítio* and whether it is a part of (or synonymous with) Itamatatuiua. Neither seems to be any objection to the notion that adjacent areas to the *sítio* are part of Itamatatuiua (the *quilombo* –see Map 9). The incongruence seems to lie instead in the definition of 'Itamatatuiua'. For instance, Zé Roxo, who lives with his wife, Dona Zelma, on one of the 'islands' (as local people say when referring to the hills scattered across the meadow) of the Campo, when speaking about 'Itamatatuiua', he is simultaneously identifying with it *and* distancing himself from it. On the one hand he would refer to the 'island' where he lived, and

part of the Campo some kilometres away from the *sítio*, as Itamatatiua. On the other, he said: ‘what they call “Itamatatiua”, the *sítio*, is just one family really, them there, it is theirs’, referring to the extended family of Seu Eurico. Equating, hence, ‘*sítio*’ to ‘Itamatatiua’ and vice versa. At the same time, he acknowledges, as much as any other, that the Campo is also Itamatatiua. But it is not its centre; its vital, founding, core.

I will try to illustrate some of the residents’ different perceptions of Itamatatiua with another example. On one of our daily walks with some of the kids in the community, we stopped by the house of Carlianne, one of the ceramicists at the Centre and mother of Clayton (Xicó), Neide’s grandson. Xicó lives with his father and grandmother, while Carlianne lives with her current partner outside the *sítio*. Their house is on a hilltop, at an early point on one of the dirt roads (see Map 9) that branch out from the *ramal* towards Mocajituba II, one of the communities attached to Itamatatiua and often considered an extension of Itamatatiua itself (Pereira Júnior 2012: 25). Her partner informed us she was not home, but she was at ‘Itamatatiua’ as if where they lived was not part of it. What he meant, the children explained to me later, was that Carlianne was at the *sítio*. Now, on the other hand, Seu Chico, who lives across the street from Carlianne, always refers to where he lives as Itamatatiua.

Even though they may distinguish between their community, Itamatatiua, and the lands of Santa Teresa, many residents of the Saint’s land commonly say: ‘All this used to be Itamatatiua’. Hence, for instance, residents of Mocajituba II and Tubarão, two communities attached to Itamatatiua, may commonly refer to their communities as ‘practically the same community’ with Itamatatiua, given the extended network of kin relations between the communities. In other words, the ‘centrality of intimate relations within the kinship compound’ extend ‘across the territory’ (Viegas 2012: 541). Itamatatiuenses welcome the identification other *quilombolas* feel with their community. They, however, and residents of the *sítio* in particular, make a clear distinction between the founding core (*sítio*) and any other

part of the Saint's land. Residents' identification with Itamatatiua can be equally found in near and distant communities of the shared territory. A resident of Goiabal, a community within the lands of Santa Teresa, told me while we were standing by an altar made for the Saint in the nearby community of Marajatiua: 'We are all here part of the same territory' (*Nós todos aqui faz [sic] parte do mesmo território*). That woman identified as a Catholic and a devotee of Santa Teresa. And even though she would differentiate her *quilombo* (Goiabal) from that of Itamatatiua, she would acknowledge that they all belonged to the same territory (lands of Santa Teresa – Itamatatiua).

No one can deny that specific areas (whether within a community, such as Bacurizeiro, Campo, etc. or different *quilombos*) within the Saint's land have their own names and people identify with these denominations. However, whether they *also* identify with the idea that they belong to a collectively shared territory designated as 'lands of Santa Teresa', and hence make their connection to Itamatatiua explicit, largely depends on two parameters: their religious affiliation (especially if they are Catholic or not) and their relationships/kin ties with the families of the *quilombo* Itamatatiua and the *sítio* in particular. The description each resident uses to describe their localities depends on how they position themselves within them. In other words, 'social relations [turn] into space' (Staeheli and Mitchell 2008: 23).

Hence, the woman from Goiabal who told me that all the communities were part of the same territory, not only was she a Catholic and devotee of Santa Teresa, but her personal relations with the families and political leaders of Itamatatiua have also been strong. Similarly, when Chico says he lives in Itamatatiua while his neighbour across the street does not, their different ways of relating to the *sítio* (Itamatatiua) reflect their own ties with the people in it. While Chico grew up in the family of Eurico and sees himself as part of it, the partner of Carlianne has stronger kin ties outside the *sítio* than within, hence does not identify with it in

the same way. He projects instead this distance to the way he sees himself within the community: Itamatatiua is the *sítio* and where he lives is the outskirts.

Before closing this section on the different uses of ‘Itamatatiua’ and their relation to the three concentric zones identified as ‘*sítio*’, ‘*quilombo*’, and ‘*terras de Santa Teresa*’, some notes on the relationship and differences between ‘land’ and ‘territory’ as they transpire in Itamatatiua. As Elden (2013: 10) has suggested, ‘[l]and, terrain, and territory need to be conceptually distinguished, even if in many instances they are practically intertwined’. Although uses of ‘land’ and ‘territory’ in Itamatatiua are often conflated, some conceptual differences can indeed be distinguished.

‘Land’ (*terra*) in Itamatatiua seems to be directly attached to the soil, the substance of the earth, the matter they themselves are made of, as will be discussed in the following chapter. Land for Itamatatiuenses directly relates to their farming activities and subsistence economy, as I show below. It is what sustains them, since it allows them to cultivate it and eat from the produce it yields. At the same time, land is a comprehensive term that includes everything that is part of the landscape –such as rivers, salt water inlets, the sea, their house and backyard. In other words, land is comprised of all those elements that constitute the natural geography of the area that constitutes the ‘territory’.

‘Territory’ (*território*), on the other hand, is more directly related to the question of sovereignty over land. In the lands of Santa Teresa, ‘territory’ is comprised of all the village communities that are part of it, it has a special relation with the notion of ‘limits’ or ‘borders’, and it is associated with the community’s struggle for land titling. Indeed, for Itamatatiuenses, ‘territory’ is often synonymous with ‘*terra de Santa*’; the domain under the protection of, and historical relation to, their patron saint.

Uses of land: Subsistence economy and resource abuse

So far, I have discussed how the *quilombolas* of the lands of Santa Teresa relate to their surrounding space and its local designations, and how social inclusion and exclusion takes a spatial dimension. In the following two chapters I will delve into residents' uses of notions of land and territoriality through the locally-extracted clay (which they mould into ceramics) and popular Catholicism (that draws on a shared history of land occupation). In this section, I will briefly discuss some of the main other aspects of local *quilombolas*' relationship with the land. These revolve around the understanding of land as an indispensable part of local subsistence economy and include the land in their backyards (*quintais*), the seasonal vegetable gardens (*roças*), and artisanal fishing.

The backyards, as Viegas (2007) has suggested for the Tupinambá of southern Bahia, 'constitute one of the indissociable elements of the house' (2007: 85) in Itamatatuiua, as well as in virtually every *quilombo* in Alcântara. A backyard (*quintal*) usually serves many different purposes. It is where fruit trees are planted that are often enough to cover a household's needs through the year. Predominantly banana and mango trees (in all their variations), but also guava (*Psidium guajava*), lime, tamarind, and cashew trees are among those most frequently found in the backyards of Itamatatuiua's houses. A backyard will often also have domestic animals, such as chickens, ducks, and pigs, and it generally also has a place (usually somewhere elevated on sticks in order to keep it out of the small animals' reach) allocated for the cultivation of medicinal herbs and spices used for cooking. Flowers, although sometimes also found in a backyard, usually decorate the front of the houses.

Women and men also typically do their laundry in their backyards. The clothes are hand-washed with soap, brushed and rinsed on a wooden tablet, and hung to dry on ropes that cut through the *quintal*. Certain meals are also cooked in the backyard (especially when it is barbeque and meals cooked in a cauldron over an open fire), and some of them even have a

small masonry oven made of clay or bricks that is used especially during festive periods for baking manioc cakes. Finally, the *quintal* is also where people traditionally take showers and even though newly constructed project houses⁹⁹ come with a bathroom inside, many people still prefer to take a shower outside ‘where it is fresher’.

The *quilombola* sharing economy is especially pronounced when it comes to the fruits and produce of the backyards. Neighbours know very well who plants what in their backyards so when they need a specific ingredient for cooking, or crave a fruit they do not have, they ask their neighbours, or even those who live further away, for a treat. One of the daily errands of children in Itamatatuiua is to go to a house and ask for, or deliver, something from the backyard. For instance, Luisa has lime trees in her *quintal* and many come to ask for limes when they run out. Luisa, on the other hand, does not grow coriander (since her chickens always find a way to destroy it) so she asks either Alice, Mariusha, or Tialúcia, her next-door neighbours, for a small handful when she needs some. Exchange of fruits, eggs, and herbs from the backyards are an everyday practice and an opportunity for a short visit and catch-up on the latest news.

Other daily subsistence activities that involve interaction with other residents is the collection of water from the *Chora*, the main spring, and walks to the nearby forests to collect fruits from palm trees (such as *juçara/açaí*, *buriti*, and *babaçu*). Extractivism is an integral part of the local subsistence economy and is undertaken in manual and non-disruptive ways, according to the appropriate season and only for a small quantity that covers the needs of the community’s households. On several occasions, I joined small groups of youth that go together on short expeditions to gather fruits and seeds from the forest. Such outings are also great opportunities to make casual conversations and have fun with friends while enjoying

⁹⁹ Part of the federal project ‘*Minha casa minha vida*’ that was implemented in Itamatatuiua.

the seasonal fruits. The fruits and seeds gathered can be used for a variety of things –e.g. the *babaçu* seeds are used, among other things, to make cooking oil.

In their vegetable gardens, that they keep in the area of the Campo or other areas within the *quilombo*, Itamatatiuenses predominantly plant manioc (cassava) and corn. There are usually two types of *roças*: one for the winter/rainy season (*roça de tempo*) and one for the summer/dry season (*sangal*). In the first, manioc is planted from January to February while in the second, manioc is usually planted from September to October. The time necessary for the growth of tubers until their collection varies significantly according to the soil where they are planted (6-12 months).

As with the houses and their backyards, the vegetable gardens also are not typically inherited but, after their keeper passes away, they are used by whoever needs the land. The trees one has planted during their lifetime are commonly remembered by those who outlive them and are, hence, a sort of ‘mnemonic references’ to ‘lived maps’, as Viegas has put it (2007: 289, 218-221). At Evarindo’s funeral, for instance, many would recall that he loved to plant pineapple trees and they were worried that there would be no one to take care of them.

Likewise, Luisa would show me the mango trees her mother had planted in her *quintal* and would proudly say that the trees had grown tall and strong and yield fruits every year. Her sisters, among other people, also remembered that the large cashew tree that stood between the ceramic centre and the Evangelical pastor’s house (now within the grounds of his house since he fenced off its grounds) was planted by their grandmother and they were displeased that they could no longer have access to it.

Another activity that relates to land (as a comprehensive term) is the artisanal fishing residents occasionally practice. Itamatatiuenses say that fishing used to be far more widespread than it is now and that there used to be plenty of fish in the community. Some recount how, during the rainy season, the river used to flood and fish reached the centre of

the *sítio*, ‘right where the two tamarind trees are’. Others suggest that even the name Itamatatiua comes from the freshwater fish *tamoatá* (called *tamatá* in the region) with which the river used to abound. However, since the river dried out in the last decade, fishing only takes place in the streams outside the *sítio* or at the salt water inlets in the adjacent areas. According to many, the river dried out due to imprudent swiddening and farming on riverbanks. In fact, unwise use of natural resources is frequently brought up in conversation and flagged as one of Itamatatiua’s great problems in the future, if action is not taken to prevent such use from continuing.

One late morning, as I was sitting on the porch of one of the houses at the Bacurizeiro (see Map 9) with one of the residents. At some point, I noticed a large truck approaching from the salt water inlet (*igarapé*). It stopped right in front of the house and two men jumped down. The truck was filled with logs from the mangroves. It dropped the two men off and carried on. I asked the men where all this wood was going and they told me it was to fire bricks. Not in Itamatatiua, but in some industrial unit in the region. Later on the same day, I was sitting on the porch at Dona Luisa’s with her and Duduca, her neighbour from down the street. They were discussing the truck, which they saw driving through the *sítio*, and seemed especially preoccupied with people ‘cutting so much wood from the mangroves’.

Duduca, who is also the sister of Zé Elias, the man who runs a small brickyard in the community and hand crafts ceramic bricks, said that her brother too needs to burn wood but is careful to cut it from areas that will not harm the environment. ‘Given that everything is being done manually’, she added, ‘he does not need excessive amounts of wood’. Luisa agreed. At the Centre, they also need wood to fire the ceramics about once a month but this was ‘nothing compared to what these people loading entire trucks every other day’ were doing. ‘They don’t just cut for personal use but go with machines and finish everything’, Luisa said. Connected to the issue of misuse of natural resources, the discussion switched to

the over-extraction of clay. Clay extraction for the ceramic work in Itamatatiua is undertaken by the potters themselves, manually, in the Campo. Luisa said that a man who lived off the MA-106 between Itamatatiua and Bequimão also worked with clay, independently. ‘He wanted to come and extract from here as well’, said Dona Luisa, ‘but we didn’t let him and now he’s mad at us’. Luisa said she knew that the area where this man used to extract clay from had now dried out.

Unlike the manual clay extraction of the women of the Centre, or that of Zé Elias, removing only the quantity needed for their small-sized, artisanal, production –closing the pit (*barreiro*), and allowing time for the earth to recuperate– that man, like those who cut the mangroves, used machines that violently and abruptly emptied the land of its clay leaving a wasteland behind. ‘And he wanted to do the same in Itamatatiua!’, said Dona Luisa with astonishment. The ceramicists opposed the wishes of the man (even as he promised to financially compensate for the extraction) and did not allow him to do so as they knew ‘it would end with what’s ours’, as Dona Luisa said. ‘Someone had already done this in the past’, she explained to me as I was hearing all that for the first time, ‘and he opened a hole too big and too deep for the clay to ever recover again. So we knew exactly what was going to happen if he came with excavators’, Luisa concluded. Duduca agreed that such processes ‘exhaust the clay’ (*acabam com o barro*) and that only the manual process, as currently undertaken according to experience built over generations, could allow for the continuation of clay work locally; ‘otherwise it will soon be over’, she added.

Tensions on the Saint's land: Outline of a problem

On a hot August morning in Itamatatiua, the Centre for Ceramic Production was bustling with people who had come to attend a community meeting. The theme mostly discussed on that occasion, was that of public security; namely the problem of assaults¹⁰⁰ that had been occurring near the entrance (where the *ramal* meets the MA-106). In her address to the community, Dona Irene, who was organising that year's *feira* expressed her preoccupation with the expected turnout as people were asking her about those incidents in conversations she had in Alcântara and elsewhere. Many, she said, had expressed their uncertainty about attending the *feira* because they were afraid to walk along the *ramal*. 'May the Santa forgive me, but I feel so embarrassed to hear that about our community', Dona Irene told the residents gathered at the Centre.

Around that time, the assaults on or near the *ramal* had gained such a reputation that even people with little or no contact with the community knew about them. In a conversation I was having with *padre* William, the priest in the church of Carmo in Alcântara and former mayor of Guimarães,¹⁰¹ he asked me about the situation in Itamatatiua and argued that 'the *ramal* and the *sítio* are competing with each other'. He suggested that ever since the creation of the MA-106 and the easy access to towns nearby and the state's capital city via the port, a lot of 'bandits (*bandidos*) have sought refuge in Itamatatiua'. He then added: 'Those in the *ramal*, involved with drug trafficking and with all their connections with the city, make fast and easy money; while the others in the *sítio*, merely depend on subsistence production and social benefits'. Father William surprised me by reiterating a distinction many Itamatatiuenses made. By distinguishing 'those in the *ramal*' from 'those in the *sítio*', he was basically

¹⁰⁰ There was a period in 2015 when non-violent assaults were so frequent in that area that even the mail man refused to enter the community after being assaulted. The assaults ceased some months later after an incident involving gun shootings between gang members and the arrest, some days later, of some of the people involved.

¹⁰¹ Guimarães is a nearby municipality and one of the main urban areas of the Baixada Maranhense region.

following a common view in Itamatatiua according to which the (old) residents were the pacifist small-farmers whereas the ‘outsiders’ (new residents, since the community has been expanding from the *sítio* to the MA-106 through the *ramal*) were those creating all the trouble and ‘giving a bad name’ to the community.

During that same meeting, the problem of drug trafficking right at the entrance to the community –for many done by the same people who mugged, and who were labelled ‘outsiders’ (*pessoas de fora*)– was also discussed. In his address, the son of Dona Irene and city councillor since 2012, Ribinha stressed that Itamatatiua was but one big family and everyone should try to apply the family values of unity and respect on a daily basis. He concluded by urging the community to take collective action to solve this problem. ‘We can’t be afraid to walk in and out of our community. All of us together, *as a family*, we need to stand our ground’, Ribinha said.

But exactly how big is the family of Itamatatiua? Or, inverting the question, who is not part of this family? For the Catholic residents of the lands of Santa Teresa, the family of Itamatatiua is comprised of all the Saint’s children: the descendants of the founding family and, by extension, all Catholics who inhabit the Saint’s land and abide by her rules. However, religious affiliation, as acknowledgment of one’s attachment to a religious community, is ‘simultaneously [an] articulatory and marginalising’ (Burdick 1998: 7) practice that aggregates some while it alienates others. According to Itamatatiua people, the ‘outsiders’ – whether Evangelicals or not– who ‘do not respect’ the customary land law, do not see themselves, nor are they seen by Catholics, as part of the family of Itamatatiua.

When talking with two Itamatatiuenses in their home in Itamatatiua da beira da estrada (see Map 9) they expressed w(e)ariness of community politics. From their point of view, most politics that took place in Itamatatiua revolved around the families of Neide and Irene, which they saw as forming a closed group with which residents from outside the *sítio* had little

involvement. They also felt that most projects brought through the Association were decided among them and ended up benefiting only those who were directly related and not those who lived in more remote areas of Itamatatiua. I questioned the way they presented decision-making in the community as being essentially discussed between the two families and asked why they were not participating in the meetings that were taking place at the Centre. They told me they would either not be informed about them in a timely manner or, when they were, they would sometimes abstain because ‘with the frequency they are being called off’, they did not want to risk going ‘all the way to the *sítio*’ (where the Centre is) for no reason.

As a matter of fact, last-minute cancellations of community meetings were not a rarity. Either because some syndicalists from Alcântara could not attend after all, or because the date coincided with something else that needed to be prioritised, meetings were frequently called off at the last minute. Nevertheless, not only were community projects addressed to all residents of Itamatatiua, but, as far as I know, there has never been a project that exclusively benefited any particular family. In fact, my two interlocutors had participated in the past in skills-learning workshops that were organised at the Centre. Also, one of them, together with her mother, had worked for a period in Itamatatiua’s guesthouse (when it received funding from a federal project), and the other’s sister and mother had both been presidents of the community’s association (AMI) in the past. Furthermore, most of their family members had themselves benefited from the housing project that was implemented in Itamatatiua and constructed 50 houses. Why then were they feeling excluded from community politics?

Neide and Irene are commonly referred to, and act, as ‘community leaders’. Neide, by virtue of her role as land custodian and (current) President of the Itamatatiua Women’s Association, and Irene, by virtue of her engagement in the community’s cultural life and due to her son, Ribinha’s, role as a city councillor. The two women have strong involvement in Itamatatiua’s religious life and kin ties that go back to the first land custodians of the community (Irene’s

paternal grandfather, Crispim, was Eurico's brother). The family of my interlocutors in the outskirts of Itamatatua, on the other hand, is not directly related to the 'founding family'. Furthermore, in recent years, a great part of their family has converted to Evangelical churches. 'Most families that live by the MA-106 are Evangelical', one of them said.

Thus, social inclusion and exclusion, besides taking a spatial dimension as discussed already, also take a religious one. Indeed, as residents often observe, the *sítio* continues to be the kin/religious enclave it used to be, whereas the further one moves away from this core the looser kin and religious relationships with Santa Teresa and Itamatatua are. The two factors, discussed next, are indicated (mostly) by Catholics as the main reasons behind the weakening of the Saint's influence outside the *sítio*.

Population growth

The growth of population in recent decades is being commonly identified as one of the major reasons tensions have arisen in Itamatatua, and the lands of Santa Teresa more generally.

The very increase in numbers is thought to have resulted in an inevitably loose management of the shared territory. The encroachment of 'outsiders' and/or Evangelicals, and the consequent conversion of many residents of the Saint's land, have contributed to the disintegration of the old family ties within and outside the community. Direct consequences of this are the 'lack of respect' for land regulations by many –especially new– residents, and lack of effective control over the natural resources and residents' actions with regards to the collective land.

Tracing the role of the land custodian, widespread among Alcântara's *quilombos*, Almeida shows that the first *encarregados* were typically recruited among the enslaved who were closer to the *casa grande* (the colonist's house). Assigned by the landowner to act as their

right hand, the land custodian was in charge of administering the land (Almeida 2006: 115).

The trust entailed in this assignment did not prevent land custodians from leading insurrections as ‘the holders of this administrative function were simultaneously mediators and leaders of the communities’ (Almeida 2006: 148, 198).

Even though the, sometimes interventionist, role of federal and state governments (for example deciding upon the legal status of the land) has often caused disruptions to the role of the land custodian and their authority over land issues (Almeida 2011: 154), in Itamatatua this role has continued –apparently uninterrupted– for generations. As Müller (2005) has observed for the *quilombo* she worked with in the State of Rio Grande do Sul, in Itamatatua too, ‘the logic of descent’, according to which the genealogical line is directly linked to ‘the “time of the ancients” in the “land”’, profoundly connects ancestry to locality (2005: 39).

According to some narratives, the role began with Crispim de Jesus, older brother of Seu Eurico and paternal grandfather of Irene, Maria dos Santos, Maria dos Anjos (ceramicist), and Amaral (husband of Ângela also a ceramicist and former president of the AMI). It was allegedly he who, in 1878, was directly given the engraved stone that bestowed upon him the duties of the control over the land. Maria dos Santos, Ceci, and some other residents, suggested that the first land custodian might have been Primo, or even Marcelino, who then passed the role to Crispim’s son, Roque de Jesus (and father of Maria dos Santos). After some time Roque would have then passed his duties to his father Crispim. After Crispim, everyone remembers, his younger brother, Eurico, took over the duties of land custodian. When Eurico got older, he transferred his duties to his only son, Tolentino. Due to an accident that took his life unexpectedly, however, his sister Neide became the first woman to take this role.

In one of our conversations about what the community used to be like when their father was still alive, Pirixi, Neide’s sister, told me that the *sítio* used to have very few houses which

were essentially all kin. ‘The families would reproduce from within’, she said, ‘only later did a family of Whites from Boca da salina move to the *sítio* and build a house where the guesthouse is found today’. The population went on increasing and the community was expanding on every side as more and more houses were being built. As years went by, the families would not only ‘reproduce from within’ but would marry with people from outside the community as well. Others, with distant, or no, kin ties to Itamatatiua would also add to the population and today Itamatatiua is not the strictly consanguineous community it used to be. Since the construction of the main asphalt road, MA-106, in the 1970s, transportation was eventually substituted almost entirely by vehicles. As MA-106 is only a short 2km walk from the *sítio*, houses begun to appear along the *ramal*, as well as along the MA-106. Eventually the area between the *sítio* and the MA-106 grew so much, that it became an extension of Itamatatiua and part of the community itself.

The community is no longer comprised of a few families, and there is a growing need for plots of land where new houses can be built. Given that the MA-106 is the main artery linking the towns in the region with the port and the capital, there is a lot of movement. More and more people want to live by the main road so they can have easier access to towns. The constant flux of people between Itamatatiua and urban centres –especially São Luís– has accentuated tensions over land (mis)use. Houses started to pop up around, and on the two sides of, the main road (*beira da pista*). There too, or rather there especially, houses have been built without Neide’s consultation. Plots of land and houses ‘left behind’ by people who migrated to an urban centre are a point of dispute between those who need a plot to build their own house on the one hand, and relatives of the people who no longer live there but wish to maintain the houses and plots for their potential return to the community, on the other. Population increase is causing a lot of tension in the community, since despite land

regulations, some individuals claim ownership of areas they fence out and wish to sell to anyone interested.

Individuals from Itamatatua as well as outsiders, illicitly buy and sell plots of land creating a situation that seems to be at odds with what has been happening so far. Residents frequently complain about this problem that they see as increasing. Rose, who splits her time between São Luís and her mother's house in Itamatatua da beira da estrada, told me about a resident who had been selling land to outsiders –including Brazilians from other states. 'It's not only that he has been selling land that does not belong to him', said Rose, 'but on top of that, he has been selling at an absurd price that nobody from the area can ever afford. This is clearly an investment plan he has so that he keeps selling property, each time increasing his earnings, and without asking anyone about it', she continued evidently annoyed.

When talking with Dona Luisa about *quilombo* land demarcation, she mentioned that some years ago, the ITERMA¹⁰² visited Itamatatua for topographic research. 'But they always say that the ITERMA never has any resources, never has money for anything', she said justifying why that visit did not yield any results.

When they came, they said that this land was untouchable. After the *discriminatória* nobody could fence in an area. They even impeded building a house, right? But there are still some who fence in [land] anyway, over there on that side [making a hand gesture to the north] ... those who build their houses along the highway. There is one guy who has fenced in two immense areas ... over there, towards Goiabal. He has fenced off two big plots of land over there. So this is what they do...they form a barrier around an area and when people approach them they want to sell that land.

¹⁰² Colonisation and Land Institute of Maranhão is an organisation attached to Maranhão's state government.

On an afternoon walk with her sister, Pirixi, they were looking at unused plots of land on either side of the *ramal*. Luisa then remembered that Chuchuca, one of the younger daughters of Domingas, had been looking for a place to build her new house (that was part of the second round of a federal housing project implemented in Itamatatiua) and that nobody was willing to give away a plot. Luisa and Pirixi stood in front of a small plot and thought it would be perfect for Chuchuca. ‘I can sell it to her’, said the man who claimed to own it. Luisa responded: ‘Sell it? Land is not for sale. Land is to live on’. ‘And you know what he said?’, Dona Luisa lowered her voice as she was telling me the story: ‘Well, most of this land is fenced out. I want to see you removing all this wire from all of it and giving that land away’. Luisa and Pirixi stayed silent and walked away. ‘When the government comes and asks all of you to show your land documents then I want to see what you’ll all do ... going around selling this land... I didn’t tell him, I was just thinking to myself, you know? When they [the government] will ask who has documents and who hasn’t, then we’ll see, right?’, continued Luisa with a contained smile.

Much like her younger sister, Neide shares Luisa’s trouble about the growing need of residents to secure a plot where they can build their houses. At the same time, large areas are illicitly being controlled by a few individuals who are not willing to abide by land regulations (as prescribed both by the Saint and the Land Identification Act, and as it is typically the case in a *quilombo*) and wish to sell that land or keep it to themselves. Neide said concerned:

We need to see what we can do about all that. These people hold much land and they don’t want to give up a part of it for others to build their houses. They should let go of some land for those who need it, right? The population is growing. And the land is nobody’s in particular. The land belongs to all the people. Where they have their goods planted, where they have put work on the land, or something, then it’s a different thing. But when it is just bush and nobody is using the land, then they must give it to someone else. Isn’t that right? There are many young people who have their families now and need to build their houses. But there are people who, just because they feel like it, they

fence out an area just to sell to other people. They don't take away this land because they need to use it, you understand?

And also, there is the right to the forest (*o direito na floresta*). The forest is very rich and the older people used to preserve it. It is a large area. When we need to cut some wood for some purpose, to build a house, or something like that, there is an area reserved for this purpose. But there are people who cut trees to sell the wood. These people seem to want to end with the forest once and for all. It used to be such a rich forest...at the time of the elders...nobody would abuse it like that (*ninguém estragava*). They would only take what was necessary. They wouldn't cut trees just to sell [the wood]!

Neide seemed particularly worried with the non-conscientious use of natural resources, which appears to be increasing alongside the population. Exploitation of natural resources, such as illicit logging and slash-and-burn agriculture on river banks, has had major consequences, in recent years, the most conspicuous one being the river drought. As Neide herself admitted, these practices are no longer as regulated as much as they used to be 'at the time of the elders'.

Criticism of Itamatatua's political leadership are not so rare – especially when one moves outside the *sítio*. Targeted, are typically Neide (as land custodian and president of the AMI) and Ribinha (as city councillor –hence with a supposed greater formal political influence) for what some perceive as lack of action. Some attempt to discuss matters with them personally. Others, try to bring issues they deem important up for discussion at the community meeting. Before a community meeting that had been called by the Rural Workers' Union (STTR) of Alcântara, for instance, Seu Chico was talking with Dona Neide suggesting that the issue of land grabs and unapproved construction should be addressed at the meeting. One of the women who had recently built a house without consulting Neide and the community was present at the meeting and Chico insisted she should be confronted publicly about it. Neide did not discuss the issue on that occasion. Ceci, Neide's oldest sister, later commented that 'if

Neide had the support she ought to be having by the STTR, she would be confronting these issues more directly. But the STTR is informed and no action is being taken', she said.

What Ceci was touching upon were concerns about the way Neide has been handling land and other issues that fell under her jurisdiction as *encarregada*. Luisa often said that many people took Neide less seriously in this role because she is a woman, unlike all previous *encarregados* who had been men. 'They don't have the same respect; these things never happened at the time of my father', said Luisa about those people who trespass, fence off areas, or build houses without consulting with the land custodian. 'We don't get any support from the municipality or the police. In the old days, even the police would interfere when they called them about a trespassing', she added. For Luisa, lack of respect towards the land custodian for being a woman, together with the lack of support from local authorities, have resulted in the present situation where trespassing and land misuse are becoming ever more frequent. 'Neide cannot do much about it because there is not much support; neither from the authorities, nor from residents', Luisa said disheartened.

Zé Roxo had said something in a similar vein. Although he did not mention any police involvement when dealing with trespassing in the past, insisting instead that it was usually 'the people alone' who would unite to take action against land predators, he maintained that 'Neide is a woman and...you know how it is. Back then, Eurico, Tolentino, Lorentino, they...were more rigid. Now Neide is in charge. It seems that things now are more loose, things are not how they used to be. Because before...hmm...no one dared to...' he said without finishing the sentence. But for Zé Roxo, there were many other things that had changed as well (my emphasis):

Clearly things have changed a lot [from the time of Seu Eurico] and people don't *respect* as much as they used to. But today there are also more people. One does one thing, the other does another. The only thing you can be sure of is that they are ruining everything. The community has grown. It is not as *united* as it used to be back then, when Eurico

managed to *mobilise everyone* and had a group always ready to protect the territory with the same fervour as he [would]. ... Now, outsiders, or younger people, they do not really care about these territorial duties because they think it is a thing of the past. The *crentes* don't care because *they don't recognise saints and so they don't recognise* [the concept of a] *saint's territory either*.

Zé Roxo appears to be longing for the time when Itamatatua was under the inspiring and unifying leadership of Seu Eurico while he also seems rather understanding of the complexity of current dynamics and the specific issues Neide has to tackle. Some others, typically those deemed 'outsiders', take a more critical stance and want the family 'dynasty' to end and residents to be able to do anything they like within the territory of Santa Teresa. Yet for others, who do not feel repressed by the concentration of administrative power in the hands of certain families, these criticisms come from people who stay at a distance and are not engaged with the life in the community. 'Many of those who say these things haven't even lived here for long', said Dorete and continued: 'or they go away and when they return they prefer to complain and criticise rather than giving a hand'.

On a last remark, with mixed pessimistic and optimistic overtones, Zé Roxo said: 'Well, I say it's a good thing we still have somewhere to plant a few roots. There is still land to grow things, there's still a lot of area for those who need to grow...there's still place for those who need to make a small house, right? There still is...but there used to be so much...*she* used to have so much land, just so much...' (my emphasis).

The Evangelicals

‘So how about that issue with the Evangelicals?’ asked Socorro when we were sitting in her office at the Secretariat for Racial Equality in São Luís. The question was addressed to Denise, daughter of Neide, who was sitting next to me and across the table from Socorro. Sérvulo Borges, local social movement leader, was sitting on our right. We were all there that morning for a meeting about an agricultural project that was going to be implemented in some *quilombos* and Itamatatiua was one of them. But Socorro, knowing Itamatatiua and Neide personally for many years during which they have collaborated closely, wanted first to catch up on the latest news.

She was referring to a recent incident that had especially affected the women of the Centre, but had also deeply disturbed the community as a whole. After a large evening worship – attended mostly by members of the Assemblies of God from nearby communities – at the makeshift Pentecostal church in the house of pastor Juniel in Itamatatiua, the women who went to work at the Centre the following morning were appalled at the sight of a large piece of graffiti on one of the walls that read: ‘The Saint is an idiot’.¹⁰³

Tensions that were simmering under the good-natured communication between the Evangelical family and Itamatatiua’s leadership reached, at that moment, a new limit. With the serenity that characterise Luisa and Neide, and without any sign of aggressiveness, the women decided to discuss the incident directly with the pastor and his wife who denied having anything to do with what had been written on the wall. What was on the mind of several Itamatatiuenses for a long time suddenly became an urgent matter: how were they to deal with the Evangelical presence in their community?

¹⁰³ In Portuguese it read: ‘A Santa é uma idiota’. It was written with red paint on one of the walls of the communal oven house (*casa do forno*) where the potters work their larger pieces and which is attached to the grounds of the ceramic centre. This wall is also the one situated closest to the church/house next door, connecting through the backyard.

The graffiti incident highlighted once again the connections between Evangelicals and issues of land. After several discussions between local political leaders and other members of the community, Neide called the Palmares Foundation (FCP) to ask for advice. Since Itamatatua has been officially recognised as *quilombo* territory since May 2006, the representative of Palmares on the phone assured Neide, land pertaining to the community could not be sold or purchased by any given individual or other interested party but belonged exclusively and collectively to the community of Itamatatua. According to this, they had the right to pursue the issue legally and question the legality of the property purchase by the Evangelical pastor.

A few days later Neide sent a letter to the FCP where, in her role as ‘community leader’ as she signed the letter, she formally addressed the issue previously discussed over the phone. The problem outlined in relation to the Evangelical family did not, of course, include any mention of the wall incident (since they could not prove the family’s involvement in it) but listed instead the fact that they held worship (*cultos*) using microphones and loud speakers from which they also played loud music at any given hour of the day. Neide underlined that this was impeding the work of the ceramicists at the Centre which is attached to the house/makeshift church. Furthermore, the letter mentions that the women of the Centre have felt ‘disrespected’ by the pastor for not having communicated to, or asked permission from, Neide in order to do any of these. Neide also mentions that to her efforts to reach an agreement that would satisfy both parties, the pastor responded by saying that he would have his lawyer take care of any claim the community might have ‘something that sounded like a form of intimidation and affront’. In closing the letter, Neide urged the Palmares and the Secretary for Racial Equality to ‘help in the resolution of this matter, before the church is built and we are therefore unable to do anything against it’ (written communication to the FCP, 2016). Palmares did respond to Neide’s call offering to provide legal support to the

community in order to handle the issue. Neide felt she was stepping on thin ice. After thoughtful consideration, she decided not to pursue the matter any further.

Socorro looked somewhat disappointed at the news. She reminded Denise that since the community is a *quilombo* territory the only thing people could sell was the house itself and not the land. That is, the material property and the work put into the construction of a house and perhaps even the produce of any cultivation, but under no circumstances could the land itself be appropriated. Any documents presented showing a purported purchase of land within the community were not legal, she insisted. Denise, of course, knew all that very well. And so did her mother. Neide's decision not to pursue the matter legally, however, was not based on any uncertainty about her rightful claims as the legal representative of the community, but on weighing up the situation and fearing it might entail unfavourable consequences for the Catholic community and the land custodian's family in particular.

If she was to pursue the issue further, as she and several others from the community wanted, she would directly confront the Evangelicals and all their allies. And open confrontation with the particular Evangelical family would equal a declaration of war with the entire Evangelical community of Alcântara. And that did not seem like a great idea to her. 'Why not?', I naively asked her sister, Luisa, at some point. After a small pause, she tried to break it down to me: 'You see, these people are very well connected, and they have a lot of power. And they can do stuff to people'.

I had heard such views before. In conversations I had with people in Itamatatua and other communities in and beyond Alcântara, I had heard of Evangelicals having 'a lot of money' and support from economically robust churches and political allies, and that many of them were involved in 'shady business'. Of course, it is not my place to suggest that any of these allegations in Alcântara, or elsewhere, are true. It is important to understand, however, that such ideas circulate widely among Catholics in the communities and the urban centre of

Alcântara. Although many people would privately express their displeasure or frustration with the vandalism at the Centre, which they were certain people attending the worship had committed, very few were willing to stick their neck out and publicly support legal action against the pastor and his family. Neide felt alone in this. She did not have the active popular support she would need if she was to pursue the matter any further. Therefore, she decided to leave the issue there; at least for the time being.

The presence of Pentecostal churches (especially of the Assemblies of God), has been growing significantly in rural Alcântara over the past five years, reshaping and reconfiguring the religious map of the area. Of the 21,851 women and men who comprise Alcântara's municipal population, according to the latest national census (IBGE 2010), 12,578 declared themselves to be Roman Catholics (and 80 Brazilian Catholics), 4,570 Evangelicals of all denominations and 4,623 declared themselves to be non-religious.¹⁰⁴ From the Evangelicals, 3,643 said they were affiliated with the *Assembleia de Deus* (Assembly of God) Pentecostal church. Seven years after the last census, and following Araken's period in office (2012-2016), one can safely assume that the number of Evangelicals has increased since 2010.

Although no Pentecostal church has been built in Itamatatuiá so far, other communities that are part of the Saint's land have already seen an *Assembleia de Deus* being constructed in their *quilombo*. Juniel and Regina, the pastor and his wife who hosted the worship the night before the vandalism at the Centre, had first arrived in Itamatatuiá in early 2013, together with their five children, from a town in the west of Maranhão. They settled at the old house

¹⁰⁴ According to the 2010 census, 0 (zero) residents in the municipality of Alcântara declared any so-called Afro-Brazilian religion, such as Umbanda, Candomblé, or Tambor de Mina as their religion. Given that I have personally attended ceremonies of the latter in Alcântara (Tambor de Mina is a relatively popular religion in Maranhão – see, e.g. Ferretti, S. 1996, Ferretti, M. 2000, and Ahlert 2011, 2016 for Terecô, a variation of Tambor de Mina), I would not rule out the possibility of residents having concealed any affiliations to Afro-religions from the census's questionnaire. On practices of hiding Afro-religiosity, see, indicatively: Bastide [1960] 1989: 219-240, Fry 1977. Martinho, a friend from Alcântara and student at the local IFMA, is currently writing his undergraduate thesis on the Tambor de Mina religious cult in the *quilombos* of Alcântara, which is the first, to the best of our knowledge, academic work on this subject.

of Neide's grandmother, Luzia, and communicated that they wanted to spend a couple of months there to get to know the community. As months went by, the family continued to live in the same house and Juniel, a pastor in training for the Assembly of God at the time of arrival, started to host religious services in their new home.

Contrary to what is expected, Neide, as land custodian, had not been consulted about the family's arrival and their subsequent relocation to the house located in the heart of the community (*sítio*) and next to the Centre for Ceramic Production. Without her knowing, their arrival had been facilitated by one of her cousins, also a grandson of Luzia. As it turned out, the cousin had recently converted to Evangelical Christianity. When Neide together with some other members of the community (and the extended family) confronted the cousin and the Evangelicals about the legitimacy of a family of outsiders relocating to the *quilombo* without calling a community meeting or informing the land custodian, they argued that it was indeed legitimate since their grandmother's house had been sold to the Evangelical pastor. They presented what they claimed to be 'legal papers' proving the transaction and asked the community to accept the fact.

The alleged act of property sale inside the *sítio*, and especially to an outsider, caused great commotion in the community. At the same time, it became evident that Neide's cousin, who claimed to have 'legally sold' the property to the pastor, was actively encouraging the creation of an Assembly of God in the same property. For some, 'this had been the plan all along'. To use Chico's expression, the pastor's family had been 'planted' in Itamatatuiua with the purpose of evangelising the community. Also importantly, the family's presence within the *sítio* undermined the authority of Neide, since she had not been consulted and was not really being able to do much about it.

A delicate and wavering relationship between the Evangelical family and the rest of Itamatatuiua has been developing ever since. After an unsuccessful first attempt to construct

an Assembly of God in Bacurizeiro, the pastor announced to Neide that he wished to build the church on the site where his house is. Neide, having on her side the ceramicists of the Centre, tried to negotiate with Juniel, claiming that having an Assembly of God in the heart of Itamatatua and right next to the Centre would be highly problematic.

The women argued that, as ceramicists, they needed a quiet space to work and the loud worship, that created a deafening soundscape in the vicinities, disturbed their work. They also made clear that Itamatatua is a predominantly Catholic community, that Santa Teresa is their patron saint, and that having an Assembly of God only a few meters away from the church of Santa Teresa would, at best, be disrespectful. They suggested instead, that he build the Pentecostal church on the *ramal*, still within the limits of the community. Juniel did not like the idea and insisted that the church needed to be built in the *sítio*, right next to the Centre.

Pastor Juniel has found limited support within Itamatatua as, during the years of his stay in the community, only a handful of residents have regularly attended the worship. He has however been receiving the steady support of the Evangelical community beyond Itamatatua: members of Assemblies of God from other *quilombos* within and outside the Saint's land have regularly attended the worships held at his house/church in Itamatatua. For many of the inhabitants of the lands of Santa Teresa, religious affiliation is deeply ingrained in their shared territory. Furthermore, inhabiting the lands of the Saint entails a recognition of each community's history as one attached to that of Itamatatua. Given the intrinsic association of the shared territory with Catholicism in general, and Santa Teresa in particular, the decision to convert to Evangelical Christianity is not an exclusively religious one, but can be better comprehended when examined against socio-political dynamics and how the convert situates themselves within them.

On the one hand, and parallel to the classic Weberian thesis, the Protestant ethic has been tightly connected to capitalism and private property while Catholicism, in the 'true' Christian

spirit and to a large extent due to the legacy of liberationist Christianity, has popularly been associated with an ethic of sharing –especially in Brazil. On the other hand, one needs to acknowledge that Protestant churches have also historically been on the side of the poor and marginal (from their role in the US civil rights movement –see, e.g., Taylor 2002– to their contemporary growing popularity among working and lower-middle class Afro-Brazilians¹⁰⁵ –see, Burdick 1999, Jacob et al. 2003) while the Catholic Church has expressed competing views on private property and free enterprise (as prominently expressed in *Centesimus annus*) also spurring works in defence of a capitalist Catholicism (Novak 1982, 1993 Neuhaus 1992).

What then makes Evangelicals stand out as the main responsible party in the current land crisis in Itamatatuiua? For most Catholic *quilombolas*, the answer is obvious: Evangelicals have a different approach to land use compared to themselves. While they have a collective understanding of land appropriation, Evangelicals tend to privately appropriate land for their exclusive use. In a similar vein, Boyer (2002) observed that the main conflicts between Catholics and Evangelical converts in the Amazonian *quilombo* Silêncio do Matá, were due to the ‘collective ownership of land that the [residents’] association wanted to impose’ on the Evangelicals (Boyer 2002: 170). Although heavily associated with Evangelicals, private land in Itamatatuiua is not exclusively appropriated by them. Instead, the problem with Evangelicals seems to go deeper than that and acquire a distinct dimension: not only does it go against an established ethic of sharing, but it contradicts the axiom that the land belongs to Santa Teresa (hence it *already* has an ‘owner’) and that her children are there to *collectively* inhabit it and *not* to *individually* appropriate it.

¹⁰⁵ It is by now a generally accepted and well-documented truism that Evangelical churches resonate strongly among the urban working classes and, especially, the female Afro-Brazilian population. In other words, as it has been commonly said, the average Evangelical is not a rich White man, but a poor Black woman.

Nearly all Evangelicals profess not to believe in, or acknowledge, the existence of saints. From John Calvin's proclamation of the cult of saints as idolatry followed by the destruction of saint images and icons, to contemporary cases of religious intolerance (Soares 1990, Mariano 1999, Silva 2007), Protestant and Evangelical rejection of saints continues to be among the major dividing lines between themselves and Catholics. In the case of Itamatatua, this also seems to be a common reason justifying Evangelical trespass on collective land. If there is no saint, let alone holy land possession, then there is no bequeathal of any sort to the saint's 'children'. Hence, the land is 'up for grabs'.

Nevertheless, the graffiti incident seems to allow for a different interpretation. If those who wrote it wanted to provoke Catholics in Itamatatua they could have insulted anyone from the residents to the Saint, and the latter could have been achieved simply with a declaration of her denial. But they didn't write 'The Saint does not exist'. Instead they chose to insult the Saint by attacking *her*, thus acknowledging her existence. While many Evangelicals try to stick to the doctrine and declare they do not believe in Santa Teresa's or any other saint's existence, incidents like this one suggest otherwise. Evangelicals do not apparently deny the existence of the Saint but they deny her legitimacy to own land.

The majority of existing Evangelicals were raised Catholics and used to be extremely familiar with (if not necessarily believe in) the cult of saints. A recent conversion to a Pentecostal church may have thus urged them to denounce such 'false doctrine' but a socio-religious upbringing that affectionately celebrated the saints seems to vent through such semiotic oversights. After all, it is not so much the proclamation of the cult of saints as idolatry but Pentecostal individual claims to land that lie at the centre of tensions between Evangelicals and Catholics in the lands of Santa Teresa. Hence, the pivotal question is not whether the/any saint exists or not but whether she can own land. And for most Evangelicals the land

conveniently does not have the owner Catholics claim it has, as this would inhibit them from appropriating the land themselves.

For many Catholics, the insult to the Saint was directly translated into a question of land and ownership. Reacting to what they considered a blasphemous act of vandalism on their collective property against their patron saint and themselves, Catholics, represented by Neide, formally questioned the pastor's right to be on *quilombola* grounds in the first place. Assured that he has no legal right to claim ownership of the house he has turned into a Pentecostal church, residents of the *sítio* wished to, but ultimately did not, expel the pastor and his family from Itamatatua by proving the illegality of his purported land purchase.

Yet for others, such is the impact of land grabbing and the 'infiltration' of Evangelicals and outsiders (usually from nearby towns/villages), with their concomitant modifications in the way land is acquired, that they no longer see all lands of Santa Teresa as 'theirs' anymore. Dona Maria de Jesus, currently one of Itamatatua's eldest residents, contemplates: 'This land used to be enormous. Santa Teresa used to have so much [land]. But not anymore, only this little bit here [Itamatatua]'. Restricting the limits of the lands of Santa Teresa to Itamatatua, one of the few communities without a Pentecostal church, Dona Maria is making an implicit connection between religious affiliation and land denomination. In a way that I would become familiar with in the course of my fieldwork in Itamatatua, Dona Maria no longer considered as Saint's lands those areas occupied by Evangelicals. Put differently, the very use of land by non-Catholics, and, perhaps especially, Evangelicals, has a direct implication on the ownership of land, which the Saint is being denied. When the land of Santa Teresa is occupied by deniers of her right to land ownership, the land itself ceases to be property of the Saint and turns into just any (free) land. Zé Roxo remembers (my emphasis):

At the time I became aware of myself, it [the Saint's territory] stretched far away on that side ... all of that was hers; all, all, all, all of it. And today, not even half of it is left. But at that time, as I say, [there were] few people, everyone believed [in the Saint], everyone... 'she is the owner, she is the patron saint, she is the owner' ... and then, with this story...how many *crentes* don't they live here? And they go around saying '[a] *Saint does not own land. This is just scrubland*'.

Conversion: The children who leave the family

In the nearly four years since the Evangelical pastor moved in the community together with his wife and children, and despite tangible support by members of Assemblies of God from other communities and towns, and even local politicians (such as the former mayor of Alcântara), the church is yet to be constructed. Unlike the popularity of Assemblies of God in other *quilombos*, its installation in Itamatatiua has, so far, failed. Apart from a handful of people, almost all of whom had already converted to Pentecostalism and helped the pastor move in, Itamatatiuenses have firmly resisted becoming *crentes*. The pastor and his wife have visited nearly every house in Itamatatiua, inviting people to their worship and talking to them about their church. Benedita commented about these visits:

Oh, they've come here a lot. They told me to follow the *crente* law (*entrar pra lei de crente*) and what not ... that God would do this or that. I said no, God is already helping me. And always has. As long as I can be *caixeira* for Santa Teresa and serve the Saint, I will not abandon this law. I will die with my law and I am grateful.

Despite continuous proselytization, the pastor's efforts have largely been in vain. So what explains Itamatatiua's reluctance to convert to Evangelical Christianity? Answers to this question are, of course, plural and inconclusive. But the community's (and the *sítio*'s in particular) resistance to the advent of Evangelicals may be better understood if we take into consideration what many *quilombolas* perceive as affronts to their cultural and religious

‘traditions’ by Evangelicals. In great part, it seems to be their reaction to what they perceive as ‘provocations’ (*provocações*) and ‘lack of respect’ (*falta de respeito*) on the part of Evangelicals, together with a long, and consolidated, history of struggle and victory over land adversaries, that impel Itamatatiuenses to take collective action against this new threat. But there are more grounds for their persistence to Catholicism than that, and I will return to this point in the following two chapters. In what follows, I will focus on those who have chosen to embrace Pentecostal values and were admitted to a new religious family.

A well-discussed thesis in the anthropological literature on early Evangelical popularity in Brazil –especially among the working classes– has been that of the replacement community (see, e.g., Wulforth 1995: 11, Bobsin 1995: 22-25, 1992; Freston 1995). According to this, the disintegration of social networks in the country’s growing urban centres was especially felt by the multitude of recent rural migrants who formed the bulk of the growing working class. Facing anonymity and the harsh reality of working conditions in the city, many migrant workers reached out to Pentecostal and, later, neo-Pentecostal churches in search of a new community into which they would be integrated and ‘regain a name’, or recognition within a group.

Building upon this main argument about the search for a close-knit community and a sense of belonging, another thesis put forward has been that of the pursuit of equality in a socio-economic context characterised by deep inequalities. The possibility of equal belonging in the global community of God’s children on earth appeared for many a powerful alternative (Burdick 1999: 123-124). Sheila Rowbotham writes on the puritan, early ‘Protestant’, churches of 16th century Europe and their resonance among the poor female population: ‘within the self-governing religious communities of the puritan sect they found a certain limited equality and a larger scope for self-expression. Here the Lord could pour out his spirit to all alike’ ([1974] 2014: 23). Hence, the ‘alternative community’ the Evangelical Church

has to offer seems to greatly appeal to those who feel marginalised, have lost membership in previously existing groups, or who feel otherwise excluded from social dynamics.

Perhaps then, one may argue that for those people who often feel peripheral, disregarded or restricted by, or simply disagree with, the actions taken by the families in the *sítio*, conversion to a church that explicitly disregards both religious and territorial principles cherished by those families, can take the form of a political act of resistance. It is in their rejection of the *status quo* that they find refuge in a new community before God: the Pentecostal church. As Boyer (2003: 33) has phrased it: ‘adhesion to the Evangelical movement, whose discourse is averse to political claims, can appear as a means to express divergence from the leaders’ choices’. After all, ‘it is always by comparison with other competing ties that any group tie is emphasized’ (Latour 2005: 32) or, in other words, we are defined by what we are fighting against.

Residents of the lands of Santa Teresa who have no close ties, kin or otherwise, with the families of the *sítio* who formally and actually ‘represent’ the Saint and her territory (Pereira Júnior 2012: 117), may find it more difficult to identify and comply with the rules of the land custodian and the current religious and territorial status quo. This situation seems to apply most to the so-called ‘outsiders’ and to some younger residents who, as Zé Roxo said, think that such regulations ‘are a thing of the past’ and no longer have any value. Whether ‘outsiders’ or recent converts from within, residents who have converted to a Pentecostal church may also find difficulties in reconciling their religious affiliation with the idea that they are inhabiting the ‘lands of Santa Teresa’ or respect a supposed divine contract between her and the first residents. One may even argue that residents who used to have close ties with the leading families of the *sítio* but for whatever reason no longer do, may feel compelled to also distance themselves from the religion those families represent, though this

suggestion may be exaggerated. As mentioned earlier, however, some do experience the hereditary role and public involvement of those families as oppressive.

Seen in this light, it does not come as a surprise that the majority of my interlocutors, from Itamatatua da beira da estrada, who expressed feeling excluded from local politics, have in recent years converted to non-Catholic churches (mostly Jehovah's Witnesses –equally referred to as 'Evangelical' in Itamatatua). Similarly, Neide's suggestion for the Assembly of God to be built outside the *sítio* (on the *ramal*), appears logical. As a shrewd community leader and land custodian, she acknowledges the growing influence of Evangelical churches in the area and has come to terms with the fact that more Evangelical churches will be dotting the lands of Santa Teresa. She cannot do away with them but she can, at least, try to keep the core of the Saint's land free from their presence. After all, as Staeheli and Mitchell (2008) have argued, the ability 'to shape the constitution of the public, or to control the relations of property that make space accessible or not, is an exercise of power' (2008: 141). Neide's, and some others', hope is that when the official land titles are issued by INCRA she will have more leverage to compel disobedient parties to comply with the communal rules of land use.

The disintegration of a strong community feeling that was allegedly shared among Itamatatua's residents at the time of Seu Eurico (when the community was smaller and essentially kin-based only), does not seem to have affected the *sítio*. Despite certain criticisms, that perhaps show a healthy participatory democratic spirit at the level of community politics, the *sítio* appears to remain a stronghold of the past unity many residents allude to. Even if, according to the most pessimistic accounts, this unity has been largely dissolved outside the kin-based core of the Saint's land, it continues to stand strong within the *sítio* where religious/kinship ties also continue to be tight. And it is precisely this feeling of solidarity that impels them to join forces and come together as a 'family', as Ribinha highlighted in his address to the community, in order to tackle their common problems.

The right to property can be defined ‘as the right to exclude –the ability to determine who does and does not belong in a particular space’ (Staeheli and Mitchell 2008: 32). This is not unlike religious affiliation and the inclusion in, or exclusion from, a religious community. For many Itamatatiuenses and other residents of the Saint’s land, inclusion in and exclusion from the ‘family’ of Santa Teresa’s ‘children’ is circumscribed by religious affiliation which determines, and is determined by, land occupation. If one lives on the lands of Santa Teresa then one is necessarily a Catholic (or, at least, a Catholic sympathiser and respectful of the role of the Saint’s land custodian) by virtue of the agreement between the Saint and first residents and, conversely, if one is not a Catholic (or does not observe land rules) then one has no place in those lands.

Boyer (2002) has argued that the close relationship between the Black movement and the Catholic Church has created a religious discourse that leaves little room for Evangelicals. Even as a minority group within the predominately Catholic *quilombo*, she argues, ‘a religious group that rejects the cult of saints appears as a threat when the legitimacy of political engagement (the Black cause) is constructed through participation in the Catholic feasts’ (2002: 170). Although this view may overstress the correlation between religious life in the *quilombo* and national Black movement politics, it makes an important point by drawing attention to the ‘incompatibility’ of *Quilombola* and Evangelical identity as many (within and outside the *quilombo*) perceive it.

Put schematically, if a *quilombo* community converts to Evangelical Christianity it will most likely stop performing any ‘Afro-Brazilian’ or ‘*quilombola*’ cultural practices because these are often associated with ‘devilish’ acts, as will be further illustrated in Chapter Six. Given the still problematic process of land regularisation and its pertinacious need of tangible ‘proof’ of ‘*quilombola* descent’, this could potentially be harmful to any given *quilombo*’s land regularisation process. Reflecting on Gallois (2004), Boyer (2017) argues: ‘The process

of land regularisation generates “a context also favourable to the emergence of an ethnic identity”, since, as she illustrates, it was during the process of demarcating their IL [indigenous land] that the Wajãpi moved from “a non-centralised self-representation (without ethnic connotation)” to an “ethnic self-representation” reflected in the formation of the category “we Wajãpi” (2017: 395). There is nothing ‘ethnic’ about an Evangelical identity that prohibits dances and drum playing that is regarded as national cultural heritage and one of the most celebrated aspects of ‘Afro-Brazilianness’ in Maranhão (such as the *Tambor de Crioula*). How is a community even to be thought of as a ‘quilombo’, in the eyes of national land institutions, when it has made a total break with all cultural elements associated with *quilombola* culture after adopting a new faith?

As will be further examined in Chapters Five and Six, maintaining a religion that allows a wide range of cultural manifestations is directly pertinent to Itamatatiua’s struggle for the acquisition of collective land titles. Itamatatiua has been building an ever-growing awareness as a *quilombo*¹⁰⁶ and prides itself on its distinct ethno-cultural traditions. Especially in the past 15 years, the revamp of the ceramic practice and local acclaim for the performance of such dances as *Tambor de Crioula*, as will be showed in the next chapter, have contributed to the consolidation of a strong awareness of and pride in the community’s history and cultural heritage. This is not construed as separate from, but in connection and alliance with, the Catholic Church. In this case then, ‘Catholicism appears in its historical truth as a “movement” rather than a doctrine, a vast movement, thoroughly skilled in the art of assimilation, which creates anything anew but in which nothing is ever lost’ (Lefebvre 2014: 244). For many Itamatatiuenses Catholicism has provided, and continues to provide, a safe

¹⁰⁶ By that I mean a strong identification with a Black ethnic identity which has been shaped by the influence of Black and *Quilombola* movements over decades. Furthermore, Itamatatiua proudly identifies with the common characterisation of the community, by Alcântarenses, as a ‘real *quilombo*’ by virtue of its residents’ skin complexion being darker than in most other Alcântara’s *quilombos*. Residents proudly identify as ‘pretos’ and ‘pretos da Santa’, shaking off previously pejorative undertones of the word ‘preto’ (literally: black).

harbour for the preservation and continuation of a rich array of cultural and religious practices.

Ramon Sarró makes a compelling argument about the ‘alliance between Christianity and “custom”’ (Sarró 2008: 81) in his discussion of the Baga in Guinea. In that particular ethnographic context, and facing increasing rates of conversion to Islam, many Baga opted for conversion to Christianity since they felt that in this way they could better protect their religious and ethnic traditions. Unlike the ‘modernising force’ of Islam, in the context of Guinea, Christianity did not ban Baga rituals and other customs (ibid.: 78). All things considered, Catholic Christianity as practiced in places like Itamatatua, similarly transpires as a church that allows for relative freedom of religious and cultural expression against the strict prohibitions and rigid rules of Pentecostal churches. Also importantly, the political alliance between members of the Catholic Church and Afro-Brazilian movements (especially in the 1990s) in Alcântara also contributed to the creation of an imaginary whereby the Catholic church is defending and wishes to empower *quilombolas* and their cultural traditions. If Itamatatua turned Evangelical it would stop playing the drums of Santa Teresa, there would be no *Tambor de Crioula*, *Forró de Caixa*, or *Dança do Negro* and, of course, there would be no *feira* of Santa Teresa. It is in large part due to the influence of Black and *Quilombola* movements, as well as Marxist missionaries imbued with the ideas of liberation theology, that Itamatatua adamantly resists letting go of such beliefs and practices.

From the mid-1950s until the end of the 1980s, sectors of the Catholic Church in Brazil gradually embraced Marxist theories and worked hand in hand with the poor and underprivileged across the country. Particularly during the years of the military dictatorship (1964-1985), members of the Catholic church in Brazil were instrumental in the dissemination, especially in rural areas and the north-eastern Brazilian states, of what Michael Löwy (1996) has called ‘liberationist Christianity’: a socio-religious movement

deeply influenced by egalitarian and socialist ideas and values that later informed the body of writings called liberation theology. Among other things, it contributed to the emergence of a strong Catholic Black consciousness movement (French 2007, Burdick 1993). The then formed Ecclesiastic Base Communities (*Comunidades Eclesiais de Base* – CEBs) embraced critical pedagogical and Marxist theories and worked hand in hand with underprivileged groups across the country, contributing to the consolidation of a liberal political education, especially, among the rural poor in Brazil (Dullo 2013). They also importantly provided practical knowledge for political mobilisation having a strong influence on the ways *quilombolas* and other peasants voiced their concerns and organised in defence of their rights. The historical entanglements of the Catholic church and land rights in Brazil have, therefore, contributed to a consideration, still powerfully present in rural areas such as Alcântara, of Catholic faith as the only religious faith compatible with the *Quilombola* struggle. This position helps to reinforce the widespread feeling of an ‘Evangelical menace’ to *quilombo* territoriality, as seen in the lands of Santa Teresa and will be further explored in this thesis. For these reasons, and while some would welcome a harmonious co-existence of Catholics and Protestants, for many such a scenario is not viable. Benedita talks about the need for mutual respect: ‘We respect their law and they need to respect ours’. Dona Maria dos Santos, another resident of Itamatatiua, chooses to stand her ground firmly (my emphasis):

I always say, people, Santa Teresa works miracles. She is here because God left her. If he [God] did not want to, there would be no Saints. ... We need to have the *festas* of the Saints, you know? ... They [the Evangelicals] don’t accept these things. But everyone does what he wants, right? What he likes. For me this is how it goes. You stay in your place. *You like your community, then you stay there and we stay in ours, right?* This is how it is....

In this case then, respect also entails the acknowledgment of the impossibility of co-existence since one 'law' overlaps with the other. In discussing co-habitation, Bruno Latour heralded the replacement of time with space as 'the main ordering principle' arguing that:

The questions are no longer: 'Are you going to disappear soon?' ... An entirely new set of questions has now emerged: 'Can we cohabitate with you?' 'Is there a way for all of us to survive together while none of our contradictory claims, interests and passions can be eliminated?'

Latour 2004: 30

Itamatatiua would probably reply in a negative way to the above-mentioned question.

Cohabiting with 'contradictory claims, interests and passions' is extremely difficult. A specific religious identity is firmly ingrained in the lived territory. Throughout the history of the Catholic Church, patron saints have been entrusted with the protection of lands under their patronage (Christian Jr. 1972: 11-12, 181) and Santa Teresa's offer of land and protection to the people of Itamatatiua is the foundation of a widespread conviction, amongst Catholics, about the inherent religiosity of those lands. Conversion to a Pentecostal church would equal repudiation of the pact; cessation of devotion to the Saint and, consequently, disregard of the land regulations as implemented by Santa Teresa and carried out by the land custodian. Itamatatiua's distinctive land identification is pointed out by Catholic residents as the main reason why Pentecostal conversion has largely failed in their community. It is also why they argue that the co-existence of Evangelicals and Catholics is incompatible on the Saint's lands. For them, there is little room for plurality in the lands of Santa Teresa that need to remain hegemonically Catholic. Hence, many feel impelled to join forces and reassert sovereignty over their legitimately occupied territory.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the major problems in relation to land use and territory, as pointed out by Catholic residents of the lands of Santa Teresa. In conclusion, I argue that at the heart of Itamatatiua's land tensions 'lie differing ideas about the proper use of land, as well as land tenure' (Díaz 1996: 209). Even though Evangelical Christians are *not* the only ones who show 'disrespect' of local land regulations and curb the role of the land custodian when deciding to build their houses or cultivate land, they are identified by the majority of Catholic residents as the main transgressors on the Saint's land. Their presence is largely experienced as an intrusion and a direct violation of their collective lands rights.

When land ownership is intrinsically attached to the observance of a specific religion by its residents (in this case, Catholicism) then the maintenance of religious faith becomes imperative to the safeguarding of territory. In order to protect the intrinsic mono-religiosity of, and preserve their sovereignty over, the more than 50,000 hectares of the lands of Santa Teresa, while they await formal attribution of their communal land titles, Itamatatiuenses are actively involved in actions that help reinforce Catholicism in the Saint's lands and reassert their territorial rights. 'We need to defend what's ours, otherwise all will be lost' said Marinete, resident of Itamatatiua and former city councillor candidate. Many other residents share Marinete's resolve and feel that the community 'as a family', as Ribinha had emphasized in the community meeting, 'needs to work together' to resolve land tensions. It is in this spirit that the Catholic family of the lands of Santa Teresa comes together to reinforce its ties and manifest its presence on a territory that it is convinced belongs to it, but which becomes ever more tense and hostile.

In the chapter that follows, I will focus on 'social action' –defined by Weber (1961: 174) as the actor's behaviour that is meaningfully oriented to that of others– channelled through the production and communication of *quilombo* cultural heritage. In the final chapter, I will be

looking at ‘social action’, as ‘motivated by revenge for a past attack, defence against present, or measures of defence against future aggression’ (Weber 1961: 174), and channelled through participation in popular religious manifestations where ‘the so-called religious “circumscriptions” allow for an alternative mapping’ of *quilombola* territory (Almeida 2006: 170). In those instances, the ‘Catholic social’ cogently emerges and places itself (mainly) against the ‘Pentecostal social’ and everything it represents.

Chapter 5. **Children of the land**

I have previously explored a range of conceptions and appropriations of the term ‘*quilombo*’ in Brazil throughout different periods in history and among different groups of people, focusing especially on post-1988 uses and what Kenny (2013: 141; 2011) calls ‘taking on’ (*assumir*) a *quilombola* ethno-racial identity as a land reform strategy. In Chapter Four, I probed into the dynamics of political mobilisation as they emerge in the *quilombo* of Itamatatuiua. I followed the community’s political organisation in defence of territorial rights in line with the *Quilombo* Clause (Article 68) in Brazil –i.e. through community associations, workers’ unions, *Quilombola* movements, and government organisations. In other words, I looked at Itamatatuiua’s engagement with the relevant *quilombo* legislation through the legal means at their disposal.

The present and following chapters draw attention to *indirect* and subtler ways of engaging politically. Chapter Five looks at creative appropriations, by residents of Itamatatuiua, of what has come to be regarded as ‘*quilombo* cultural heritage’. It needs to be clarified that ‘creative appropriations’ here is not another term for ‘ethnogenesis’, a notion with which most *quilombolas* strongly disagree (see also Viegas 2007, among others, positing the same on indigenous groups). While ‘ethnogenesis’ is often part and parcel of the ‘ethnic fraud’ discourse levelled against indigenous and *quilombolas*, ‘creative appropriations’ solely indicate different uses of pre-existing categories, practices, and notions. Chapter Six looks at the aggregating and mobilising dynamics of religious capital at the local level. Both chapters aim to explore some of the ‘informal’ means of *quilombola* political engagement; first, by delving into grassroots strategies for recognition, raising awareness of, and campaigning for, their land cause (through their ceramic production); second, by looking into ‘protracted

grassroots organising in principled coalitions’ (Catholics united as children of Santa Teresa) ‘that bring power and pressure to bear on specific issues’ (West [1991] 2009: 565).

Although, as I will show in the course of this chapter, essentially all (older and new) cultural activities in the community –such as pottery, dances, music– are vested in notions of a distinct, Afro-Brazilian, ethnic heritage, this discussion will mainly focus on the local ceramic production. This is due to pottery being most regularly practised (on a daily basis), professionalised (with the creation of a centre for ceramic production), and arguably the most emblematic of Itamatatua’s *quilombo* cultural heritage (for reasons that will become clear later in the discussion).

By exploring the diverse ways local potters relate to, and communicate their relationship with clay and the ceramic objects they make, my aim here is to delve into an underexplored aspect of Afro-Brazilian heritage and identity politics, which is the employment of *quilombo* cultural heritage as a channel for the promotion of land rights.

I will be looking at the practice of pottery in Itamatatua in two main periods: as it was ‘in the old days’ (*antigamente*) –as the potters say when they refer to the time before the creation of the Centre for Ceramic Production of Itamatatua– and after the opening of the Centre, when pottery became ever more attached to notions of ‘*quilombo* heritage’. I will then explore some of the principal modalities through which potters, and the community in general, communicate their cultural production and what they perceive as their *quilombo* cultural heritage. This discussion aims at highlighting the central role land plays in all those processes and the profound attachment makers and non-makers alike express to their native land.

While I will occasionally be using the terms ‘artisan/s’ (*artesã/s*) in specific contexts, throughout this chapter (and thesis), I use the terms ‘maker’, ‘potter’, and ‘ceramicist’ more frequently, in reflection of the way the women talk about themselves and their work on a

daily basis. The term ‘artisan’ was mainly introduced after the creation of the Centre and while some of the makers do identify with it, only a couple of them are using it to refer to themselves or others. However, outsiders –especially collaborating shops and buyers– do make frequent use of the term and the makers in the community will also use it when talking with people from outside the community.



Picture 8: Clay figurines left to dry on a shelf. Note the truncated figurine on the left side.

The earth people and pottery are made of

One day, on one of the shelves where the makers leave their artefacts once ready, I noticed a truncated female ceramic figure with no facial features, hair, or headwrap, as usual, placed horizontally on her right side (see Picture 8 for a similar one). This, by Itamatatiua standards unusual, clay figurine was all painted black. I asked its maker to tell me how she had come up with the idea of making this one. ‘Oh, that was not my idea. A client asked me to make it like that’, she said and continued: ‘they wanted her dark black (*negrinha, negrinha*) but with no arms or hair’. From that moment on I began closely observing the kinds of artefacts made

by the women of Itamatatua. I began to realize that most pieces that were different from the usual ‘*quilombo* ceramic production’ were orders. What then gave these artefacts the Itamatatua *quilombo* cultural identity so skilfully and ardently imbued in the other pieces? I asked the makers about it and they all turned to clay for the answer. It is the *barro* itself that gives them their unique identity; ‘black just like us’, as the women frequently say referring to the colour of the clay. The form may change, and that does not really matter, because what ultimately makes an artefact unique, what makes it a product of the *quilombola* artisanal production, is that it is made by the women of the community using the black clay they unearthed from the land of Santa Teresa.

That clay, the women argue, is unique to the lands of the community; there is nowhere one can find clay like that. This perception of the quality of the clay is not only discussed when directly asked about the ceramic production’s most characteristic element, but it is also pronounced in casual conversations. Once I was asked if there were ceramics in my home country. When I said that there were, one of the women asked: ‘But the clay there is white, right?’ They did not care too much about the ceramic forms, but the first thing to ask about was the colour of the clay.

A strong identification transpires between the artisans, the clay they mould into ceramic objects, and the land from which that clay is extracted. They say they are created in, and from, this very land; the land Santa Teresa bestowed upon them, the land they inhabit and sustains them, the land that has been guaranteeing their freedom and social and cultural reproduction as the Black children of Santa Teresa since the community’s foundation. The makers see themselves in the clay, and feel they instil a bit of themselves in every piece they make. The clay, that has the same colour as they do, is what they themselves are made of and a piece of the community. For this reason, some of them are especially happy when they sell

some of their work to people from other states or countries. ‘In this way we travel with them. We see the world’, Nazaré, one of the makers told me.

The potters’ strong identification with Itamatatiua’s clay dialogues, in some ways, with myths of autochthony in other parts of the world. To mention two examples from Ancient Greece, the Athenian Erichthonios and the Spartans (*spartoi*, meaning ‘sown-men’) were thought to have been literally born out of their native soil. As Forsdyke (2012) shows, Athenians, by emphasizing their descent from earthborn¹⁰⁷ kings nurtured by Goddess Athena, were laying claim to the territory of Attica (see also: Tortorelli Ghidini 2015; for a discussion of contemporary political uses of notions of autochthony, see Geschiere’s 2009 comparative perspective on Cameroon and the Netherlands). In a similar fashion, the potters of Itamatatiua, by emphasizing their strong, essentially consubstantial, attachment to their native land, they are also adding weight to their land claims.

Notes on the shared corporality between potters and clay also bring to mind Karsten’s notes on clay uses and perceptions among the Jivaro of western Amazonia (discussed by Lévi-Strauss in *The jealous potter*). ‘This raw material has “a magical significance”’ (Lévi-Strauss 1988: 33); ‘the clay of which they [artefacts] are made, like the earth itself, is female –that is, has a woman’s soul’ (ibid.: 32; citing Karsten 1923: 12). In Itamatatiua, Santa Teresa’s ‘soul’, permeates through the earth and the living creatures upon it. She is firmly attached to her children and their land. In that sense, Santa Teresa, the divine matriarch of the people of Itamatatiua, is the land; the source of life itself.

¹⁰⁷ In Greek, two words were mostly used to describe a person thought to be earthborn: *γηγενής* (pronounced *yiyeńís* – literally: born from the earth) and *αὐτόχθων* (autochthon). The latter, originally only in plural, signified ‘a person indigenous to a particular country or region and traditionally supposed to have been born out of the earth, or to have descended from ancestors born in this way’ (OED, entry 13384).

Making ceramics in the backyard

No one among Itamatatiuenses can confidently say exactly when, or how, ceramic practice started in the community. Makers and non-makers alike agree that it is an old tradition, going back many generations to an unspecified time. Archival sources are also relatively silent about the influences, or the first input of knowledge of the practice, from which Itamatatiua's clay-work stemmed. It is known that the Carmelite *fazenda* Tamatatiua owned a brick yard (*olaria*). As it commonly occurred in such scenarios, it would be the *fazenda*'s enslaved people who would make bricks and roof tiles (Godoy 2004: 3-6, 21; Martins 2008: 29). It is not known, however, whether the *fazenda* also produced other artefacts out of clay, such as ceramic pots, plates, and stewpots. But it is not unlikely, since this production could provide enslaved people with necessary crockery for cooking and eating.

Today, the pottery once produced at the Carmelite *olaria* survives in the traces of shards of tiles scattered around the community; unearthed accidentally by residents when planting in their backyards or when the path to the water source gets flooded and scoops some of them up. At first, upon discovery, most Itamatatiuenses found the shards peculiar as they could not identify their source –they did not look like the ceramics made in the community. They eventually began to connect the uncovered fragments with the 'time of the slaves' (*o tempo dos escravos*); a past which, as discussed in previous chapters, lies largely remote, and dissociated from, the past and present of Itamatatiua.

Stories narrated by ceramic makers in Itamatatiua today emphasize that they acquired their skills by observing their mothers and grandmothers working with clay. The potters of Itamatatiua do not make bricks or roof tiles nor have memories or stories about making those artefacts. As mentioned in Chapter Four, there is an artisanal brick yard today in the community, owned and run by Zé Elias, that caters for Itamatatiua and areas nearby. It is worth noting here, and as Davi Pereira Júnior (2011: 43-46) diligently elaborates in his work,

the community's long-established association with the ceramic work produced by women, has entirely overshadowed this one-man ceramic production. However, another way to approach the apparent neglect for the tile and brick production, is that not only is it a job undertaken by a single person (and occasionally his assistant) –unlike the group work of the women in the Centre– but the fabrication of tiles and bricks have long been associated with slavery as enslaved people would commonly undertake such work (see, e.g., Dantas 2003 for brickmen and bricklayers of African descent in the Americas, Bowman 2008, Pinto 2015 for examples from the US, and Kenny 2011 making the case for Brazil). The artisanal ceramic production, on the other hand, does not usually come with such associations and corroborates residents' accounts of Itamatatua being founded as a free community. Indeed, the forms and techniques used to make Itamatatua's ceramics coincide with widespread perceptions of 'African styles', and traditions inherited by their African ancestors, without making an explicit association with slavery.

'In the old days everyone used to make crockery', the women commonly say when asked about how they acquired their ceramic-making skills. This is another undetermined point in time. In the course of my fieldwork in Itamatatua (and Alcântara in general) I learned that 'social time – a time defined by both formal relationships and daily interaction' (Herzfeld 1991: 6; citing Evans-Pritchard 1940: 107 and Bourdieu 1977: 5-8) is fluid and vaguely defined. But, if I wish to be more precise when I mention 'in the old days', I can follow the indirect traces given by some of my eldest interlocutors when they said that they first learned to shape the locally extracted argil into ceramic objects at the age of ten or eleven. Given that many of them are now in their mid-sixties, one can easily deduce that the time when 'everyone used to make crockery' can (also) be situated some fifty years ago. The oldest ceramicist in Itamatatua today, Dona Maria de Jesus, is currently in her late eighties. She

stopped making pottery some years ago because her vision was ‘no longer helping’ her, but vividly reminiscences about the old days:

We used to make so much crockery (*louça*). My daughters, from the age of seven I was putting them to make crockery ... we say that things are bad now, but before, there was no *Bolsa Família*, there was no state pension, we used to live only off [money from] this crockery. During the time of the *feira* of Santa Teresa, the ovens were never enough. There were a bunch of ovens, but they were not enough. People used to come from far away. People from São Luís, from São Bento, from Peri-Mirim, from Pontal. Many people would come to buy crockery here. It was from this and from the land (*roça*) that a family was sustained.

The ovens mentioned in Dona Maria’s account were situated in the backyards. And ‘there were a bunch of ovens’ because pottery, ‘in the old days’, used to be made by most women and involve nearly the entire community. The production and reproduction of knowledge of clay-work was situated in the backyard.¹⁰⁸ Gathered there, the women would mould clay into ceramic objects while men and children –especially female children– would also be assigned small tasks (see also Noronha 2015a: 72-74). The men and boys of the house, for instance, Dona Maria told me, would often polish ceramic objects to make their surface smooth before a firing. They would also fetch firewood for the ovens. The young girls would usually be assigned more creative, yet manageable tasks so they could start learning from an early age.

The women commonly gathered together and helped one another through a co-working system based on time exchange. In this case, a woman would call another to help her based on neighbourliness, friendship, as well as her skills and expertise. Working together would not only allow one to make more ceramics in less time, but also to socialise while working. The person who lent her time would then receive the help (and time/company) of the person she had helped. This work exchange system did not involve monetary transactions and was

¹⁰⁸ On the *quintal* as place of knowledge-making, see: Pereira and Almeida 2010.

used to enhance ceramic production and facilitate knowledge exchange (Pereira Júnior 2011: 24, 2012: 27-28). A similar system is used for work in the fields.

Itamatatiua's pottery at the time was in great demand. Before the advent of metal and plastic water containers, the ceramicists would meet the great demand for water storage in the area supplying ceramic pots. Such was the demand that 'we used to take out the pots while they were still hot in the oven', Canuta, one of the makers, told me. According to accounts of residents and non-residents alike, nearly all village communities between the towns of Alcântara and Pinheiro, in the Baixada Maranhense, would depend on Itamatatiua's ceramic pots for carrying and storing water.

Many of my interlocutors in Alcântara told me that Itamatatiua was one of the two *quilombos* that were well known in the town, before the MA-106 connected Alcântara with other towns and village communities in the Baixada in the late 1970s. Itamatatiua's fame, according to them, was due to the *feira* of Santa Teresa on the one hand, and the production of ceramic pots on the other. As Seu Jonas, a 73-year-old resident of Alcântara, told me, Itamatatiua was 'famous' all across the county because it was:

...where they made pots, artefacts that were not *artesanato*. They used to make utensils for domestic use. *Artesanato* is what they make today. But back then they were utensils for domestic use that they were bringing to Alcântara...it wasn't on a donkey's back, no. They were bringing [the artefacts] here in canoes...it was a crazy [sic] physical labour to get here...all this for them to sell here. They used to sell in all this region.

Navigating the intricate fluvial networks that connected rural communities with each other and with nearby towns, was a fundamental part of the male area of knowledge (Funes 2015). As we saw, women used to occupy –as they still do today– the role of the pot maker. Men, on the other hand, used to have the role of the pot vendor (one they no longer have, since the female potters are also managing the sale and distribution by themselves today). Once the

pots were out of the oven, men would load them up in the canoes that were in dock in one of the two small ports that used to exist in Itamatatiua. Paddling through the salt-water inlets (*igarapés*), they would transport them to nearby and distant areas of the Baixada Maranhense. Once at their destination, they would either sell them directly to customers or to local retailers. The involvement of both women (production) and men (distribution) made Itamatatiua's ceramic work an essentially communal activity.



Picture 9: Pots of Itamatatiua.

'If only we could sell these pots as easily as before', said Ângela in a nostalgic tone in one of our conversations. When plastic and metal bottles were introduced to the local markets at affordable prices, the demand for ceramic pots started to drop significantly until it virtually

disappeared. Unlike ceramics, the new commercial alternatives were more resistant and lighter to carry. The women and men of Itamatatua quickly realised that there was no market for their pots anymore, and that their main source of revenue had been exhausted.¹⁰⁹ In the years that followed, and until the opening of the Centre for Ceramic Production of Itamatatua in 2005, most women stopped making ceramics, dedicating themselves to other daily activities, and most men returned to artisanal fishing and smallholder farming.

Luisa was one of the few women who never stopped making pottery. She would sometimes work on her own in the old communal oven house (*casa do forno*)¹¹⁰ that nobody was using. She says she has always loved making ceramics, and since she was not married, nor had children, she was able to find more time for pottery than most women. Eventually others would join her there and not much later, they started gathering regularly in the old *casa do forno* to make ceramics and spend time together. After all, clay-work used to be and remains an essentially social activity, and an opportunity for getting together and talking. It may have been Luisa's unabating love for clay-work that invited other women to join her (to keep her company and because they also liked pottery even if they were not able to sell their work) and continue the practice, but once back to making ceramics (time, again, unspecified), the women realised they needed a change. Since their artefacts could no longer be used, they could, at least, decorate.

¹⁰⁹ As seen already, Itamatatua is based on subsistence agriculture, extractivism, and artisanal fishing. Residents also heavily rely on conditional benefit programs (such as the *Bolsa Família*) with the main income-generating activities being the sales from ceramics, animals, vegetable produce, and fermented manioc meal (*farinha*).

¹¹⁰ *Casa do forno* (also known as *casa de farinha*) is an open-air oven compound where fermented manioc meal (*farinha d'água* and *tapioca*) is roasted. These houses, essential in the production of this staple food across rural areas in Maranhão state and elsewhere in Brazil, are either collectively owned and run, or owned by individuals. In the case of the latter, they are commonly used by all community residents who, in exchange for the use of the oven, pay the owner with a part of the manioc meal produced. This open-air oven should not be confused with an oven where ceramics are fired.

As I will show next, the creation of the Centre for Ceramic Production of Itamatatiua marks the beginning of a ‘new era’ for pottery in Itamatatiua. Slowly at first, and greatly boosted with its opening, these women managed to (re)create a job for themselves and economic revenues for their families and, by extension, the community. Perhaps more importantly for our discussion, however, this ‘traditional’ practice was re-signified and gradually became intrinsically attached to notions of ‘*quilombo* heritage’. From the backyards of the houses the production was relocated to a community-owned workshop (*galpão*) that housed the Centre. There, the ceramics produced by the women of Itamatatiua would begin to lose the strictly utilitarian and commercial character they had for many years (pots for carrying and storing water), and acquire aesthetic and symbolic values linked to the community’s *quilombola* culture and history. Together with other cultural practices in Itamatatiua, pottery gained heritage-value and, hence, became an important channel for the dissemination of the community’s land struggle and their grassroots campaign for the final recognition of their collective territory.

An old practice under a new light: The Centre for Ceramic Production

The construction of the Centre, together with two other projects for the community (the construction of an artesian aquifer and a communal open-air oven house), were implemented through the FUMAC fund.¹¹¹ This was part of a wider Federal program run by the State Secretariat of Agrarian Development and Family Agriculture (SEDAGRO), which had as its main objective to fight rural poverty by means of generating employment and income.

I asked Luisa to tell me the story of the foundation of the Centre, a story she likes to tell with delicate and humble delight. ‘It’s very funny!’, she says and sits down comfortably, ‘You’re

¹¹¹ Municipal Fund for Community Support.

not going to believe how it happened'. It all started in March 2004 when Itamatatiua's ceramics were exhibited, for the first time, at a large fair of local artisanal production in Maranhão's capital city, São Luís.¹¹² Their participation in the fair, Luisa explained, was facilitated by Marilda's contacts there. Marilda is a former journalist who resides in Alcântara. Ever since she first visited Itamatatiua and discovered its ceramics, she has made several efforts to make the women's work reach buyers outside the community. Marilda currently runs *OCA: Residência Artística*, an open space for arts in São Luís, where she asked Itamatatiua's makers to participate with their work. Back in 2004, with her help, the Itamatatiua Women's Association (AMI) was registered to participate in the artisanal fair. Luisa, being the person most involved in the ceramic production at the time, represented the women of Itamatatiua by showing some of their ceramic work to the public. 'I was shying away from people', she said, 'it was so hard for me to stand there and talk about the ceramics to those asking; I wasn't used to all that at all'. But there she was, all proud and out of place at the same time. Worse still, given Luisa's timid side, Alexandra Tavares, the then state governor's¹¹³ wife, passed by their stand and stopped to have a closer look at the ceramics of Itamatatiua. Luisa said about that meeting:

She loved it! She was grabbing one piece after the other, looking closely and saying all the time how beautiful they were. She was asking where they came from, how was our community, what we did, how we did it, so many things. Then she asked, 'what is missing there?' ... 'Everything!', I exclaimed, 'there is nothing there!'.

Tavares promised to return the following day with her husband so he could also see their work and talk to Luisa. And so she did. On the last day of the fair, Alexandra Tavares

¹¹² The fair was a parallel event to the International Seminar on Gender Equality and Sustainable Development of Rural Territories that took place in São Luís from 23 to 26 March 2004. The seminar was co-organized by the Interamerican Institute for Agricultural Cooperation (IICA), the State Federation of Agricultural Workers (FETAEMA) and the State University of Maranhão (UEMA).

¹¹³ José (Zé) Reinaldo Carneiro Tavares, Governor of the state of Maranhão from 2002 to 2007.

returned together with José (Zé) Reinaldo and both went to the community's stall to speak with Luisa. After a few remarks on the ceramics and the artisans' skills, it was the governor's turn to ask Luisa: 'What is missing from your community?' Luisa gathered all the courage she had and said: 'Everything. Our community has nothing at all. People live in extremely poor conditions. We need piped water. And we could also use a centre for our association'. Luisa explained to me that during the dry season (or summer) potable water used to be a scarce resource in the community and residents needed to make great sacrifices in order to make sure they would not spend any days without water. Since the creation of the community's association (AMI), the women's top priority had been the installation of an artesian aquifer for the collection and distribution of water. Constructing a space where the production of ceramics could be housed and centralised, as well as a new communal open-air oven (*casa de forno*), were also at the top of their agenda.

The meeting with the governor turned out to be extremely favourable to the community and the participation in the fair more productive than anyone could have imagined. 'No more than twenty days later, people were sent to the community to take pictures of the site [where the artesian aquifer is today] and started making arrangements for the constructions [of the three works]', said Ângela de Jesus, at the time president of the Association. Never before had residents seen such an investment being made in their community or works being concluded so promptly. When the governor himself visited Itamatatua to inaugurate the constructions most residents could not believe their eyes. Ângela welcomed the governor on behalf of the community in a small inaugural celebration. In his speech, Zé Reinaldo stated: 'Through projects in the area of agriculture, healthcare, environment, sanitation, culture and education, we are benefiting the communities of Maranhão that are most in need'.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ From an article published on 3 September 2006 in the journal *Jornal Pequeno*. Accessible online at: <http://www.koinonia.org.br/oq/noticias-detalhes.asp?cod=6546>, accessed on 10 November 2017.

Itamatatiua was one of the five Alcântara communities to receive funds from the FUMAC.¹¹⁵ Interestingly, however, it was the only one to benefit with three constructions under the project and, in the eyes of many residents, the serendipity of having met the governor in person contributed to this end. The FUMAC project was followed by several others, the implementation of which, was commonly also initiated through personal contacts with ‘important allies’. Gradually, making contacts and expanding a network of allies that could ‘bring projects to the community’, in the words of many residents, became a nearly ordinary part of how the community was to do politics. Some residents more than others would hence try to ‘break links of dependency on the inept municipality which never does anything for us anyway’, as Zé Olho said. Building unmediated relations with strategically important allies appeared to be an effective way to do so.

The creation of a communal space with the purpose to house the (traditionally) diffused ceramic practice was a long-awaited wish of many makers. Ever since its creation in 2005, the Centre has not only aggregated all potters under one roof, but it has also been an important reference point for the community itself. The workshop and the attached shop bring visitors and attention from outside to Itamatatiua, something that had been partly anticipated and partly wished for by the Itamatatiuenses involved in the implementation of the project.

¹¹⁵ Paraíso, Prainha, Guaíba and Cá Te Espero were the other four communities that benefited from the project in the same year, with poultry farming facilities, rural electrification, and road improvements, respectively.



Picture 10: The entrance to the shop (door in the centre) attached to the *galpão* (door on the left side).

Open daily, the Centre's space is filled with movement and sounds. Fourteen women of different ages frequented the *galpão* and the shop in the course of my fieldwork. Among them, Luisa, Neide, Pirixi and Cecí, the four daughters of Seu Eurico de Jesus. Nearly all potters, however, are first or second-degree relatives.

Luisa, Pirixi, Domingas, Ângela, Nazaré, Canuta, and Cecí rarely miss a day of work. Luisa, keeps the keys to the Centre and is, informally but effectively, its keeper. She is always the first to go; she opens the windows and lets the first rays of sunlight pierce the crisp air of the moist early morning. She then goes back to her house, conveniently located right across the street from the Centre, and takes her breakfast. By the time she is ready to start working, usually some of the other women have also arrived. They stop by Luisa's house to call her and leave together.

Neide and Maria dos Anjos, both in their late sixties and potters since they were very young, rarely work at the Centre anymore. They stop by to meet with the other women and have a chat, but make pottery less and less frequently. They both specialise in pots and the typical

bodily posture when making large pots in Itamatatiua is to sit on the floor for hours. As they say, they are no longer able to sit like that without having strong back pains. On the other hand, Sileide, Maria dos Anjos's youngest child, works ever more frequently and, at the age of 21, she is currently the Centre's youngest potter. Together with Sileide comes Bia – daughter of Nazaré and only a few years older than Sileide. They are neighbours (living in Bacurizeiro –about ten minutes' walk from the Centre) and close friends. Bia and Sileide have only relatively recently joined in but quickly begun to devote themselves to their work. As young mothers themselves, they needed to stay home with their children, and could not find the time to make pottery. As soon as their children grew up a little, and they were able to leave them with relatives at home, they decided to follow in their mothers' footsteps as potters. They say they really enjoy working at the Centre. It is not only a nice way to spend some time outside their house, but they can also earn some money for their families.

For Duca, a woman in her early thirties and a mother of five, working at the Centre is a relaxing distraction from daily errands at home. 'One lets go of things here', she says. She likes to go to see the other women and spend time with them. She then goes home 'feeling lighter' and, if she earns some money from the sales, 'even better; I can go buy something for myself because from the money we have, I cannot'. Carlianne, is also from the 'young generation' of potters and goes to the Centre when she finds time. Usually before busy periods for the Centre, most women make an effort to produce more artefacts, as sales are expected to increase. For instance, during the *feira* of Santa Teresa in October, hundreds of people visit the community. During the three days the feast culminates, the little shop attached to the workshop makes more sales than it usually does in an entire month. Therefore, the more artefacts the potters have to sell during the *feira*, the better are their chances to make money from the sales. Those are registered on an individual maker basis, so that each one receives the amount corresponding to the sales of her own ceramics. For example, if 12

pieces made by ceramicist A are sold in the month of September, at the beginning of October she will receive the amount corresponding to those 12 pieces. This is a system unanimously decided by the ceramicists, since they agreed it was fair, allowing them to work more or less each calendar month without influencing the work and earnings of the other women. Ana Rita, daughter of Domingas, and Denise, daughter of Neide, are also young skilled potters who visit the Centre when they have more time and/or want to make some extra money.

As discussed earlier, in the past, the ceramic artefact that was primarily destined for the market was the pot. The women also made other artefacts out of the locally extracted argil. Unlike the pots, however, the plates, bowls, platters, basins, pans, pitchers, and stew pots, were produced to cover the needs of Itamatatiua's households and rarely –if ever– would they be sold. In the years between the 'pot crisis' and the opening of the Centre, the few women who continued to make pottery would still make what they always used to, but also started to experiment with new objects.

Taking inspiration from anything around them, some of the women would create new artefacts, from flowerpots to little piggy banks. One would learn from the other, and together, they would gradually diversify Itamatatiua's ceramic production. Several training and skills exchange workshops later (as we will see next), the ceramic work in Itamatatiua is richer and more diverse than ever before. Nevertheless, one type of ceramics is currently considered more emblematic than the others –just like the pot used to be. This is the ceramic figurines (*bonecas*) inspired by scenes from daily life in the community. Pregnant women carrying pots filled with water on their heads, breastfeeding while soaking manioc, or holding an infant while carrying logs on their head; men herding their cattle, or working in the fields, are some of the scenes of 'traditional life', and lived experiences of the potters of Itamatatiua, that are being transformed into ceramic figurines.

Luisa, who is the person who dedicates most time to making these *bonecas*, explained to me that she makes them based on the memories she has of the community. She said she likes to make them so that she can ‘let the young ones know how it used to be here before’ and also because ‘tourists like this *quilombo* stuff’.

In that phrase, Luisa encapsulated the workings of ‘heritage politics’ in Itamatatiua. As I will try to show in the course of this chapter, for Itamatatiuenses involved in the community’s cultural life, ‘*quilombo* heritage’ is largely understood as a twofold apparatus. On the one hand, it made residents more aware of the significance and value of their cultural production and, unlike the past when ‘nobody cared about these things’, today many direct their efforts to preserving Itamatatiua’s ‘cultural legacy’ and urge the younger generations not to let those practices get lost. On the other, cultural production is directly linked to *quilombo* legislation and their engagement in *Quilombola* movements. In addition to that, it brings attention from outside to the community and, consequently, visibility to issues pertaining to the *Quilombola* struggle for land.

Preserving intangible cultural heritage

Efforts to safeguard and preserve what is considered important, or inherent, to people’s distinct ethnic, religious, or other, identities may be a centuries-old phenomenon. It is only in the second half of the 20th century, however, that notions of heritage, in its manifold sub-categories, are increasingly permeating a wide range of national policies and discourses around the world. From regulations aiming to define, protect, and manage heritage, to the establishment and growth of heritage studies as an independent discipline, people and institutions around the world seem to share a common preoccupation with the past, its safeguarding in the present, and its continuation into the future.

National and international institutions and organisations, such as UNESCO and ICOMOS, have, on several occasions, attempted to define heritage and create ethical and practical guidelines to be implemented in government policies for its preservation. The decision to register an item as national or world heritage is, by and large, shaped by the conventions and regulations put forward by such institutions. The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, and widely known as World Heritage Convention (WHC), was proposed by UNESCO in 1972 in an attempt to identify a number of sites, monuments, artefacts, and other articulations of ‘heritage’ worldwide, register them in an official catalogue of ‘World Heritage’ and ensure that measures will be taken for their protection. In spite of its contribution to giving prominence to and safeguarding a large number of sites and artefacts listed, the WHC has been heavily criticised for ‘embodying a particular Western conceptualisation of cultural and natural heritage’ (Rowlands and de Jong 2007: 16, Smith 2006; see also Smith and Akagawa 2009: 1-10).

Endeavouring to take such critiques into consideration, the General Conference of UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage –also known as Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention (ICHC), in 2003. The ICHC defines as intangible cultural heritage ‘practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith– that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage’ (UNESCO, Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage), and aims at ensuring its viability. Representing the intangible, or immaterial, side of official interpretations of heritage, the most recent convention on ‘World Heritage’ was, in part, a response to, what was seen as an increasingly globalised human interaction threatening cultural diversity. The ICHC underlined the need to protect local customs and cultural expressions from the homogenising effects of globalisation.

The very distinction between tangible (e.g. grand monuments) and intangible (e.g. music, oral traditions) heritage, largely associating Western with the former and non-Western with the latter, has been problematised in the literature and heritage practice. Authors have drawn attention to a tendency to essentialise cultural heritage based on such descriptions. Rowlands and de Jong (2007), for example, observe that the implementation of UNESCO heritage policy in several African countries has ‘resulted in an opposition between tangible and intangible heritage, which has privileged the idea of an authentic Africa as performative rather than monumental’ (Rowlands and de Jong 2007: 15). Based on the tendency of the ICHC to ‘privilege colourful and exotic examples of intangible heritage’, which often coincide with ‘romanticised Western perceptions’ (Smith and Akagawa 2009: 5) of non-Western cultures, heritage theorists have questioned the capacity of such conventions to address ‘the cultural complexity of heritage’ in the first place.

However, and despite criticisms of what can be legitimised as humanity’s ‘shared heritage’ (UNESCO, Budapest Declaration on World Heritage), the WHC and the ICHC have been instrumental in drafting both international and national heritage policies. In other words, heritage initiatives around the world have been ‘held accountable to an increasingly globalised standard’ (Herzfeld 2004: 85). This ‘increasingly homogeneous language of culture and ethics constitutes’, what Herzfeld has called, ‘a global hierarchy of value’ (2004: 2). Brazil ratified the ICHC in 2006.

Being listed as part of world or national heritage is likely to bring attention from the outside to particular places and/or cultural practices. In the case of former colonies and ‘underrepresented populations’ (Rowlands and de Jong 2007: 16), where non-Western cultural expressions had been largely disregarded and suppressed for a long time, ‘heritage is increasingly thought to offer recognition, in terms of a valuation’ (ibid.).

Perhaps it is worth mentioning here that it was not only after the ICHC that countries around

the world started implementing strategies for intangible heritage preservation, but some had already been engaged in cataloguing and safeguarding what they deemed worthy of consideration as ‘national heritage’. East Asia, and Japan in particular, are significant cases in point. Japan is one of the countries that initiated attempts to register, safeguard, and promote ‘the protection of cultural property’ through various types of documentation (Miyata 2013: 89). In 1950, Japan was the first country to formally register artisans and practitioners of certain skills and techniques that were considered expressions of intangible cultural heritage as ‘Living Human Treasures’ (Vecco 2010: 324, Abreu 2003). Following this, several other countries, such as the Republic of Korea (South Korea) in the 1960s, Thailand in the 1980s, and the Philippines in the early 1990s, established similar national categories. The first European country to establish a similar recognition was France, when it formally introduced, in 1994, the category *Maîtres d’Art*. The 2003 ICHC recognised and defined the category of ‘Living Human Treasure’ and encouraged member states to adopt such national categories.

Taking into consideration the discussion above, as well as ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ registers of national heritage discussed in Chapter Three, we may suggest that heritage is better understood as a locus of diverse ‘struggles of representation’ (Chuva 2009). It is, hence, always subject to a multiplicity of political agendas and the socio-economic context of the era during which preservation practices are implemented –whether at a national or global level. It is for these reasons that Márcia Chuva (2009) has suggested that the intellectuals and politicians engaged in the early ‘heritagisation’ of Brazil’s (tangible) cultural patrimony were also implementing their own ideas of what counts as ‘national heritage’ in the aftermath of the *Estado Novo* coup. The need to de-colonise Brazil’s past was especially pronounced at the time and rendered ‘tangible’, in lived everyday experiences, by enhancing aspects of the struggle against Portuguese rule and repopulate cities that had fallen into decay (Santos 2016: 19-20, see also Chuva 2003).

Likewise, Brazil's 1988 Federal Constitution was an answer to human rights violations and restrictions on freedom of expression by a brutal military dictatorship that had ended only three years before. Also in line with global developments in registering 'national heritage', the new Constitution significantly broadened the definition of heritage to include some of the voices 'from below'. Brazil's 'Magna Carta', not only recognised land rights for '*quilombo* remnant communities', but also, Articles 215 and 216 included Afro-Brazilian and *quilombo* cultural manifestations and some of their *sites* –e.g. *quilombo* territories, in the country's national cultural heritage (*patrimônio cultural*). More specifically, Article 215 states that:

The State will guarantee the free exercise of cultural rights and the access to sources of national culture, and will support and incentivise the valorisation and diffusion of cultural manifestations; §1: The State will protect the popular, indigenous and Afro-Brazilian cultural manifestations, and those of other groups that contributed to the national process of civilisation; §2: The law shall provide for the establishment of commemorative dates of great significance for the different ethnic segments nationally.

And Article 216 mentions:

Brazilian cultural heritage consists of those material and immaterial goods, taken independently or as a whole, carriers of references of identity, livelihood, and memory of different groups that have formed Brazilian society, including: ... II The modes of creating, making, and living; §3. The law will establish incentives for the production and dissemination of cultural goods and values. ... §5. All the documents and sites that contain historical residues of the ancient *quilombos* are listed as heritage.

1988 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Brazil

Heritage, therefore, has an important functional goal: more than treasuring the past, it re-signifies it. By turning the 'invisible' 'visible' (Chuva 2009: 144), the protective measures institutionalised in the 1930s, established proud national narratives that emphasized Brazilian resilience and struggle against Portuguese and other foreign rule, while re-defining colonial architecture and White elite culture as essentially Brazilian. Similarly, in the late 1980s, the

state decided to include previously neglected aspects of the country's 'national heritage', offer them recognition and institute measures for their protection.

The 1988 Federal Constitution establishes the methods of heritage preservation: register (*registro*), inventory (*inventário*) and protection (*tombamento*). The recognition of certain *quilombo* sites as heritage also reflects global discussions about the impossibility of distinguishing between 'cultural' and 'natural' heritage sites (see, e.g., Jacques 1995). By constitutionally establishing all 'documents and sites that contain historical residues of the ancient *quilombos* as national heritage', and by attaching notions of continuity (as in 'residues') and specific descent ('ancient *quilombos*') to contemporary social groups (modern-day *quilombos*), the 1988 Federal Constitution not only broadened pre-existing notions of heritage, but also, and equally importantly, inextricably merged such notions with, and produced new, specifically 'ethnic' ones. For what concerns this thesis, it yielded the multivalent notion of '*quilombo* cultural heritage'.

In 2000, the IPHAN launched the Registry of Intangible Cultural Assets. Registered properties are declared 'Brazilian cultural heritage', which 'entitles them to be promoted and to receive financial support for safeguarding plans' (UNESCO, ICH website). Parallel to that, the National Programme for the Intangible Heritage of Cultural References 'was established for preserving the country's ethnic and cultural diversity, which included the National Inventory of Cultural References' (ibid.). The National Inventory's (NICR) purpose, as stated by the IPHAN, is to 'disseminate knowledge about the areas of social life in which meanings and values are attributed hence, constituting marks of, and references to, the identity of a specific social group'.¹¹⁶ It is worth noting the emphasis the NICR gives to 'meanings and values' attributed to specific 'areas of social life' by the people who *live* their heritage. Given

¹¹⁶ For further reading: <http://portal.iphan.gov.br/pagina/detalhes/685/>, accessed on 10 November 2017.

that the above-mentioned National Programme is aimed specifically at ethnic groups within the nation-state, *quilombola* cultural production directly relates to the NICR. In fact, in the early 2000s, Itamatatua's ceramic production was registered on the National Inventory.

***Quilombo* cultural heritage**

For many *quilombo* communities, artisanal production –such as baskets made of palm tree leaves to carry food or ceramic utensils– was traditionally made without necessarily being associated with notions of ‘cultural production’ or ‘heritage’, for that matter. Those were typically simply *practices*; either of everyday life (such as the ceramic work in Itamatatua) or of festive and extraordinary occasions (such as the ditties chanted by the female drummers during the *feira* of Santa Teresa), and were not really thought of as part of a collective *tradition*. As Herzfeld (2004) reminds us, ‘the very idea of tradition is a modernist one: people did not, in the past, announce that they were living traditional lives’ (2004: 18). However, while the ‘archaeological paradigm’ dictated the technical reports necessary for land titling (see discussion in the Introduction) cultural production transpired, in relevant reports, as an effective way of demonstrating the expected ‘traditional’ ways of living, and of continuous land occupation based on the good knowledge and use of natural resources, for many Brazilian *quilombos*.

As Kenny (2011) has observed, ‘an assemblage of social, economic, and political conditions have come together to make a “*quilombo* heritage” relevant for those living in rural Black communities’ (2011: 94). This heritage, Kenny argues, ‘draws on the narratives, symbols, and practices of Black activists, human rights discourse, and new federal politics on land restitution and multiculturalism’ (ibid.). In other words, through this ‘assemblage’ of conditions that gave shape to ‘*quilombo* heritage’, not only did ‘Blackness feature as a

cultural asset’ (Armstrong 2005: 57), but ‘new interpretations emerged for cultural practices with origins in the period of slavery, such as *jongo* and *caxambu* –circle dances and songs to the sound of drums– which were transformed into symbolic capital for the affirmation of the *quilombola* identity’ (Mattos 2005: 12).

When it comes to classifying a cultural expression as (group/national/world) heritage, theorists and practitioners have raised an important question: ‘How to safeguard and manage a heritage that is mutable and part of “living culture” without fossilising, freezing or trivialising it’ (Smith and Akagawa 2009: 3; see also Layton 2009, Harrison et al 2008, Canclini 2012, Benton 2010). This question problematises the notion of heritage being attached to an immutable past, and encourages us to think of heritage in a wider, more complex, and contemporary way, that will incorporate heritage in a living context.

The question is arguably highly pertinent to our discussion of processes of ‘heritagisation’ of Afro-Brazilian and/or *quilombo* cultural expressions. As previously explored, federal recognition of *quilombo* territories greatly depended on demonstrating a particular ‘*quilombo* living’ based on antiquated colonial understandings of it. Although such anachronistic and essentialist requirements were largely rendered redundant with the Presidential Decree n. 4.887 of 2003 and *quilombolas* have, by and large, been successful in escaping narrow and largely unproblematised definitions of *quilombola* identity and heritage, government and non-government institutions and collaborating agents often continue to rely on notions of ‘authenticity’.¹¹⁷ This authenticity –especially when it comes to indigenous/ethnic groups and their cultures– usually translates to specific imaginaries of what particular people should look, behave, live, and make culture like.

¹¹⁷ For a discussion about ‘authenticity’ see, indicatively: Boyle 2004, Heynen 2006, and Berliner 2013.

Comaroff and Comaroff (2009) have suggested that a certain ‘objectification of identity’ (2009: 2) by the groups who ‘market’ themselves in order ‘to “manage” their symbolic and material assets’ (2009: 8), may indeed prove valuable to them. Discussing Graburn’s (1976) work, the Comaroffs posit: ‘In making artwork for outsiders, he [Graburn] wrote, peoples of the “fourth world” convey a message: “We exist; we are different; we can do something we are proud of; we have something uniquely ours.”’ (2009: 10). Likewise, Zárte (2012) has argued for the rural communities she worked with in Mexico that ‘ethnicity allowed the display of the subaltern status of these *comuneros*’ (2012: 229). In the case of *quilombos*, local ‘traditional’ artisanal work becomes directly relevant to their ‘control over territorial rights’ (Kenny 2009: 151).

Hence, self-conscious display of ‘tradition’, or self-‘marketing’ of a group’s cultural identity, does not necessarily fossilise its cultural heritage. To the extent that all cultural heritage is, in certain ways, a ‘representation of representations’ (Arizpe 2013: 19, Hobsbawm 1983), a certain degree of ‘self-conscious tradition’ is understood, and even expected, to be involved when larger issues are at stake for given social groups. Sarró (2007), for instance, observes for the Baga-speaking peoples of coastal Guinea that they ‘will get funds from international donors only if they show that they are a minority ethnic group in danger, and they can prove this only by performing traditional dances, not by playing football’ (2007: 226-7). In the case of Itamatatua, and Brazilian *quilombos* at large, the selectivity and mobilisation of cultural heritage has less to do with getting funds and more with guaranteeing the legally-protected status of *quilombo*. But the point I wish to make here is that conscious reproduction of certain cultural aspects that conform to external expectations of ‘representative heritage’ often proves a powerful way of bringing visibility to specific localities.

If cultural heritage is ‘a product decanted from the living process of culture and has specific historical and social modalities’ (Machuca 2013: 59, see also Caballero 2008), then the

‘marketing’ of cultural heritage is but an expression of the ‘living process of culture’ itself. Instead of fossilising *quilombola* cultural identities, it may become an asset to the affirmation thereof. As long as ‘living cultures’ are controlling their own heritage representations, and even find a way to use them for their own benefit, there is no doubt that this is indeed ‘living heritage’ –even when it is based on a certain ‘objectification’ of cultural identities. Living heritage can therefore be understood as a continuous process that reflects upon mutable social and political landscapes.

Thinking of heritage as a future-oriented ‘process in the present’ (Kenny 2009: 151, see also Appadurai 2013) is a useful analytical tool with which we can approach *quilombo* cultural heritage and move beyond the sterile ‘traditional versus modern’ and ‘static versus changing’ opposition. A ‘dialogical’ approach to heritage (Harrison 2013, Gonçalves 2003, Harvey 2001) allows us to look at heritage as an ongoing process that draws heavily on the past (real or imagined), is situated in the present, and is looking towards the future. In this way, the tension between past, present and future dissolves, and heritage is understood as an active attempt to manage representations and self-images in the present, for the future.

Heritage as a *living* and mutable experience opens up the definition to a wide range of different heritage *values* (Smith, Messenger, and Soderland 2010, Otero-Pailos, Gaiger, and West 2010, Lenzerini 2011) and representations as they materialise in manifold ways around the world. One needs to tune in and carefully listen, see, and experience, local groups’ and individuals’ own perceptions of heritage.

I have so far discussed the growing openness of official definitions of cultural heritage and situated them within the socio-political contexts from which they emerge. I have also discussed some of the conditions that enabled a specific category of ‘*quilombo* heritage’ to emerge. I will now move on to discuss understandings of heritage ‘from below’ by drawing on specific ethnographic examples. In the following section, I will explore the plurality of

interpretations of, and strategies around, Itamatatiua's *quilombo* heritage, as construed, primarily, by the potters and the Centre's collaborating agents.



Picture 11: Moulding clay and clay streamers.

Itamatatiua's lived heritage

Aesthetically the ceramic production of Itamatatiua is characterised by relatively simple forms, unglazed, coarse and non-designed surfaces, and natural colour. Although a small number of ceramic artefacts can indeed be painted (such as the ceramic figurines) the greatest part of the production follows non-elaborated design patterns and minimal decoration. The production persists in a manual way, resisting the use of any machinery, with the exception of the *maromba*.¹¹⁸ 'This type of pottery is a common artefact among assemblages from African Diaspora sites and continues to be made in a number of rural Black communities in Brazil in the same way it was centuries ago', says Kenny (2011: 102) about the pottery of Telhado, a *quilombo* in the Brazilian state of Paraíba.

Kenny's ethnographic context bears important similarities, but also clear differences, with my own in Itamatatiua. Since I am drawing on some of Kenny's insights on *quilombo* cultural production, I wish to briefly discuss here some of the converging and diverging points of our works. Telhado also has a long tradition of ceramic practice and, like Itamatatiua, there seems to be a preoccupation in recent years with the continuation of this tradition by new generations. Furthermore, in both *quilombos* pottery is understood and communicated as a 'badge for *quilombola* heritage and identity' (Kenny 2011: 102). However, unlike the makers of Telhado, and as discussed above, Itamatatiuenses *do not* make associations between pottery and slavery, nor is it regarded as a 'derogatory and stigmatising' activity due to its attachment to slavery and 'negro' identity (Kenny 2009: 157). A second important difference between the two *quilombos* is that unlike what happened with Telhado, where the official recognition as '*quilombo*' created a sharp distinction (and even envy) between neighbouring villages, in Alcântara nearly all rural communities have been given the *Palmares* certificate as

¹¹⁸ Machine used for the extrusion of raw clay into large chunks, which the makers mould into clay objects.

‘*quilombo* remnant communities’. Thus, this recognition has not been a basis for any differentiation or perceived injustice between *quilombos*.

As Kenny argues, handcrafted and undecorated ceramics, like those of Itamatatiua, are generally considered to be aesthetically and even technically closer to African, and often West African, pottery traditions. It is also worth noting that undecorated ceramic objects are not generally believed to characterize all ‘traditional pottery’ but bear a clear ‘Afro-Brazilian’ and ‘*quilombola*’ tinge. For instance, the pottery of Maragogipinho, in the state of Bahia, is famously considered ‘traditional’ but features mostly decorated pottery (see indicatively: Moreira, N. 2011). Despite such common views, however, West African ceramic traditions demonstrate a rich array of elaborate decorations (Symanski 2006).

Nevertheless, what the ‘badge for *quilombola* heritage and identity’, in the words of Kenny, importantly translates to is that specific cultural practices and knowledge-making can be traced back many generations. This quality links specific contemporary communities to *quilombo* settlements in the past, something that speaks to the relevant legislation and has direct implications for the communities’ land struggle. And it is precisely this ‘timeless connection with the absolute past’ (Monteiro 2007: 6) that potters, and other *quilombolas* of Itamatatiua, strive to communicate when selling their craftwork.

Itamatatiua’s ethnic identity, the significance of their *quilombo* history to the ceramic work, and their attachment to modes of production inherited by their ancestors, are some of the most eloquent values communicated by members of the community and trade networks in commercial transactions. A case in point is a leaflet¹¹⁹ given to customers and visitors to the Centre that describes the ‘traditional artisanal production, manually made by the artisans’.

¹¹⁹ The leaflets were printed with funding from a state project (through SEBRAE).

We also read (my emphasis):

They [the potters] use a *very old* technique that consists of rolling the clay against a surface with the palms of their hands in order to make the so-called clay streamers (*serpentinhas*), which are placed one on top of the other in a spiral formation in order to make the pot.

In *Ethnicity Inc.*, the Comaroffs (2009) have discussed ethnic tourism¹²⁰ as a global phenomenon that has contributed to the transition from the sale of labour to the sale of culture, for many of the ‘ethnic groups’ involved in it. Bowen (2016) argues that ‘ethnic tourism has become a booming business in neoliberal Brazil, as traditional communities (marginalised and wage-labour poor) market their culture in return for the promises of diversifying and increasing their incomes and thus securing their livelihoods’ (2016: 20). He further suggests that the decision of *quilombolas* to join in the so-called ‘ethnic tourism enterprises in their communities has less to do with their empowerment than with an economic context in which there are few options but to insert themselves into the global economy by commodifying their culture and identity’ (Bowen 2016: 21).

Let us pause for a moment and consider two of the aforementioned terms: ‘empowerment’ and ‘commodification’ of culture and identity. The two, so the Comaroffs have suggested, are closely related to one another, since ‘in the case of ethnic groups, it [empowerment] is frankly associated with finding something essentially their own and theirs alone, something of their essence, *to sell*. In other words, a brand’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 15; my emphasis). They further argue that ‘the resort to things ethnic as a means of “empowerment” is, patently, not confined to South Africa, or Africa, or that part of the World formerly known

¹²⁰ Given the very limited tourism in Itamatatiua, I think it is more appropriate to suggest that its artisanal production is intended for an ‘ethnic market’, and not so much inserted in ‘ethnic tourism’. Most tourists that purchase Itamatatiua’s ceramics do so from the shop in Alcântara and not by visiting the community itself. For some informed readings on *quilombos* and tourism, see: Bowen (2016), Sousa (2007).

as Third. The entire planet “rejoices in ... the cult of heritage,” declares David Lowenthal (1998: 1); by any measure, the “cultural economy” has become a massive global enterprise’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 15-16).

When designer and anthropologist Raquel Noronha convened a SEBRAE¹²¹ project called ‘Identity is Value’ (*Identidade é Valor*) in three Alcântara *quilombos* that produce *artesanato*, she concluded that selling their craftwork ‘made them proud of their ethnic identity, and their histories and traditions, which they felt were being legitimised’ (Noronha 2011: 7). She also wrote that the potters of Itamatatiua ‘mentioned that their lives changed significantly, since not only were they able to earn their own money and secure financial independence, but they also felt *empowered* as creative and competent members of their community (ibid.; my emphasis). For Noronha (2011, 2015a, b), a strong connection between cultural production, value, and empowerment seems to emerge from the economic transaction. If, however, ceramics have been an important source of revenue for Itamatatiua decades before the construction of the Centre, why is it that economic transactions *now* are a source of cultural pride and ‘empowerment’?

As discussed already, Itamatatiua used to depend greatly on the income generated by the high demand for ceramic pots for water storage in the region. As women and men from Itamatatiua never get tired of saying, they were able to sustain their families ‘only from money earned by selling pots’ since at the time there were no social benefits nor state pensions for small farmers to add to a family’s income. Although the Centre did open up again possibilities for distribution of the local ceramic production to new markets (less local than in the past) the potters’ income is significantly less (in comparison) than the one they used to earn in the past. This is partly reflected in the number of potters involved today (only

¹²¹ SEBRAE stands for *Serviço Brasileiro de Apoio às Micro e Pequenas Empresas* (Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service).

about a dozen women while in the past nearly all households were producing ceramics) as well as in the way the makers talk about the economic aspect of ceramic work: most see it as a little money on the side they can use either to contribute to monthly expenses or, occasionally, to buy something personal, such as clothes. Although it is nearly impossible to estimate monthly salaries for each potter, since both their production and sales fluctuate, it is safe to say that these rarely go beyond R\$150 (approx. £35) per month and are usually between R\$20 and R\$50 (approx. between £5 and £12).

Certainly this is not an insignificant amount, especially since other salaried jobs for women within the community are nearly down to zero. ‘Better than nothing’, as the makers say. If it was not for the combined benefits of conditional cash transfer programs, stipends, occasional small jobs, collaborative work in the fields, house ownership and a general low-cost of life in the *quilombo*, many argue that ‘most people would have already left for the city’ looking for job opportunities. Many have certainly already done that, or did for a period and then returned to the community. Although I do not have here the space to discuss networks of migration to urban centres and return migration to the *quilombos*, this is a particularly widespread phenomenon not only for *quilombos* in Alcântara but for *quilombos* everywhere in Brazil (see, e.g., Kenny 2013: 145-153). Likewise, in Itamatatua nearly every household has at least one family member who currently lives, or has lived in the past, in one of the major urban centres in the state and the country –predominantly São Luís, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Brasília.

What I am suggesting therefore is that it is *not* pottery’s economic aspect that has contributed to the women being ever prouder in their cultural production and feeling ‘empowered’ in any way. It is rather the increasing identification of the old ceramic practice with *quilombo* heritage and notions of Black history and culture that resonate nationally and even internationally that have transformed pottery in Itamatatua into a powerful source of local

cultural capital and a vehicle for land struggle and social transformation.

The Centre opened up a new market for Itamatatiua's ceramic production and facilitated the distribution of this work through various new channels. And this market has been strongly associating Itamatatiua's ceramic work with specific notions of 'ethnic' identity. However, it has not been the commercialisation, or 'commodification', of Itamatatiua's ceramics and/or *quilombo* identity that was the catalyst for a shift in the way ceramic work was perceived by Itamatatiuenses, but the increased interest from outside for local *culture* and *quilombola* ways of living.

In a distinct way from their commercial transactions in the past, the demand for their craftwork today is taken as an index for the appreciation and valorisation of the community's history and traditions. This validation from the outside (and especially from individuals and institutions considered 'prestigious outsiders', such as national organisations and academics) has contributed to the affirmation of and growing admiration for Itamatatiua's cultural production by the residents. The interest is commonly attributed by Itamatatiuenses to their community's unique trajectory and strong ethnic identity. As some of the residents like to say, their *quilombo* is 'known around the world', and 'people come here to study and learn about our history and culture'. Alessiane de Jesus, secondary education teacher (and one of four Itamatatiua women to have acquired a higher education degree), said that the way people 'survive through the clay' is what distinguishes them. She continues:

This is what characterises us as *quilombolas*. It is our culture. And we are also known because of the clay, no? They work with the clay and through the clay we are known all around the world.

Warren (2012) has made similar observations regarding the transformative power of recognition from the outside to a community in the Jequitinhonha Valley, in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. The traditional songs of the people of the valley, before rarely a source of pride for the local communities, were revalued by local people as ‘more outsiders affirmed their music’ (Warren 2012: 135-136, 142). The gaze of others, and especially outsiders who are typically unrelated to the cultural tradition of given localities, often informs and strongly influences people’s own perception of cultural values. ‘They were seen’, write the Comaroffs about the San, ‘and reciprocally were able to see themselves, as a named *people* with a “tradition and a way of life”’. In other words, a culture’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 11). A growing interest in, and approval of, their ceramic work and their *quilombo* from the outside, has consolidated a sense of pride in their work and cultural heritage among the female potters of Itamatatua and the community in general.

To be sure, it was not only pottery that was seen under a new ‘*quilombo* cultural heritage’ light, but nearly all cultural manifestations (those associated with ‘tradition’, and especially those specifically regarded as ‘Afro-Brazilian traditions’) in Itamatatua were equally reappraised and proudly considered today by residents as part of Itamatatua’s distinct *quilombo* cultural heritage. Irene, a woman in her early sixties, is –informally yet effectively– responsible for the non-ceramic cultural life in Itamatatua. She is one of the eldest drummers (*caixeira*) of the *Forró de Caixa*¹²² in the community, zealously participating every year in the *feira* of Santa Teresa as one of the drummers of the Saint’s *batuque*, and never misses an opportunity to play the drum; in Itamatatua, as well as in the *feira* of the Holy Spirit in Alcântara. She is also a well-known dancer of *Tambor de Crioula*. For many years, she has dedicated her time to instilling her passion for local culture in young Itamatatuenses. In

¹²² A musical performance typical of Itamatatua. Also known as *Bambuê*. It is performed exclusively by women and involves singing and drum playing. It is associated with the Holy Spirit festival. Variations of *Forró de Caixa* (each with distinct drum beat or *sotaque*) are found throughout the Baixada Maranhense region.

recent years, and sometimes also with the help of Denise and Alessiane, she has been teaching the girls and boys of Itamatatiua how to perform several dances and play music, incentivising them to actively participate.

Irene, is also the person behind the creation of the *Dança do Negro*, a dance (or rather, a choreography) born in 2005 and crafted ‘out of memories of some dances that existed in the community when we were kids, and the music of the Axé from Bahia’, as she told me. An ‘old-new’ dance, hence, which translates as ‘the dance of the Black’, was created in order to represent what the community had in the past (its African roots) what it is in the present (a Black rural *quilombo* community) and its connections with the Afro-Brazilian world (the adoption of music from Bahia as the dance’s background). The process of informing cultural practice by the community’s ‘African heritage’ is continuous (and often explicit) and once again shows the vibrancy of *quilombo* heritage management in Itamatatiua. On one occasion, for instance, Alessiane told me that they wanted to ‘watch dance videos from Africa on YouTube’ and incorporate some of the choreography in the *Dança do Negro*.

In one of the group rehearsals that usually take place at the community’s football/basketball court, a few days before a performance, Irene was showing the younger ones how to move their bodies to the sound of drums (*tambor*; pl. *tambores*). During a small break, she gathered the children to tell them ‘the story of the *Tambor de Crioula*’. According to that story, the old *quilombolas* of Itamatatiua (time, again, vaguely situated in the past) were playing the drums as a form of protection from people who wanted to invade their community:

When they heard some noise, anything, someone here would beat the drum: *pi pi pi pi* ... it was an announcement that somebody was coming; it was a warning. ‘Let’s be alarmed because someone is trying to reach our *quilombo*!’ ... So today we cannot stop playing the *Tambor de Crioula* in our *quilombo*, right kids? Who’s proud to be *quilombola*? Shout out loud!

Irene, especially keen on public speaking, is the person who usually represents the community in public cultural events, and accompanies the group to nearby communities and towns, or even the state's capital, when they are invited to perform their 'typical dances'. Before the dances start, she takes the microphone and says a few words about the *quilombo*, their traditions, and the pride residents (need to) take in being *quilombolas* and being from Itamatatiua. Before concluding her speech, she often invites people to sing along to the –also recently created– 'anthem of Itamatatiua'. It goes as follows (my emphases):

[singing]

Itamatatiua is a community
That maintains its *tradition*
All of its people are *quilombola*
With much *pride* in our hearts

*Itamatatiua é povoado
Que mantém sua tradição
Todo seu povo é quilombola
Com muito orgulho no coração*

It was the Jesuit priests
Who came to catechize
This is one of the stories
Itamatatiua has to tell

*Foram os padres jesuítas
Que vieram catequizar
Essa é uma das nossas histórias
Que Itamatatiua tem pra contar*

They taught our people
A beautiful *tradition*
It was the clay of our land
Which transformed us into artisans

*Ensinaram a nossa gente
Uma linda tradição
Com a argila da nossa terra
Nos transformamos em artesanão*

Itamatatiua is mysterious
It even has a water spring that cries
You only need to come closer
For you to know the story

*Itamatatiua é misterioso
Tem até poço que chora
Basta tu chegar lá perto
Pra tu conhecer a história*

We are *proud*
With much joy
We thank you
For listening to our song

*Nós estamos orgulhosos
Com muita satisfação
Agradecemos a vocês
Por ouvir nossa canção*

Note the emphasis on 'tradition' and 'pride'. Also, the song includes all aspects of what has come, in recent years, to be widely regarded as 'essentially' Itamatatiuense –i.e. Catholic faith, ceramic production, and the community's natural resources (the water source and 'mysterious' stories about it). The song seems also to be composed with the purpose of being

presented to a crowd that is *not* from the community (outsiders, potential tourists, etc.) and hence it is especially interesting to note what its composers (some of the women from Itamatatiua), controlling the ‘power of representation’ (Hall 1999: 7), have selected as Itamatatiua’s most characteristic socio-cultural traits.

In recent years then, we see the articulation, on the part of the local people, of explicit connections between such notions as culture, tradition, *quilombo* heritage, and pride.

Especially with regards to the ceramic production, arguably Itamatatiua’s best-known and widely diffused of all cultural practices, we are able to observe the potters’ and other local agents’ associations of ceramic work ‘with a specific territory, knowledge and modes of production’ (Filho and Andrade 2012: 85; citing Cunha 2005: 17).

Processes of re-appraisal and re-valorisation of *quilombo* cultural heritage and history go hand-in-hand with initiatives at the national level –prompted by constitutional provisions and implemented through established and grassroots social structures. In Itamatatiua, as in other Black rural communities in Brazil, notions of culture and ‘cultural identity’ became intrinsically connected to a definition of ‘*quilombo*’, which was gradually adopted by the people. Much like the eventual incorporation of the word ‘*quilombo*’ into the colloquial and political vocabulary of *quilombolas* throughout Brazil, the 1988 constitutional definition of the aspects of ‘*quilombo*’ natural and cultural heritage that were thereafter regarded as national heritage, also had an important impact on the ways *quilombolas* started perceiving and engaging with heritage. For Itamatatiua, according to Article 216 cited above, both its ‘stone of rights’ and the entire site of the former Carmelite *fazenda* Tamatatiua are considered national heritage and should, therefore, be protected. This is the same territory claimed by Itamatatiuenses today.



Picture 12: Ceramics being taken out of the oven. Note Itamatatiua's logo impressed on the base.

Cultural mediators and collaborators

Since the early days of its existence, the Centre has been visited by hundreds of people who, some more than others, have had an impact on the ways the ceramicists themselves perceived their work. Sometimes through close collaboration –as in the case of academic researchers, representatives of organisations, artists and other professionals– or through transient encounters –as in the case of short visits made by artists, travellers and passers-by– the women of Itamatatiua have come into contact with various people who often have, willingly or unwillingly, acted as ‘cultural mediators in shaping *quilombola* identity’ (Kenny 2013:142, Losacano 2008) and left their mark on the ceramic work produced by the women.¹²³ Such contributions have also marked the vocabulary used to describe the work produced in the Centre. From crockery (*louça*), the ceramic work produced by the women of Itamatatiua came to be described as artisanal production/work (*artesanato*). I reiterate, however, that makers usually refer to their work as *artesanato* mostly when discussing pottery or the Centre

¹²³ Slightly paraphrasing Arantes (2009), I use the term ‘mediators’ to refer to those individuals and/or representatives of different organisations who act as connecting links between artisans and a larger public, and who often exercise some influence on the artisans and their production.

with clients, academic researchers, and other non-local people, while they refer to their work as *louça* when talking among themselves irrespective of the objects they are referring to (clay figurines can equally be included in the category '*louça*'). The term 'ceramics' (*cerâmica*) crosses these formal-informal boundaries, and it is frequently used in all contexts.

SEBRAE has collaborated with the Itamatatua Women's Association (AMI) since the early days of the Centre's existence and has since financed several knowledge building workshops and training courses addressed to the ceramicists. Such courses generally aim at introducing new skills and techniques that can help the makers diversify, develop, and promote their work.¹²⁴ A case in point, is a workshop that took place over several weeks and during which the self-taught ceramicists of Itamatatua were instructed by Isabela, a professional ceramicist from São Luís, in making clay figurines. Itamatatua's potters, who cordially welcome such skill improving courses, embraced the idea of the figurine and quickly learned how to make them themselves. Some of the elder ceramicists told me that there was a local woman who also used to make clay figurines 'out of her own imagination' many years before the SEBRAE seminar. However, the other ceramicists had not learned the technique and only started making figurines as a group in recent years. The figurines today are amongst the fastest-selling and most sought-after objects. Each one bearing the unique signature style of its maker, they have turned into one of the most emblematic objects of Itamatatua's pottery. Most potters like to learn new skills and improvise. Nonetheless, on many occasions while at work, the makers expressed their fear of 'innovating too much'. I wondered why that was. The women explained to me that a good part of collaborators, and even political activists from *quilombola* movements, have explicitly warned them against transgressing the

¹²⁴ On skills training/artisanal projects addressed to *quilombos*, and especially to women *quilombolas*, see the work of Losacano (2008) among an urban Bahian *quilombo* community and the empowerment of local women through the implementation of an artisanal project.

boundaries of their ‘traditional style’ resulting in their ceramic-work becoming ‘too modern’ to be considered *quilombola*. In a similar vein, Herzfeld (2009) reflecting on the ‘bureaucratic agencies that preserve intangible heritage’, argues that they often do so by ‘rendering it tangible, rejecting the entire range of what is considered indecent or trivial as irrelevant to “the” culture of a given people’ (2009: 147).

The fear, in the case of Itamatatiua, was reified in the possibility of ‘people from the government coming and not finding our work as a continuation of an old knowledge-practice (*aprendizagem*)’. In the words of Watts and Ferro (2012), the intensified ‘connection between the groups and the cultural agencies’ has made them not only collaborators but also ‘primary culture consumers’ (2012: 896-897) and has increased their influence on the cultural production itself. No one, however, in all the years of the Centre’s life has come so far to make an ‘authenticity check’. Nevertheless, the tendency to stick to a normative ‘*quilombola* style’ is strong. As Canclini (1981) has noted ‘farmers and residents of small villages of artisans receive, ever-more, from outside the definition of what they should be. ... [E]ven indications about the designs that can best compete in urban markets’ (1981: 715-716).

Léa is the manager of the small municipal shop in Alcântara’s port area that exclusively sells artisanal work produced by local groups and individuals. In our conversations, she seemed to echo some of these conservative views on innovation and change in *quilombo* craftwork. As she explained, the shop was originally created to attend to the needs of Itamatatiua and Santa Maria.¹²⁵ These are two communities with a significant production of artisanal work in the municipality. Léa has been running the shop from its foundation to this day. In those twelve years, she has participated in several training courses organised by the SEBRAE and she also enrolled in the Tourism Management program offered at the Federal Institute of Maranhão

¹²⁵ Santa Maria produces work with the *buriti* fibre, a type of palm tree found in the region.

(IFMA) in Alcântara. She admits that knowledge acquired through her training has been valuable to her work but seems to think differently when such training courses are addressed to the artisans. She said (my emphasis):

We have insisted a lot so that they don't lose their *identity*. Because, you see, many people have passed from there and brought training courses wanting to *alter* their artisanal production. They even took them to Belém, in Pará, in a [knowledge] exchange [visit] to get to know the artisanal production there. It was an *innovation*. But they can't lose their characteristic elements, which is this colour without paint, this rustic artisanal production (*artesanato rústico*) which is their identity; they can't lose that.

What becomes clear in Léa's interview is a differentiation between the need for training she identified as valuable to herself but potentially harmful to the integrity of the method and type of work that is supposedly 'characteristic' of Itamatatua's 'identity'. Her words reflect a view according to which Itamatatua's ceramic production needs to remain, if not completely unchanged, at least within specific boundaries. Whereas she, on the other hand, as an intermediary between the artisans and the market, needs to keep up with changes. She continues (my emphasis):

The tourists' point of view is simple. They like this artisanal production that doesn't have form ... it is crooked (*torto*), by which I mean it is actually rustic. They don't use any machines, everything is handcrafted. And it is this *past* [sic] that is missing from the tourist because we only sell the final object. One cannot understand the history ... it is different to see a work in a shop and to get to know the work in the community itself. In the community, you don't even need to say anything about the history, because the history is being *witnessed*. From the oven [they use] to everything else.

For Léa, the craftwork produced in the communities is associated with an immutable representation of a past. Its value stems directly from its association with what she perceives as 'traditional', something that has repeated itself through time. History is *witnessed* in the clay-work, as if it is restored to life in every ceramic object produced. In this sense,

quilombolas’ “lifeways,” withdrawn from time or history, congeal into object-form, all the better to conceive, communicate, and consume’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 12). For Léa, and those cultural mediators who see value in *quilombola* artisanal production only insofar as it can directly be traced back to their ‘roots’ in history, change and innovation have no place in the ceramic work of Itamatatiua. And yet, Léa also said (my emphasis):

In the past they only made pots and stew pots. In the community the pot is stronger. In Alcântara no. Their *identity* is the pot ... you even see the pot at the entrance [to the community]. Here [in the shop/Alcântara], they need to *adapt*. Because we cannot only exhibit their work, we need to pay for this shop.

The need for adaptation here apparently fits within the confines of the ‘traditional’ as Léa and others define it. In the words of Sahlins (2005: 492): “‘Tradition’ here functions as a yardstick by which the people measure the acceptability of change’. Rather than changing Itamatatiua’s ceramic ‘identity’, the adaptation Léa indicates as essential to the shop’s survival caters to the needs of the market Itamatatiua’s ceramic production wishes to reach. Speaking from a position of relative authority in relation to the ceramicists (since the shop is one of the few spaces where Itamatatiua’s potters regularly sell their work outside the community), Léa does not hesitate to make interventions in order to ‘boost’ the ceramicists’ ethnic identity. ‘In the [community’s] guest house they have nothing of theirs because they thought it was better to place plastic or glass crockery... I told them: “where is your *identity* people?”’. Léa’s comment echoes those of several other cultural mediators who have worked with the ceramicists in Itamatatiua (see, e.g., Noronha 2011).

What these people draw attention to is the lack of ceramic objects in most of Itamatatiua’s households, including those of the makers. From their accounts, it seems that they would expect the ceramicists to use ceramic plates, and cooking pots, and other objects they make, at home. However, with the rare exception of flowerpots or other decorative items the makers usually bring home (such as cracked objects which cannot be placed for sale), no kitchen in

Itamatatiua uses ceramic crockery. That is, not anymore. ‘We used to have all kitchenware made out of clay. We ourselves made everything we needed. But not anymore. It’s better to buy a plastic or glass plate; it’s also easier to clean’, said Neide. It is not that the potters do not think highly of their ceramic work. What their rejection reveals, besides practical reasons and a modernising adaptation, is a long association of kitchen earthenware with severe poverty. Nearly all of the ceramicists today, grew up eating from and cooking with ceramic crockery. But those were also times when poverty was particularly intense in the community, as Dona Maria’s account also shows (p. 218). Being able to use glass or plastic plates, and metal or stainless steel cooking pots is, for those women and men, a sign of better living conditions and a dissociation from a poverty-stricken life where they needed to produce their own crockery.

Hence, the women’s choice not to place ceramic plates in the community’s guest house (see also Noronha 2015a: 36-38), is understood by their desire to build a ‘good image’ of the community for the visitors, one in which Itamatatiua is not ‘living in the past’ nor is it extremely poor, but people can afford to buy a few things for themselves. Many of the women, still consider it funny, and even strange, when restaurant owners buy dozens of ceramic dishes, plates and stew pots. Why would anyone use them anymore? Over time, followed by hundreds of such purchases, the ceramicists came to reappraise the use of ceramic crockery, this time appreciating its aesthetic –and not (only) its utilitarian– value. Seeing the customers buying and appreciating their ceramics –whether decorative (such as clay figurines) or utilitarian (such as crockery)– made the makers re-appreciate and re-consider their uses. In the last year, I saw more and more houses having locally produced ceramic objects for decoration. They may still refrain from using them for food preparation, but they are (re)introducing them into their homes, this time as decorative items.

However, not all cultural mediators wish to impose constraints on the ceramicists' 'identity'. As mentioned before, Isabela, who passed on her knowledge of clay figurine making to the women of Itamatatiua, has a radically different approach. Isabela was first acquainted with Itamatatiua's ceramics when she met Luisa at the artisanal fair in São Luís in 2004. Among the serendipitous events that the fair triggered for Itamatatiua was that Isabela 'helped bring' (*ajudou trazer*) one of the first SEBRAE workshops to be held at the Centre: a pottery workshop where Isabela worked closely with the ceramic makers of Itamatatiua.

Ever since that first workshop, Isabela admits to have 'fallen in love with the place and the people'. 'I wish I was from this *quilombo*, this is my place, I feel as if I am from Itamatatiua', she said to me. In the over ten years since she first visited Itamatatiua, Isabela has frequently returned. Every time, she goes door to door visiting each and every house in Itamatatiua's *sítio* and has a small chat with the residents. She keeps friendly relationships with all and most people in the community speak fondly of Isabela and 'all that she has done for this place'. Whether at the call of some of the community leaders (she has become close friends with Neide and Luisa) or when she gets funding for the implementation of some cultural workshop, Isabela returns to spend some time in the community. 'It is nice to have Isabela around', said Luisa, 'she speaks about identity, how it is good to be *quilombola*, people start valuing these things; it's important to talk about all that'. Isabela, a Black, Catholic woman, engages with all sorts of activities while she is in the community, all of them aiming at imparting some knowledge to the *quilombolas* of Itamatatiua. As a ceramicist herself, she teaches different techniques to the local potters. She informs them about artisanal fairs and how they can participate in them. As a former seamstress, she has also organised a workshop where several women from Itamatatiua and nearby *quilombos* learned how to sew clothes for themselves and their families. She also gathers the children and tells them stories related to Afro-Brazilian history and the importance of taking pride in their 'Black identity' and

cultural heritage. She helps Irene organise a music night where they will perform *Tambor de Crioula*. And also helps Neide run an activity at the church after Sunday's catechism. 'I am trying to do everything I possibly can to help in this community', she says.

One of the oldest cultural mediators in Itamatatiua, Isabela has become a good friend of the community. And even though she is very much engaged in spreading awareness of what she considers important for Itamatatiua's social and cultural reproduction, she has never imposed limitations on the *quilombolas*' creative imagination. Francinete, a young woman from Alcântara, has collaborated with Itamatatiua for the implementation of the 'Cultural revival' (*Resgate Cultural*)¹²⁶ project that focused on the 're-valorisation of local cultural practices'. The project was developed in two periods, first in 2007-8 and then in 2010 and revolved around different aspects of Itamatatiua's cultural life, such as *Tambor de Crioula* and *Forró de Caixa*, besides pottery. Francinete is politically engaged with the Black and *Quilombola* movements (and one of the founding members of the MABE) and believes that retaking pride in *quilombo* cultural heritage does not involve a rigid adherence to narrow representations about 'authentic' *quilombo* culture. Her understanding of *quilombo* heritage is shaped by her experience of working and living with the *quilombolas*. What was more important to the people involved in Itamatatiua's cultural life, Francinete remembers, was their ability to inculcate the younger generations with their passion for these cultural practices. 'The women were very happy to see young people getting involved', said Francinete, 'but they are also afraid that when they withdraw from the coordination of the Association (AMI) the *Tambor [de Crioula]* will end, the ceramics will end, the *caixeiras* will no longer play. They are strongly resisting but they say that the *feira* [of Santa Teresa] has already changed a lot, that

¹²⁶ The project was funded by the Fundo Elas. With funds made available by the project, the community also acquired new musical instruments and equipment both for the Centre for Ceramic Production and the guest house (*Pousada Santa Teresa*).

it is no longer the same thing’.

These cultural mediators wish to contribute to a cultural exchange with the women and men of Itamatatua rather than prescribe their limits of creativity. Paraphrasing Warren (2012), what allowed agents like Isabela and Francinete to become loved and valuable associates of the community ‘was their ability to take on the horizontal role of collaborators rather than that of the didactic expert who has already determined what the truth was and how it was achieved’ (2012: 147). Both women carefully listen to what Itamatatiuenses think of such notions as ‘identity’, ‘culture’, and ‘heritage’, and try to collaborate with them in articulating and communicating their own, unique, *quilombo* heritage.¹²⁷

Some final notes before concluding this section. As discussed so far, a part of Itamatatua’s rich ceramic production has been associated with what can be described as ‘self-conscious’ *quilombo* production. Scenes from peasant life (as it once was), forms that are plain and minimal, unpainted and coarse surfaces, are elements that for many attest to a *quilombo*’s African roots and cultural heritage, and are found in abundance in the ceramic production of Itamatatua. However, it needs to be made clear that a need ‘to prove’, or demonstrate, a *quilombola* cultural identity is not the motivating force behind the production itself.

Although, for instance, some of the ceramic makers may be interested in the representation of scenes of community life through memories in some of their artefacts, the potters are not necessarily interested in making their ceramic work *about* the *quilombo per se*. In other words, the ceramic production in Itamatatua is the product of the work of all of the women working in the Centre as a group and as individuals, creating pieces that both share common

¹²⁷ For processes of heritage-making among Afro-Brazilian groups (not *quilombos*), see the study by Nina Pinheiro Bitar (2010) among the Baianas of Acarajé (women producing a typical (street) food in Bahia) the culinary knowledge of whom was recognised as intangible national heritage by the IPHAN in 2004. See, also, the comparative study of processes of heritage making between Brazil and Reunion Island, taking as case-studies the UNESCO nomination processes for *samba de roda* (Brazil) and *maloya* (Reunion Island), Samson and Sandroni (2013).

elements –techniques of shaping objects, types of objects chosen to be made, etc. – *and* reveal traces of individual initiatives and personal style. Despite the sometimes intrusive, authoritative or even highhanded, approach some of those in position of relative influence to Itamatatiua's production may have, the women continue to be creative and make ceramic objects freely, inspired by the most diverse sources. The creative limits explicitly or implicitly advocated by those who conceive of *quilombo* production only within rigid classifications are, by and large, not followed by the women of the Centre.

It would at best be erroneous –and at worse biased– to suggest that the contemporary production in Itamatatiua stems from some sort of need to demonstrate to those 'outside' that Itamatatiua is indeed an 'authentic' *quilombo*. The potters' criteria for production stem mainly from two sources: what they *want* to make (whether this is their 'cultural legacy' or something they saw on TV), and what they think will sell more, reminding us that this is both –and equally importantly– a remunerative and enjoyable occupation. It is worth remembering that for the potters the form is secondary to the medium; the 'essence' of Itamatatiua's ceramics is in the clay with which they are made, and not so much in the form in which they are shaped.



Picture 13: Preparing the oven before a firing



Picture 14: Ângela and Nazaré selling ceramics at a fair in the Baixada Maranhense.

Materialities of heritage in Itamatatiua

In one of my first attempts at moulding clay into an identifiable ceramic objet, I was helped by the skilled hand of Canuta, one of the eldest makers. Next to me was Daina, a 12-year-old girl from the community and inseparable companion of mine in the village. Watching me taking my chances with the clay, she also decided to try making something of her own. No helping hands were offered to her, however. Adding more agitation to my clumsy efforts, all eyes at the *galpão* were turned to the two newbies. To my great surprise, the makers were making very encouraging and generous comments to me, while they were being anything but generous to the girl. I found this curious because from what I could see what we were producing did not differ much. The potters, each one occupying a different spot around the large working table, kept making comparisons between the two of us. Persistently applauding my efforts while criticising those of Daina. Trying to defend the young girl, I said that I was having help while she was doing everything on her own. The women immediately responded: ‘But she is from here! She should know’, and ‘Nobody ever instructed me!’ They reiterated how they had learned just by watching their mothers and grandmothers working with clay when they had been the girl’s age or even younger. ‘Aah, in your age Dai, I was making large pots after coming home from the field (*roça*)’, said Domingas. ‘But I rarely come here [to the Centre] how can I know how to do everything?’, the girl mildly protested. But that didn’t change much: ‘Not like that, Dai’, ‘press harder’, the potters would occasionally give some useful tips to the girl without however instructing her. ‘Katerina who is from foreign lands is learning and Dai who is from here cannot!’, her grandmother finally said in despair.

In that phrase, Daina’s grandmother captured much of the way knowledge of clay-work operates for Itamatatiuenses. For the makers, ‘the circulation of corporal substances’ and ‘the aptitude for a certain type of performance’ (Boyer 2015: 21) seem to conflate. If you are born here, then you should know, as the makers would have it. Being born in the lands of Santa

Teresa, being a daughter of the land (*filha da terra*) just like them, does not only make one *part* of the land, but also imparts the knowledge and the ability to mould the locally extracted argil into a ceramic object. The latter (as a final artisanal object), just like them, is an inseparable part of the land from which the black clay is extracted.

In discussing indigenous Australian views on heritage and the lived world, Harrison and Rose (2010) stress that ‘many societies perceive heritage in an integrated fashion, which makes the delineation of intangible and tangible impossible and illogical’ (2010: 272). In a similar fashion, Itamatatiua’s potters do not distinguish between the clay they use to mould their ceramics, the soil which they inhabit and nurtures them, and the earth they themselves are made of. Pottery may have turned into a symbol for Itamatatiua but Itamatatiua is not reduced to its ceramic production. Its *quilombolas* point instead to a more inclusive understanding of heritage and consequent strategies of preservation. As Benton (2010) reminds us, in the era of ‘living heritage’, ‘what counts is not the age, or rarity or other extrinsic value of a thing or a practice but the feelings of those involved’ (Benton 2010: 2-3). For the potters, heritage, as lived and felt by them, includes the totality of their collectively inhabited territory: the lands of Santa Teresa.

Similarly, for most Itamatatiuenses, ‘*quilombo* heritage’ is comprised of diverse elements of social life and, therefore, cannot be ‘simply a site, place, or intangible performance or event’ (Smith and Akagawa 2009: 6). It encompasses all aspects of *quilombola* cultural life, which is intrinsically attached to specific localities, histories, and affective relationships. How can Itamatatiua’s ceramic production be considered ‘national cultural heritage’ while the land from which the clay is extracted is yet to be safeguarded and protected by the state (despite having acquired a legally-protected status)? How can Itamatatiuenses be assured of the continuation of their traditional practice, which the inscription in national heritage lists is supposed to prescribe, when they are uncertain about the future of their communal lands?

Participation in local cultural life (*lived* heritage) has therefore been inextricably conceived of as an essential part of, or an instrument for, the community's struggle for land rights.

Quilombo heritage's intrinsic association with other constitutional provisions made to guarantee the rights of *quilombolas*, has rendered it an inseparable part of the same political struggle for the recognition of territorial rights. In this sense, 'heritage is not a substitute for land claims, struggles over subsistence rights, development, educational, and health projects, defence of sacred sites, and repatriation of human remains or stolen artefacts, but it is closely connected to all those struggles' (Clifford 2004: 8).

Itamatatiua's cultural heritage seems to be gaining wider recognition that is also attached to protective measures for its preservation. In 1999, the church of Santa Teresa together with the Saint's statuette and the 'stone of rights' (among eight other items inside the church), were registered by IPHAN in the National Inventory of Movable and Attached Goods (*Inventário Nacional de Bens Móveis e Integrados*). A few years later, Itamatatiua's ceramic production was included in IPHAN's National Inventory of Cultural References.¹²⁸ In 2015, it was also included in the initiative *Selo Quilombos of Brazil*; a strategy created by the Secretary of Politics for the Promotion of Racial Equality (SEPPIR) 'in order to identify products stemming from *quilombo* communities'.¹²⁹ The acquisition of the *Selo*, has been viewed by the makers as a marker of valorisation of their work, and something they hope will also be positively viewed by potential buyers. Finally, in 2017, Maranhão's state government inaugurated the award of the title 'Master of Popular Culture'. In the first public ceremony for the award of the '*Mestres da cultura popular*', which took place in São Luís in August 2017, ten *Mestres* from across Maranhão were designated by the state governor, Flávio Dino

¹²⁸ Based on the research of a joint UFMA-IPHAN working group, headed by Benedito Souza Filho, Maristela de Paula Andrade, and Rodrigo Ramassote, with the purpose to create an inventory of cultural references for the municipality of Alcântara. As a general note, recognition at the national level is also required by UNESCO if an item is to be considered as World Heritage. For further reading, see: Filho and Andrade (2012).

¹²⁹ The *Selo Quilombos do Brasil* is part of the Brazil *Quilombola* Program (PBQ).

(2015-present) in different categories of ‘popular culture’ –such as dance, music, and artisanal production. Among them, Neide de Jesus, as representative of Itamatatiua’s pottery-making skills and knowledge, was awarded *Mestre da Cultura Popular*.

Such tokens of recognition and affirmation of ‘popular culture’ are part of larger efforts at the state and national levels to acknowledge the forms of cultural heritage that have been most neglected –especially those relevant to *quilombo* and Afro-Brazilian groups. The state of Ceará is a pioneer in establishing the recognition and protection of ‘Masters of Traditional Popular Culture’ and ‘Living Cultural Treasures’ since 2003. The states of Alagoas, Pernambuco, Bahia, and Maranhão have also introduced similar laws. Furthermore, recent years have seen the intensification of efforts to acknowledge Brazil’s slave history and its role within the Atlantic slave trade. A prominent example is the Valongo Wharf archaeological site in Rio de Janeiro, one of the largest harbour areas of the slave trade where an estimated 900,000 Africans disembarked. The site was unearthed, partly rehabilitated, and turned into a historical visiting site (Mattos, Abreu, and Guran 2014). In 2017 it became Brazil’s 21st item to be inscribed in UNESCO’s World Heritage List.

For many, such efforts are a positive indication of the state’s valuation of Brazil’s plural cultural landscape. For others, however, such efforts also entail a degree of cultural appropriation by the state (Fry 1977). For the latter, the state’s formal acknowledgment of specific expressions as ‘national heritage’ has direct consequences for those groups whose cultural expressions do not fit the defined categories. For instance, if ‘traditional’ ceramic production is a badge of *quilombola* culture, what does that imply for *quilombos* that do not have a ceramic, or other recognisable, cultural tradition? Is the state, through mechanisms for the institutionalisation of heritage, controlling ‘authenticity’? For Neide, and Itamatatiua’s potters, the ‘Master of Popular Culture’ title is a positive recognition of the community’s long ceramic tradition, and it is hoped that such recognitions will propel the final land titling of

their *quilombo*. Others remain more sceptical and simply say that ‘only time will tell’ whether they will indeed expedite the process of land titling.

The ceramics the potters make out of their consubstantial relationship with clay are thought to contribute to the community by becoming known and attracting more attention from the outside. Grossberg (1996) has argued that ‘[t]he new global economy of culture entails a deterritorialisation of culture and its subsequent reterritorialization, and challenges culture’s equation with location or place’ (1996: 169). In the case of Itamatatiua, as well as that of other *quilombos*, we see that culture is ‘deterritorialised’ only to be firmly attached to territory again. It leaves the community (by becoming known and sold outside of it) yet it always returns to it, since it is intrinsically tied to the communal land. Being made of clay extracted from the lands of Santa Teresa, and from which the potters themselves are created, the ceramics objects seem to have a ‘capacity to mediate and be involved in intersubjective relations’ (Ewart 2012: 177). In their ‘struggle to be seen’ (Guidry 2003), *quilombolas* do not only defend their lands –their present– but they are actively engaged in the preservation of their future and the continuation of their existence.

Preserving *quilombo* cultural heritage in Itamatatiua is not therefore to simply preserve pottery work, or the Centre. It is not to preserve the knowledge of drum playing and creating the new generation of *caixeiras* either. It is all of that together and more. Preserving cultural heritage is, for Itamatatiuenses, to preserve all those tangible and intangible elements that constitute community life. It is to preserve the environment, religiosity, their ways of living, and their family bonds. It is, in other words, to preserve the communal land.



Picture 15: Adding objects to the oven before firing.

Conclusion

As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004) has argued, and as I have also been able to explore in my own ethnographic context, participants are ‘not only cultural carriers and transmitters ... but also agents in the heritage enterprise’ (2004: 169). *Quilombolas*’ active engagement in the wider recognition of their cultural practices aims at valorising and including their distinct ethnic culture within a wider, national and international context.

History, memory, and identity, are commonly being employed by groups as an ‘ideological messenger’ that communicates particular ‘representations about the future’ (Crouch and Parker 2003: 395). Or, in the words of James Clifford, ‘heritage is self-conscious tradition’ (2004: 6). At the same time, discourses of *quilombo* history and cultural heritage in the political sphere have influenced perceptions of the significance of local cultural heritage. For many of the women and men of Itamatatiua, taking pride in their *quilombo* cultural heritage is another way to say they are proud to be inhabiting their community lands for many generations. In this sense, involvement in, and the mobilisation of, resources in support of the community’s cultural heritage is also a way to further the community’s struggle for the establishment of land rights.

Through and in their ceramics, the women of Itamatatiua are expressing and communicating their intimate relation with their land and its history. Taking inspiration from lived and remembered images of their community that fit their understanding of a *quilombo*, those women tell a story of Itamatatiua identity, tradition, and resistance. It is their voice and their struggle for land that is imbued in their artefacts and through their distribution, they are hoping to tell their story, raise awareness, bring visibility, and final recognition of their presence in those lands.

Cultural activities end up reinforcing the intrinsic connection among the trinity residents-land-Saint. The land, and all that it means for the people of Itamatatua, is materialised in the pottery and manifested in religious articulations in honour of the patron saint and owner of the lands. Through both activities their relationship with the land is not only expressed, made visible, and communicated, but also reinforced. I will now move on to examine some of the ways residents, and children of Santa Teresa, manifest their affectionate, familial, relationship with the Saint and, in doing so, they also manifest their intimate relationship with the Saint's land which they inhabit. In the final chapter, I will focus especially on the ways these bonds are made manifest against a competitive religious background that appears to be growing stronger on the lands of Santa Teresa.

Chapter 6. Children of the Saint

Once somebody wanted to sell a plot of land to an outsider.
A pale White woman with blue eyes suddenly appeared and said:
‘This land is mine and you cannot sell it’.
She appeared out of nowhere and disappeared in the same way.
The men abandoned the deal at once.
It was Santa Teresa herself.

Beata de Jesus, born in 1924 in Itamatatua



Picture 16: View of the MA-106 that connects Alcântara with the port and towns in the Baixada Maranhense.

It was a hot dry morning, just a few days away from the *feira*, and the *batuque* had embarked on one of the last outings for the collection of donations (*joia*). As the 15 of October was approaching, the stretch covered by the itinerant group had greatly diminished. Walking on the MA-106, they were collecting donations from the houses along the road. From there one can also take the narrow dirt roads, growing on both sides of the dark grey asphalt like dusty arteries, that lead to the different village communities. Heading eastwards, aiming to visit

some *quilombos* that border Itamatatiua on that side, the group heard a woman calling and turned around. She was standing at her front door waving at the group that had walked past her house only a few minutes earlier. Had she not come out on time? Unsure what the call was for, Bena asked the young woman from where she was standing:

- Miss, are you *crente*?

- No!

- Do you receive Santa Teresa?

- I do. Please, come on in!

Assured it was a friendly house, the *batuque* turned around and walked straight to the woman's door. She warmly welcomed everyone in. It is rare that the *caixeiras* (the women playing 'the drums of Santa Teresa'), or one of the men accompanying the *batuque*, do not know what religious faith is followed at each house. Across the thousands of hectares the group walks during the outings to collect *joia*, they visit hundreds of houses. Through family and friend networks across the lands of Santa Teresa, however, Itamatatiuenses (and the *batuque*) are informed about recent conversions. Most *caixeiras* and escorts have also gained experience from previous *joia* outings. With very few exceptions, such as the one described above, the *caixeiras* and the men, accurately know which house is occupied by Evangelicals (*crentes*) and which is not. In other words, they know precisely where they are welcome and where they are not.

Nevertheless, religious conviction is not set in stone but often changes swiftly. People who used to be Catholics all their lives convert to Evangelical Christianity –or some members of the household do and then the entire house usually refuses to receive the Saint's visit, or people who had converted 'leave the Evangelical community' and go back to being Catholics. Therefore, sometimes, the *batuque* feels obliged to ask the house owner, just to be

sure, and avoid confrontation. ‘If we [inadvertently] approach a house [of Evangelicals] they just don’t open their doors. Some may even donate, but most take the opportunity to come out and start shouting and saying ugly things to us’, said Benedita, one of the *caixeiras*.

As explored in Chapter Four, the religious map of Alcântara’s villages has been changing dramatically in recent years. Pentecostal churches¹³⁰ also dot Santa Teresa’s territory and several former ‘children’ have converted to Evangelical Christianity. And while some go through a period of conversion only to return to Catholicism, it is safe to say that the numbers of Evangelicals have increased, both in the town and the rural communities of Alcântara.

In a 2015 *joia* outing in Oitiua, for instance, there was a lot of discussion between the *batuque* and Catholics there about the growing influence of the Assembly of God on their village. Oitiua is one of the largest villages of Alcântara and, together with Raimundo Sú, they are increasingly being seen as two potential urban centres in the area. Due to its demographic expansion, Oitiua has gained relative administrative autonomy from municipal authorities. Recently, a Catholic priest was assigned to the community and the Church of Oitiua now administers all the southern region of Alcântara (including Itamatatua). This was the first attempt, in recent years, to distribute ecclesiastic authority and reinforce the presence of Catholic priests in the municipality. Before then, priests were based permanently only in the town of Alcântara that continues to administer the majority of *quilombos*.

While walking around Oitiua collecting *joia*, there were entire streets from where the *batuque* did not collect any. ‘All the houses on this street are [of] Evangelical[s]’, said Seu Reginaldo who was accompanying the outing. ‘We better not waste our time’, he suggested. Given the

¹³⁰ Almost exclusively Assemblies of God. There are a few other Pentecostal churches in Alcântara, such as the *Primeira Igreja Batista em Alcântara* (First Baptist Church in Alcântara) and the *Igreja Adventista do Sétimo Dia* (Seventh-day Adventist Church), but their presence in the interior of Alcântara remains virtually non-existent, especially in comparison to the, by now, ubiquitous presence of *Assembleias de Deus* (Assemblies of God). It is worth mentioning here that, at the time of writing, no so-called neo-Pentecostal, or charismatic, churches (such as the nationally powerful *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* –IURD) are found in Alcântara.

relentless heat, the group welcomed the sparing of some streets, but the *caixeiras* were also disheartened by the fact that they were not welcome in those houses anymore. ‘You see this house over there?’, said Benedita as we were walking past some of the ‘Evangelical houses’, ‘this woman used to be a devotee of the Saint all her life...and now she is a *crente*’.

From one of those houses a young man opened his door: ‘Hey! Come over here!’, he shouted calling the *batuque*. The women were startled knowing the man was Evangelical, but seeing him waving at them they walked towards him. ‘Please don’t play the drums but here’s my *joia* for you’, the man said and continued: ‘I may be *crente* now but ever since I can remember we have been receiving the Saint in this house and have given you *joia*, so here you go’. The man smiled and wished the *batuque* a good day. The women thanked him and moved along. It seemed like, for that Evangelical, the *joia* outings were more part of a shared local tradition than a strictly Catholic (and hence ‘forbidden’ or ‘sinful’) religious celebration of a patron saint. The *caixeiras* were content that some *crentes* still acknowledged ‘the importance of our *feira* for all those lands’, as Irene said touched by the man’s consideration.

In this chapter I focus on some of the ways religious and territorial links between residents of the village communities that compose the lands of Santa Teresa are reinforced and reasserted. For this purpose, I will be looking at the activities that revolve around the organisation of the annual Catholic feast in honour of Santa Teresa d’ Ávila in Itamatatua. It will be argued that during the months of preparations for this religious celebration, the historical links that bind together the *quilombos* within the Saint’s land are reaffirmed through acts of devotion to and reverence for the Catholic saint. Such public demonstrations of religious faith do not only, paraphrasing Latour (2005), reassemble the Catholic social world of the Saint’s land, but also, manifest this social against its religious and territorial antagonists.

I am primarily focusing on the *feira* of Santa Teresa not because it is the only Catholic religious event in Itamatatua but because it is the largest and, arguably, the most emblematic one. Just like the ceramic work is the most emblematic aspect of Itamatatua's cultural life. In contradistinction to the restricted participatory dynamics of the local actors involved in the ceramic work (a group of women), however, this form of harnessing (religious) heritage is far more popular, taking the form of a mass participation during the main feast days. Similar to pottery-making, the religious feast has strong symbolic and tangible connections to the land. Nevertheless, the feast is fundamentally about delimiting a shared geography called '*terras de Santa Teresa*', and less about the material qualities of the land of which this geography is comprised. In other words, if ceramics are intrinsically attached to the *land*, the feast constitutes and articulates the shared *territory*.

Taking into consideration a spreading Evangelical presence in the region, I will be arguing that the *feira*, besides serving a strictly religious purpose (devotion to a patron saint), is simultaneously acting on a shared religious heritage –the latter here defined as collective historical legacy. In a rapidly changing and religiously-charged social landscape, one of the *feira*'s main workings is to renew members' affiliation to the Saint's family and reassert Catholic collective territorial claims. Through its realisation, it demonstrates Catholic presence and effective control over the land. The process of collecting *joia* also shows how devotees defy the Evangelical negation (and even mocking) of their saints, cultural and religious expressions, and sovereignty over their territory.

The analysis will not delve into the inner working of religious rituals. For the purposes of this chapter, I take ritual as 'an aspect of all social behaviour, not a special kind of behaviour, though some kinds of behaviour are much more ritualistic than others' (MacGaffey 1986: 42). My focus here is on the very public occurrence of such rituals and their visibility vis-à-vis, what for many Catholics are, their religious and territorial antagonists. Hence, as far as

ritual exegesis goes, I will ‘simply switch off the intentionality-seeking device’ (Bloch 2005: 132) and zoom out in order to place emphasis on the intentionality of participation in the ritual as a conscious and bodily affirmation of territorial control.

My aim is to make a compelling case suggesting that in the preparations for, as well as during, the feast days ‘traditional’ rites –such as drumbeat– take a new dimension, of which Catholic devotees are aware. This consists of a means of mass intervention in, and mapping out of, the collective territory –allowing for visibility and manifesting the ‘Catholic social’ against a growing ‘Pentecostal social’.

Worlds apart: Catholic and Evangelical Christians

One morning I was having a conversation with Juliene, a young woman from the nearby town of Bequimão who works in the school’s kitchen in Itamatatuiua. She is Evangelical ‘but very cool’, some Itamatatiuenses had told me before meeting her. We were talking about religion and what many Evangelicals think when it comes to other religions and cultural expressions. I told her about an incident that had happened a few days before our conversation. At the time, I was offering a beginners-level English class that was taking place at the Centre. Kids of different ages would join and among them, the children of the pastor. It was essentially the only activity they were allowed to participate in besides school attendance and services in their church. Evangelicals typically abstain from social activities that are not organised by other *crentes* or are explicitly addressed to them. Likewise, Juniel and Regina did not allow their children to socialise with the other kids outside school hours, nor partake in any social and sports activities outside their house. On that afternoon, the two girls and the youngest boy of the pastor’s family noticed the long drums used for the *Tambor de Crioula* that are kept at the Centre, and approached them intrigued. Class had not started yet so the

kids were playing about until everyone had arrived. The pastor's children touched the drums with hesitation and laughter. They started beating them softly. Their older brother quickly approached his siblings and asked them to stop at once. And so they did. Juliene laughed and explained to me that for Evangelicals these are 'instruments of the devil' and they should not be played. But, of course, these are not the only things 'they do not tolerate', as Juliene said, but there are many other aspects of what Afro-Brazilians at large consider their 'cultural heritage', that Evangelicals also associate with devilish adoration.

They don't like them [Afro-Brazilian cultural manifestations], they really don't. I do, because I don't want to discriminate against them, but not everybody is like that either. Take the teacher [in the elementary school], for example. She is Evangelical but she teaches them here. You understand? She teaches those things [sic] ... [related to Afro-Brazilian culture and included in the syllabus]. There are two teachers here [in the two schools in Itamatatua] who are Evangelical. And they teach them normally. One needs to be respectful. I think this is very important.

Despite the openness of many Evangelicals, some tend to be perceived as 'provocative' and 'disrespectful' towards non-*crentes* by many of my Catholic interlocutors. After their conversion, many Catholics argue, the *crente* looks down on 'sinners' who have not yet found salvation. They are also often believed to mock Catholic faith in saints. Here too, Santa Teresa often intervenes. The following story, about the 'punishment' of a 'disrespectful' Evangelical by Santa Teresa, was told to me by Benedita:

Once they [the *batuque*] were out for *joia*. You know where the tower of Jacioca is, right? So, they were there collecting *joia* and there were people up the tower doing some works. Some of them all the way up. They [the *batuque*] were walking past the tower. From up there they shouted: 'Eeeh! You're going to ask for alms? Go work you bums!'. They [the *batuque*] ignored them and continued their way. In the afternoon, around four o'clock, news spread that one of them had fallen from up there and died. I say it was the Saint's punishment for what he did (*castigo que a Santa deu pra ele*).

Evangelical prohibitions against alcoholic beverages, extramarital sex, drugs, and particular types of music (to name but a few), do not allow most *crentes* to attend *festas* other than their own –i.e. organised by members of the Evangelical community. Peel (2016) has argued that ‘religions tend to assume their most distinctive form when they are at the edge of their range, set in antithesis to another way of being’ (2016: 540). Pentecostal churches promise spiritual liberation from life’s plight through individual salvation and a radical transformation of the *crente*’s way of living. It is precisely the differences in lifestyle that sharply separate *crentes* from non-*crentes* and, from an Evangelical point of view, serve to exemplify how a virtuous life in Jesus can be led.

The Evangelical community does not participate in any of the festivities that relate to Santa Teresa, or to any other Catholic saint or feast for that matter. They clearly strive to stay far from such ‘false doctrines’. After conversion, most Evangelicals distance themselves from their fellow non-Evangelical villagers, especially when religious events are taking place in the community. On such occasions, they either shut their doors and windows and avoid communication with non-*crentes*, or altogether leave the community for the day.

Many Catholics in Itamatatuiua, however, insist that Evangelicals are not simply distant, but provocative. Especially around Catholic festive dates. Before the 2016 *feira* of Santa Teresa, for instance, the pastor (whose house is across the street from Luisa’s and next to the Centre) increased the frequency of religious services (*cultos*) held at the makeshift Assembly of God. During the first week of October, loud *cultos* were being held every night. The night before the *mastro* (6 October), that signals the official opening of the celebrations, a worship was taking place in the Pentecostal church/house. Pastor Junieli took the microphone to preach. As happened increasingly at that time, the *culto* revolved around ‘deceitful celebrations of the devil’. Dona Luisa had stayed up until the end of the service, not only because she was disturbed by what she was hearing, but also because, as a light sleeper, the sound of the

pastor's voice coming out of the loudspeakers just a few meters away from her bedroom did not give her much choice. 'We begin to get very worried and sad with all this', she told me the following morning after an early visit to her sister Neide. 'He kept talking about "lies" and "liars" and insinuating things about us and the *feira*', Luisa said frustrated and downhearted. 'What are we going to do?', she said voicing a thought that had probably been turning in her head all night.

Such indirect offensives against the Catholic community were not a rarity in Itamatatua. In the summer of 2015, *cultos* often included open-air film screenings, that were easily visible from the street, plugged into big loud speakers so that everyone within a range of a few dozen meters could hear loud and clear. The films almost exclusively revolved around 'false faith' and 'worshipping the Devil' something exemplified, in those stories, by '*macumbeiros*' (which essentially, for most Evangelicals, translates to all practitioners of so-called Afro-Brazilian religions in general). Although there is no active *terreiro* (religious house) of any such religion in Itamatatua, several residents (nearly all of which also identify as Catholic) attend services of Tambor de Mina in nearby communities (see also footnote 104 on the existence of Afro-Brazilian religions in the municipality at large). In one such film, screened on a large flat television screen placed outside the makeshift church, '*macumbeiros*' were depicted eating human flesh. As the film was easily visible from the street, the above-mentioned scene caused great commotion. The following morning, Luisa called Regina, the pastor's wife, to talk.

The film screenings did not continue. Yet, according to Catholic residents, the Evangelicals found different ways to 'provoke' them. On the eve of the *mastro* of the same year, a group of people had gathered at the communal open-air oven house, behind the Centre, to prepare traditional manioc cakes (*bolo de tapioca*) offered every night after church service. Mariusha

was the ‘judge’¹³¹ of the *mastro* and in charge of organising the baking. Neighbours and family were helping her and I offered to give an extra hand. Residents of Itamatatiua are typically joined by family and friends from other communities, since they too want to help with the preparations. Many people look forward to these gatherings that only happen once a year. Such occasions are jolly opportunities to gather together, tell jokes and tease one another, catch up on news and gossip, and enjoy oneself while contributing to the *festa* (or ‘working for Santa Teresa’, as many say). On that morning however, it was extremely difficult to have a conversation while making the cakes. Religious music was blasting from next door, and most people complained that the deafening sound made the work unbearable and ‘ruined the day’. I turned my head from where I was standing and looked at the source of the sound waves: the Pentecostal church/house just a few meters away. Doors and windows left wide open to facilitate the flow of sound out of the loud speakers. After a few hours, the music stopped and all windows and doors were shut.

We see, therefore, that two separate social spheres, or a public and a counterpublic, coexist. Evangelicals set their boundaries and restrict themselves to the activities taking place within their religious community. The same can also be said about Catholics. Counterpublics, argues Warner (2002: 63), ‘are, by definition, formed by their conflict with the norms and contexts of their cultural environment’. The counterpublic’s ‘cultural horizon against which it marks itself off is not just a general or wider public, but a dominant one’ (2002: 119). In this sense, Evangelicals are the, arguably smaller in size, ‘counterpublic’ to Catholics since they have created ‘alternative spheres’ of public action (Staeheli and Mitchell 2008: 142) –even though not particularly strong in Itamatatiua.

¹³¹ Every *festa* has two ‘judges’ (*juíz* and *juíza*) who are the main organisers of the celebrations or ‘*donos*’ (owners) of the *festa*. There are also one or two ‘judges’ for the *mastro*, and nine *mordomos* or *novenarios*, people who organise the evening prayers at the church, between the 6 and the 15 of October.

But an important issue that arises from the clear-cut distinction between Evangelical and Catholic social spheres, is that of being ‘*quilombola*’. If, as seen already, the latter entails subscription to specific socio-cultural identities and even (as will be discussed next), strong ties to the Catholic Church, can one be *quilombola* and Evangelical? Discussing the incompatibility of the two, Boyer (2003) has argued that the entanglement of Catholicism with the Black movement in Brazil, has generated an Evangelical ‘reaction’ to the Catholic codification of ‘the negritude of *quilombola* descendants’ (2003: 33). For Boyer, this ‘reaction’ has major consequences not just for *quilombola* religious identities but also, and perhaps most importantly for our discussion, for the lack of support Evangelical churches demonstrate with regards to *Quilombola* political movements. As Boyer argues: ‘any political initiative, any attempt to organise the collective, is to be considered as the devil’s work by Evangelicals’ (ibid.). It is also important to underline that most Evangelicals do not deny, in principle, being *quilombolas*. What they cannot accept is ‘the modalities of the current definition’ (ibid.).

Political/religious tensions between Catholics and Evangelicals have, therefore, created a de facto exclusive category of ‘*quilombola*’. Especially considering the latter’s indifference to the *Quilombola* movement. This incompatibility between specific ethno-racial and religious identities takes a radical form in Itamatatiua, where Catholicism is rooted in the *quilombo* foundation narratives. In the lands of Santa Teresa, one is either *quilombola* or Evangelical; the two are mutually exclusive. Furthermore, given the generally still narrow perceptions of ‘*quilombola*’ at the national level and their frequent attachment to specific imaginaries of rural life, renunciation of practices such as drum play, or ‘Afro-Brazilian’ dances, could have important repercussions for a given *quilombo*’s land regularisation procedure. Put simply, a *quilombola* who refuses or is afraid to play the drums risks not being seen as a ‘real’ *quilombola* in the eyes of the state. Would Itamatatiua continue to be considered a *quilombo*

and claim land titles if the majority converted to Evangelical Christianity and stopped producing their living heritage?

The production of ‘outsiders’

As a result of the above-mentioned reasons, and the particularly tense dynamics between Catholic and Evangelical Christians in the lands of Santa Teresa, Itamatatiuenses adopt a proactive approach to religious conversion, aiming at preventing more Catholics from leaving the Saint’s family and attenuating Pentecostal influence in the adjacent villages. One of the things Catholic *quilombolas* do for this purpose, is to forge the image of the Evangelical as an ‘outsider’. As Sarró (2010) points out, one cannot dissociate behaviour towards ‘strangers’ in local communities from ‘general political culture and access to citizenship’ (2010: 232). Besides the question of incorporating outsiders, one also needs to carefully examine the ‘*production* of strangers and mechanisms of social exclusion by which people from an in-group are classified and treated as strangers’ (2010: 233, 239; emphasis in the original). This, of course, has a direct bearing on former Catholics (and children of the Saint) who have converted to Evangelical Christianity in recent years.

For instance, the daughter of Pontaense (the former Evangelical and recently elected city councillor from Itamatatiua) works at the village’s school kitchen. She’s Evangelical and regularly attends the services delivered by Pastor Juniel. In one of our conversations, she told me she was born and lived all her life in Itamatatiua. Yet, when speaking with some of the *sítio* residents, they categorically said that Pontaense’s family was *not* from the community, alluding to the fact that they always lived outside the *sítio*. Several Catholic Itamatatiuenses had expressed their regret with that family’s involvement in politics and the Evangelical community. According to them, that family should not be representing the community in the

local council (since they were not ‘really’ from Itamatatiua) neither should some of its members have ‘helped bring’ the Evangelical family to their community.

Historically, *quilombos* used to be ‘extrastate zones of flight and refuge’ (Scott 2009: 133), where anyone who wished (and managed) to escape the exploitative colonial system could find a relatively safe space. In that, *quilombos* resembled several other refuge areas at various points in time and space, such as the ‘Baga institutional asylum’ in the mangroves of the Guinean coast where ‘people escaping adverse situations were rather welcome’ (Sarró 2010: 233-4). However, the openness of the historical *quilombo* does not necessarily reflect processes of incorporation of ‘outsiders’ today. Indeed, the establishment of ‘*quilombo*’ as a legal category in the 1988 Federal Constitution, and its attachment to specific requirements for the land regularisation procedure, has imposed certain limitations to the diversity of its ethno-racial, social, and religious composition. Today, many things are at stake if a given *quilombo* does not fit the generic ‘*quilombo*’ description dictated by the different agents responsible for, among other things, land regularisation.

Wishing to clearly distance themselves from Evangelicals (the ‘non-*quilombola* outsiders’), Catholics (the ‘autochthonous *quilombolas*’) seek to particularly reaffirm those aspects of their collective identities that are rejected by their religious/territorial antagonists. They hence define their identities and claim their territory in opposition to the others. Sarró (2010) similarly shows how the openness of the Guinean mangroves was curbed when things were at stake for the autochthones, who had signed contracts with the spirits, the ‘ultimate autochthones’ (2010: 235), and were granted permission to live there –not unlike Itamatatiuenses in the lands of Santa Teresa. As Yuval-Davis (2006: 197) has suggested: ‘Belonging tends to be naturalised, and becomes articulated and politicised only when it is threatened in some way’. When the *quilombolas* of the Saint’s land perceived the growing influence of Pentecostal churches in their area as a potential threat to the legitimisation of

their land ownership and their claims to legal land titles, then the need to clearly dissociate themselves from them and ‘produce’ them as ‘outsiders’ and ‘non-*quilombolas*’ (something Evangelicals do not deny for reasons outlined above), became imperative. As will be showed next, the land tenure system in the Saint’s land ultimately transpires as the major dividing line between Catholics and Evangelicals.

Commons and enclosure in the Saint’s land

As discussed at length in Chapter Four, the problem of population growth created a sort of housing crisis in Itamatatuiua, since increasingly more people needed a plot of land to build their homes. The encroachment of outsiders who anarchically demarcated land passing over customary law worsened the problem since if someone needed that land the ‘owner’ would want to sell it and not give it away. It is *crentes* who are seen as the pre-eminent infiltrators by virtue of their vociferous rejection of the pact between Santa Teresa and her (Catholic) children. The problem of land grabbing and its private appropriation grew especially in areas outside the *sítio* where the custodian’s authority is not immediately felt.

Dona Maria de Jesus, one of Itamatatuiua’s oldest residents, has personally experienced this issue when, like other elderly people, she decided to move outside the *sítio* in order to have easier access to the main roadway:

Just so you see, I live here and this land I myself bought! In the old days nobody used to buy land. [But] today one has his house and when a plot of land appears they go and take it...they just grab the land to sell it.

For the Catholic majority of *quilombolas* in the lands of Santa Teresa ‘community and Catholicism are inextricable’ (Boyer 2016: 29). The growing presence of Evangelicals throughout their shared territory has not only defied the rules of common land use, but it also

had important ramifications for the very nature of land ownership by the Saint. Such is the disruption experienced by Evangelical land occupation, that Catholics do not see it as *theirs* anymore. As residents frequently comment, before the advent of Evangelicals ‘all this area *used to be Catholic*’. ‘It’s not how it used to be’, said Zé Roxo as we were walking in the area of Campo where he lives. ‘Since I remember myself there was *not a single crente on this land*’ (my emphasis) he said pointing out the vast open area of the Campo that was stretching in front of us. ‘Can you imagine that?’, he asked rhetorically while staring into the fields.

The existence of *crentes* indeed nullifies the very principle of land ownership by the Saint, in the eyes of many Catholics. When land is occupied by deniers of her existence, and perhaps most importantly, of her right to own land (as seen also in Chapter Four), then the land itself ceases to be property of the Saint. In that sense, ‘locality is ephemeral unless hard and regular work is undertaken to produce and maintain its materiality’ (Appadurai 1996: 180-181). For the land to remain the Saint’s property it needs to be inhabited exclusively by the Saint’s children. As Castanhede Filho has argued: ‘in Itamatatuiua the use of land or natural resources is considered a good (*um bem*) available to those who *agree to respect* the social practices regarded as propitiators of equal rights for all those who use the lands’ (Pereira Júnior 2017: 23; citing Castanhede Filho 1999: 11, my emphasis). Across the Saint’s territory, therefore, land is a *limited* common good, conditionally available to those who agree to live by the rules established by the Saint and kept by the land custodian.

For Jeffrey, McFarlane, and Vasudevan (2012), common rights to land and resources are better understood in terms of a dialectic relationship with enclosure. Defining the latter as ‘a seizure of the commons’ and the commons as ‘a generative spacing that is not simply reducible to but that variously precedes, responds to, and exceeds processes of enclosure’ (2012: 1249; citing Blomley 2008: 320), Jeffrey, McFarlane, and Vasudevan (2012) argue that the two are in flux. Commons and enclosure ‘are not resolved into a neat binary’, since

‘[t]he struggle for the commons has never been without its own politics of separation and division’ (2012: 1254).

With this in mind, we may be able to better comprehend the exclusive identification of common land with Catholicism by the majority of the Saint’s children. Even though the ‘*quilombo*’ may be commonly perceived to represent a collective ethos of sharing and common rights to land and natural resources, that does not prevent it from simultaneously choosing to raise its boundaries to protect the commons under threat. In the context of the lands of Santa Teresa, these boundaries are set by the Catholic majority against infiltrating Evangelicals as well as recent converts.

The Evangelicals living on the lands of Santa Teresa reject the axiom that the land belongs to the Saint (who, for Catholics, is the original and *only* owner), and do not adopt the ethic of land sharing, which the Saint’s children have adopted for many generations. These two points of disjunction are of major significance to the children of the Saint and the *quilombolas* of Itamatatua in particular. This is why the Saint’s lands *cannot* be shared between Catholics and *crentes*; the two cannot co-exist within the same territory without altering the status quo of land ownership. By emphasizing how the Saint ‘used to own so much land, but not anymore’, Catholics are highlighting the extent to which the Evangelical presence within their collective territory has been experienced as intrusive and annihilating.

Events that are perceived as disruptive to an existent state of order, argues Gledhill (2012), affect ‘the overall balance of social and political forces’ (2012: 13). Lefebvre writes that ‘the balance of the community’ is ‘threatened on two fronts’, namely ‘in nature’ and

in social life, through ever more differentiation and inequality. The simultaneous emergence of families isolated from the community, of 'private' property outside of the collective systems, and of the power which certain families and certain individuals wielded over the community, destroyed that community from within (2014: 227-228).

What for several generations used to be an 'unmitigated' Catholic territory, where nearly everyone identified and fostered strong ties with Santa Teresa and whom they acknowledged as 'owner of the lands' (*dona das terras*), is now in many ways a 'divided' territory between Catholics and Evangelicals. Catholics extend the association with the mutually exclusive identities of Evangelical and *quilombola* to the territory they occupy. The *quilombo* lands of Santa Teresa cannot be occupied by non-Catholics and/or non-*quilombolas*.

Reacting against the growing Evangelical 'menace', Itamatatiuenses, at the forefront of religious life on the lands of Santa Teresa, take initiatives to reinforce Catholicism and ties among Catholics. This, as will be explored next, mainly happens through the realisation of different rites that are part of religious festivities. In the words of Durkheim ([1912] 2001: 287): 'rites are, above all, the means by which the social group periodically reaffirms itself'. As explored in Chapter Five, Itamatatiua's 'ethno-cultural' *quilombo* heritage, stemming from and asserting their historical relation with 'specific territorialities' (Almeida 2006), is one major stream of grassroots action in defence of the collective territory. Their religious identity, by virtue of its intrinsic association with kinship and the collective territory, is another. Just as their cultural identity is attached to the material qualities of the land they inhabit (the black clay of which both people and ceramics are made), their religious identity is essentially attached to the trinity Saint (Catholicism) - Saint's land (territoriality) - children of the Saint (kinship). Since the three are inherently interrelated, whoever openly rejects the fundamental principles of religious life in the lands of Santa Teresa, has no place on the collectively inhabited territory.

Catholicism outside the October religious feast

Religious and territorial bonds between the different communities that comprise the Saint's land are not dormant only to be awakened in the period before and during the *feita*.

Throughout the year, religious, kin, and neighbourly ties bring residents together. The existence of both the church and the cemetery in Itamatatua are essential to the maintenance of these inter-communal relationships. Important events in the religious calendar, as well as burials in the communal cemetery, are not only opportunities for Catholics to gather together but also a good reminder of the deep-rooted ties of each 'satellite community' with the Saint's home.

Other Catholic religious events that take place throughout the year mainly revolve around Catechism and occasional meetings. Alessiane, 27-year-old school teacher and wife of councillor Ribinha, leads such activities in Itamatatua, together with Dona Maria who lives in Itamatatua da beira da estrada (see Map 9). Dona Maria will typically run Sunday catechism (which essentially substitutes the Sunday mass), while Alessiane leads all activities that connect Itamatatua's Catholic community with those of other *quilombos* in Alcântara and the Baixada. These usually consist of 'youth meetings' (*encontros da juventude*) where young people from different communities meet and are encouraged to get involved in religious life through entertaining and participatory activities. Also commonly, groups from the *quilombos* gather together to celebrate important events in the Catholic calendar, such as religious feasts and masses, by visiting different communities or towns in the Baixada.

Such church-related activities bring together Catholics from across the Saint's land throughout the year. Residents, however, often express their regret at the absence of members of the Catholic Church in their communities. They often allude to this relative lack of the church from the everyday life of *quilombolas* as one of the main reasons behind Pentecostalism's growing popularity. Unlike the lack of priests in Alcântara's *quilombos*, all

Evangelical churches have their pastor firmly based in the community. For some Itamatatiuenses, this lack is a major setback facing the growing Evangelical presence. The *casa do padre* in Itamatatiua, where missionaries would reside for long periods over several decades, stood dilapidated for many years and has now completely vanished. ‘We need more support from the church so we can educate our youth and not let them be seduced by the Evangelicals’, said Ceci.



Picture 17: Carrying Santa Teresa

The legacy of liberationist Christianity

Complaints about the ‘abandonment’ by the Catholic church are especially pronounced in contradistinction to the close relationship *quilombolas* used to have with members of the Church in the past. The community’s own history of foundation, land struggle, and survival goes hand in hand with a solidified identification of land with the Catholic patron saint. The mutual agreement over land occupation between residents and the Saint is, after all, the reason why Itamatatiuenses are today the legitimate occupiers of her land. The intimate relationship of the ‘children’ with their patron saint has been largely extended to the Catholic Church, and both are often seen as the community’s allies since the beginning.

To my knowledge, there is virtually no registered information about the nature of relationships between representatives of the Catholic Church and locals who practised so-called Afro-Brazilian religions. It is possible that there were tensions or frictions between the Catholic church in Alcântara and those adhering to other religious faiths. However, residents’ accounts today do not describe a conflictual relationship between Afro-Brazilian practices and the Catholic church, but give the impression that the two co-existed relatively harmoniously and that they were mutually influenced.¹³²

In Alcântara, the role of the Catholic Church and its missions in those years have left an indelible mark on the struggle of *quilombolas* for their land rights. Under the jurisdiction of the Prelacy of Pinheiro (elevated to Diocese in 1979) Brazilian and foreign missionaries undertook long periods of missionary work in the village communities and towns of the Baixada Maranhense. Especially during the years of Bishop Dom Afonso Maria Ungarelli

¹³² There is a huge body of literature on syncretic Afro-Catholicism, especially in Brazil. See, indicatively: Goldman 1985, 2009; Brown and Bick 1987, Silva 1994, Maués 1995, Ferretti, S. 1995, Lewgoy 2006. See also the recently published handbook on contemporary Brazilian religions, edited by Schmidt and Engler (2017).

(1946-1975), the work of the MSC¹³³ missionaries has been of great significance in raising awareness of human rights and laying a solid basis for the political struggle of *quilombolas* in the following decades.

Several pastoral agents took an active role in the struggle of *quilombolas* against the launch centre, defending residents' land claims and helping organise their cause. During the 1980s, a critical decade for Alcântara since it was when the construction of the space port took place, Catholic missionaries were scattered throughout the municipality. Some were influential in spreading awareness of the implications of such an undertaking and worked together with political and human rights activists in order to coordinate and articulate a strong collective movement of rural residents against the construction of the CLA. One such Catholic missionary was *padre* Hélder, 'a strong leader in the work of the CEBs in Alcântara', Borges, local social movement leader, told me. 'His contribution was very important in the 80s, in the period the base was constructed, with our confrontation with the government', Borges remembered with affection. More recently, in the conflicts between *quilombolas* and the CLA in 2007 and 2009, priests Renner and Silvino were also in the front line of popular demonstrations against the CLA.

Father Haroldo (also discussed in Chapter Two), is another priest who is fondly remembered by many people in Alcântara, especially in Itamatatuiá. 'He is one of those fathers who are engaged [with the people]; fighting from within a contradictory organisation, like the Catholic church. But [he] has been very important in this process of resistance and visibility of our struggle', Davi Pereira Júnior told me.

¹³³ Stands for *Missionários do Sagrado Coração* (Missionaries of the Sacred Heart). It is a missionary congregation in the Catholic Church that was founded in France, in 1854. In the Diocese of Pinheiro, missionaries were mainly Italians and, later, Canadians.

From the early 1980s to this day, clergy and lay advisers in Alcântara have, by and large, joined forces with the *quilombolas* in the articulation of their positions. Militants of the Black and *Quilombola* movements have had a close collaboration with Catholic missionaries and priests in Alcântara and continue to be on good terms with each other, unlike Evangelical pastors and churches in general. The Catholic church's work influenced by liberationist Christianity, has contributed to the creation of a profile of a church of acceptance, of the poor and marginal, and of all those less privileged in general. Löwy importantly underpins that this was not a uniquely Brazilian phenomenon but widespread across Latin America where the 'Church of the Poor is the inheritor of the ethical rejection of capitalism by Catholicism' –a product of 'negative affinity', in Weberian terms, between the two (Löwy 1996: 30).

This is especially important when contrasted with the 'dominant conservative political/religious culture of most Evangelical Churches' that 'often turns them into passive or ardent supporters of the status quo and sometimes even of sinister military dictatorships, like those of Brazil, Chile and Guatemala' (Löwy 1996: 113). Known for their powerful political alliances and rapidly accumulated wealth (Freston 1994, Carneiro Campos 2011, Machado and Burity 2014, Cunha 1999, Siepierski 1997, Bohn 2004), this aspect of Evangelical churches is strongly reflected in popular perceptions in Alcântara about the recent 'infiltration' of Evangelicals in their communities.

Of course, not all priests in Alcântara have been, or are today, engaged in liberation theology. Some have kept a more reserved or even indifferent stance when it comes to political life and the land struggle of *quilombolas*. In a conversation I had with a Catholic priest who is based in the town of Alcântara but had spent some time in the past in Itamatatua, he explained to me that his stay in the community solely revolved around catechism and preaching the Bible. Coming from a wealthy family of Maranhão, the White priest had studied medicine in one of Brazil's most prestigious universities, the University of São Paulo, and had then left for Paris

where he pursued studies in philosophy only to decide to become a priest some years later. Alcântara was his first mission, a proper outpost and, as he confessed, the ‘culture shock’ was particularly intense for him. ‘I spent some weeks in Itamatatiua back then. I was young and didn’t have much patience when they kept saying all these things about Santa Teresa being from Itamatatiua and so on. “No, Santa Teresa d’Ávila was born in Spain”, I would tell them, but their ignorance was immense’, the priest told me. The rather elitist approach to teaching this priest followed, however, may have left its impression on Itamatatiua, since nowadays most residents indeed acknowledge that Santa Teresa was born in Spain and was then ‘brought to Itamatatiua’, in the form of the little statue, ‘because she wanted to live in the poorest place of all’, as many tell.

For most *quilombolas* material wealth is hard to access, and many do not wish to adhere to an economically and/or politically ‘powerful’ church, like the Assembly of God (assuming for a moment that the Catholic Church is not as powerful). An identity of ‘poor’ (*pobre*) imbued with dignity and pride is perhaps one of the most impactful residues of the influence of liberationist Christianity on Alcântara’s *quilombos*. Furthermore, many of the current *quilombola* leaders have collaborated with local CEBs and pastoral agents, usually alongside civil political activists. Dona Irene, for instance, spent a few years in a Catholic convent in Guimarães where she was immersed in the studies and teachings of Catholicism and came close to a group of priests and missionaries. She participated in field missions and catechism with them, which is how, she argues, she enhanced her communication skills and built confidence in public speaking. During her time in Guimarães she was under the custody of Padre Claudio, an Italian missionary, who ‘was like a father’ to young Irene. ‘This experience also helped me get over the prejudice we had about foreigners’, she said in one of our conversations.

The Catholic Church in Alcântara continues to be sympathetic to *Quilombola* movements and the legacy of the CEBs is ingrained in the practices of peasant political mobilisation among *quilombolas*. In Itamatatua, the work of Marxist Catholic missionaries found fecund ground and added to the community's very own historical trajectory of struggle and deep-seated idea of belongingness. Several priests spent spells in Itamatatua contributing not only to the residents' religious but also political and human rights education. Father Haroldo, for instance, continues to work closely with Neide, the land custodian and community leader, and has overtly embraced the community's struggle for land rights. In a conversation I had with him in São Luís, he expressed his vehement position with regards to the presence of an Evangelical pastor in Itamatatua. He said: 'Who has entered there now is a Protestant [sic], isn't that right? And he shouldn't have. Because this colony is of the *quilombolas*. Not his. This is wrong, it is just wrong. It's like me arriving there and building a house. No. This is a *quilombo*. A *quilombo*. A *quilombo*', he firmly repeated.

While Father Haroldo's justification for the repudiation of the Evangelical presence in the community was made on ethno-legal grounds (Itamatatua having the legally-protected status of *quilombo*), many residents articulate their objection to the pastor's establishment in their community on entirely religious grounds (Itamatatua being land of Santa Teresa, hence, by definition Catholic only). 'These are the lands of Santa Teresa', Nazaré, resident of the Bacurizeiro, told me and continued: 'because since I remember myself everyone was saying that this land is the Saint's. And I continue to believe the same'.

So far, I have discussed the entanglement of specific notions of religious, ethno-racial, and cultural identities with local perceptions of autochthony (the Saint's children granted divine permission to live there). In what follows, I will try to show how specific rites, that are an essential part of the *feira* of Santa Teresa, visibly and acoustically manifest the presence of the Saint's children across her territory. As seen in Chapter Two, the stories narrating Santa

Teresa's divine intervention serve to consolidate the Saint's ubiquitous presence throughout the year. However, it is in the outings for *joia* and the actual feast days that Santa Teresa presents herself at each and every household, resulting in direct encounters with her children. Furthermore, as will be argued, the offering of *joia* is an effective validation of the socio-religious and territorial relationship between a resident/household and Santa Teresa.

The *batuque*'s physical presence across the Saint's land, not only calls other Catholics into action by contributing to the organisation of the religious festivity, but also delivers a strong message of determination to Evangelicals. 'Let's beat those drums real loud guys! Let's show them we're here. Santa Teresa is here!', said Benedita as the *batuque* was entering a village.



Picture 18: The *batuque* walking through a field during a *joia* outing

Mapping out the shared territory

The *feira* of Santa Teresa in Itamatatua celebrates its patron saint, Santa Teresa d' Ávila de Jesus. Although the feast culminates on the 14, 15, and 16 of October, these three days are only the climax of long weeks of preparations and small pre-celebrations. A few months before the *feira* takes place, the festive period officially opens and a group from the community (*batuque*), led by *caixeiros*, visits nearby and more distant communities collecting donations that will contribute to the organisation of the big celebration. It is, therefore, with the help and material and immaterial contribution of all the Catholic devotees inhabiting the lands of Santa Teresa that the *feira* comes into being every year.

In this touring that lasts for weeks, the *batuque* walks through the lands of Santa Teresa, visiting each and every community that is part of it, as well as some villages and towns beyond those limits. Santa Teresa participates in all outings for *joia*. Together with the *batuque*, the Saint leaves the community in the form of a small statue (which is believed by many to be the Saint herself)¹³⁴ and, after the end of each visit, she returns to her home: the church of Itamatatua. During those visits, that continue until the eve of the feast day, the Saint (as a statue) is carefully carried by a guardian in order to 'physically' visit the devotees' houses and give them her blessing.

Teresinha is collecting *joia*

But it is not out of need

She collects to find out

Whose heart is good indeed

Teresinha tira joia

Mas não é com precisão

Ela tira experimentando

Quem tá de bom coração

Teresinha came from faraway

Tired from walking

In the house of this devotee

She came to get some rest

Teresinha veio de longe

Cansadinha de andar

Na casa deste devoto

Ela veio se descansar

¹³⁴ On the agency of objects, see: Blanes and Sarró 2015, Berliner 2007.

Lady of the house
Teresinha came to see you
If she finds you with health
Please receive her with pleasure

Senhora dona da casa
Teresinha veio lhe ver
Se lhe acha com saúde
A receba com prazer

Chants like this one are sung by the *caixeiras* when visiting a house to collect *joia*. The first outings, that begin at some point between July and August, are destined to those communities that are on the outer limits of the Saint's lands and hence the furthest away from Itamatatua. As weeks go by, the visits get closer so they gradually end up in Itamatatua, where the *batuque* carries out its last collection of donations on the eve of the *feira*. In these centrifugal expeditions, and centripetal returns home, the sum of miles walked under the equatorial sun increases as the radius covered by the *batuque* shortens.¹³⁵ Bena, one of the *caixeiras*, explained the alternating motif of the outings to me:

Each time the group visits some part [of the Saint's territory]. First we go towards Bequimão. We go and spend seven or eight days there...then we come back. We spend three days at home. Then the other group already leaves towards another direction, towards Mojô, those parts over there...sometimes we spend ten days...nowadays not really anymore, but before we used to spend up to fifteen days in one outing. Now the maximum is seven, eight days. Then we come back...the first group gets some rest and the one that was here [in Itamatatua] goes somewhere else, to Japeú, to those places over that side. In Japeú we only spend three days. Then we come back, and the other group is already waiting to leave from yet another part. This is how it goes ... until the day of the *feira*. When the day of the *mastro* comes [6 October], from then on, we leave in the morning and we come back in the afternoon. We go in the morning and come back in the afternoon, until the 13th. Every day. One group goes, one group stays, one group leaves, one group arrives...until the end.

¹³⁵ If we take as an example the concentric circles of Graphic 1 (Chapter Four) the *batuque* starts from the outer circle (*terras de Santa Teresa*) and after having covered this area moves to the circle in the middle (*quilombo* of Itamatatua) only to end up in the *sítio* on the eve of the feast day.

Among the responsibilities of the people who organise the *feira* each year is to form the *batuque* (see discussion in Chapter Two). Although most people are invited to join in these roles, it is also common that someone has made a promise –e.g. to participate in the *feira* as *caixeira*, or to send their daughter to be a *bandeira*, and therefore asks the organizers in advance in order to secure their place and hence the payment of their promise. Bena is the granddaughter of Dona Zuleide, one of Itamatatua's most iconic *caixeiros*, who died at the age of 102 and had dedicated most of her life to the organisation of *feiras* for Santa Teresa and training women in drum playing. Bena knew how to play the drum (*caixa*) from a very young age but had never been a *caixeira* before she needed to redeem a promise. Going through some health problems herself, she had promised Santa Teresa that if she recovered she would serve as a *caixeira* in her *feira*. Since then, many years have passed and Bena is now asked by organisers to participate. 'It is a bit tiring for me to do it every year', she said, 'but it is not so easy to find *caixeiros* anymore, so I don't want to tell them no. I like doing it; it's just very tiring to walk such long distances under the sun'. Benedita, Bena's neighbour in Itamatatua and an experienced *caixeira* herself, takes great pride and joy in participating every year. 'I like it, oh, I like it very much!', she says, 'I can't wait for this time of the year to come, so we can go out for *joia*. I will continue to do it for as long as my feet stand'. Unlike Bena, she did not have anyone in her family who was a *caixeira* but since she was a young girl she would accompany the *batuque*. 'I wasn't even a *bandeira*', Benedita says, explaining that the common path to becoming a *caixeira* is to be a *bandeira* as a young girl so that one gradually learns all the chants and practices the drums with the older women. 'I just learned on my own, I was accompanying the *joia* with the Saint, I would carry [the Saint] ... and listen to the ditties (*cantigas*) and then I went keeping them in my memory', she said.

The *batuque* announces its arrival to a given community by beating the drums of Santa Teresa. Residents expect the visit and when hearing the drums they know the Saint with her *batuque* have arrived. They open their doors and prepare their donations. When the *batuque* approaches, the house owners come to the door and make way for the Saint to come in. The custodian who has the honour to carry the Saint throughout the visit carefully hands in the small-sized statue of Santa Teresa to the devotee receiving it. While they take the Saint through the house and receive her blessings, the *batuque* beats the drums, dances, and sings ditties of gratitude for the *joia*. In a few minutes' time, the house owner carefully hands back the Saint and thanks her and the *batuque* for their visit. Sometimes devotees are especially moved by Santa Teresa's visit and start crying or holding on to her and praying for a long time. The *batuque* then quickly shifts the tune and sings a ditty apt for the occasion. In the latter case, for instance, they will sing one of the following verses:

The sun enters through the door	<i>O sol entra pela porta</i>
The moon through the window	<i>E a lua pela janela</i>
Lady Santa Teresa	<i>Senhora Santa Teresa</i>
I am not leaving without you	<i>Eu não vou daqui sem ela</i>
Lady give back the Saint	<i>Senhora me dê a Santa</i>
I will not leave her with you	<i>Que essa Santa eu não lhe dou</i>
This Saint is not mine	<i>Essa Santa não é minha</i>
She is our Saviour's	<i>É do nosso Salvador</i>

When the Saint is handed back to the custodian, blessings are exchanged, donations are handed to the porter, and the *batuque* moves on to the next house expressing good wishes to the devotees by singing:

Lady of the house
I am leaving now
Goodbye until next year
I will be coming back

*Senhora dona de casa
Eu já vou me retirar
Adeus até paro ano
Eu tornarei a voltar*

Stay with God
I am also leaving with Him
Stay with our Lady
With Teresinha I leave

*Fique vós com Deus Adeus
Que eu também com Deus me vou
Fique com Nossa Senhora
Com Teresinha eu vou*



Picture 19: The day of the *mastro*

On October 6th, nine days before the main feast day, the *festa* officially begins and the *mastro* (a tall decorated tree trunk) is installed in front of the church. As happens before a *festa*-related activity takes place, at the crack of dawn the *caixeiras* sing and play the

alvorada, a morning chant, by the church door. In those chants, they welcome and pray for the new day that is rising and call the community to get ready for the upcoming celebrations. On the day of the *mastro*, a group of young and strong men go to the forest in the early morning and cut a tall tree. They clean it of its branches and carry the trunk to Itamatatua. The rest of the community, as well as people from other *quilombos*, meet the men on their way back from the forest at the entrance to the community (where the *ramal* meets the MA-106). The gathered crowd, accompanies the men who carry the *mastro* in a high-spirited procession to the church door. The *caixeiras* beat their drums and sing as they walk along. ‘The *mastro* of my judge is from the tree of *mamoré*, carried by the men and celebrated by us women’, one ditty goes. The songs of the *caixeiras* alternate with the cheerful music of an invited brass orchestra that calls everyone to dance along as they walk up the steep dirt road to Itamatatua. When they reach the church, everyone takes a break. It has been a long and exhausting walk to the community, especially for those who carry a heavy tree trunk under the hot sun. The assembled people go to the ‘house of the *festa*’ or ‘house of the Saint’ (*casa da festa/casa da Santa*) for some water and food, and shelter from the sun. In the meantime, women and men decorate the trunk with vegetation, offerings –such as fruits and alcohol– and hang a flag with the image of Santa Teresa right on the tip of the tree trunk. Around four in the afternoon, energies retrieved, the men are ready to raise the *mastro*. After long and strenuous efforts, it is installed in front of the church, signalling the beginning of the *novenas*. Starting on that night, and for nine consecutive nights, the *novenas* take place. They are organised by a different person each night, called a *mordomo* (usually alternating between male and female *mordomos*), and they consist of public praying at the church followed by the offering of a lavish table full of cakes, sodas, and special treats for the kids, paid for by the *mordomo*. *Novenas* are usually held as a form of payment for a promise made to Santa Teresa. The same is true for the ‘judges’ of the *mastro* and the feast. Perhaps it is worth

noting here that most *mordomos* are not from Itamatatiua, but rather residents of other communities within the Saint's land. On the other hand, the 'judges' of the *feira* and of the *mastro* are, with rare exceptions, from Itamatatiua. The 'tables of the *mordomos*' (*mesas dos mordomos*) are so sumptuous that they can satisfy the appetite of all those present (both those who are the guests of honour and invited to sit around the table and those who attend the event crowding the space inside and outside the *casa da festa*) and even suffice for many to leave with bags full of cake to take home and share with their families.

The last novena takes place on the eve of the 15th, which is the night the *sítio* takes turn in offering its *joia*, closing the cycle of each year's round of donations. On that day all festivities culminate. The *casa da festa* and the church are full of people who come to pay tribute to their beloved Santa Teresinha. Catholics from every part of the Baixada Maranhense come to Itamatatiua on a small pilgrimage, which attracts hundreds. In the afternoon of the same day, the main procession takes place and the Saint is taken around the *sítio*. On the 16th, the *feira* concludes with the announcement of the following year's organisers.

Walking through the plains of the Saint's land, the *batuque*, that carries the Saint, takes the opportunity to amplify its voice and manifest its presence loud and clear. By beating the drums of Santa Teresa upon entering a community and throughout their visit, they announce their presence and deliver a strong message to the Evangelical population. An instrument widely known to be strongly disliked by Evangelicals but essential to the *feira*, as well as to what has come to be considered 'Black' and '*quilombo* cultural heritage', the drum assumes a central and symbolic role in the outings for *joia* and during the *feira*. In this sense, like the *feira*, the drum becomes 'an embodiment of the community' (Meyer 2012: 165).

Drum beating is a symbolic gesture that is powerfully perceived by those to whom the message is intended. ‘Sound renders the object dynamic’, argues Voegelin (2011:11). Gallant (1994) analyses an episode from 1867 Kérkyra (Greece) where rebelling peasants refused to pay landlords rent. In a symbolic gesture that deeply humiliated gathered bailiffs and constables, a farmer emptied in front of them a basket full of rams’ horns and offered it instead of rent. As Gallant argues, ‘[t]he throwing down of the horns symbolised the cuckolding of the landlords... In a reversal of roles, the rent/wife was now in the hands of the lover/tenants; and there she would remain’ (1994: 704). Perceiving the mechanics of a shared ‘cultural system of meaning’, (ibid.: 703), is key to understanding the subtler forms of resistance, ‘provocation’, or power display. Similarly to the horns the farmer presented in front of the landlords’ representatives, the beating of drums in the open for everyone to hear (Catholics and Evangelicals alike) taps ‘into a reservoir of symbolic understandings’ (ibid.: 719) that cause great joy to the former and distress to the latter. The very act of listening ‘produces a sonic life-world that we inhabit, with or against our will’ (Voegelin 2011: 11). Whether they like it or not the drumbeat reaches Evangelicals even through closed doors. The same can surely be said for Evangelicals’ loudspeakers that deeply ‘provoke’ many Catholics.

Filling the space with their controversial sound, the drums of Santa Teresa are calling out the Catholic community while instigating Evangelical antipathy. Along with the sound of the drums, Catholicism spreads across the lands of Santa Teresa and, at least during the festivities, prevails over the loud Evangelical preaching. The drumbeat, argues Hendy (2014: 143) ‘has always been the authentic sound of the dispossessed ... their way of saying, ‘I’m here, I exist, I won’t be ignored’’. Beating the drums of Santa Teresa serves as a powerful reminder to both Catholics and Evangelicals that these lands continue to be under the custody of the Saint’s children.

The physical mapping of the shared territory, by the Saint and her *batuque*, delimit the area under Catholic sovereignty and manifest their presence everywhere within it. Momentarily, Santa Teresa reoccupies the contested space and asserts her dominion over it. She reunites her children, and reminds them that they are but one big family, sharing one territory and one religious faith. What happens during the *feira*, hence, is a commemoration of those links and of the reasons they are tied together –i.e. they all inhabit the Saint’s land and they are all Catholics. In that sense, not unlike what Hertz (1983) has argued about St Besse’s pilgrimage that brings together villagers of the valleys of Piedmont once a year, the *feira*, if not ‘the last vestige of those links’ (MacClancy 1994: 36), it is certainly the most evocative one. The visits for the collection of *joia* importantly serve to reinforce religious ties amongst residents. As Leal (2015) argues about the Holy Ghost festivals in North America, ‘[t]he relationships between the people involved may be loose or sporadic; however, there is a sense of being part of a collective, which the *feira* itself helps to create’ (2015: 7). In other words, the collection of *joia* and the *feira* of Santa Teresa, first and foremost, contribute to the creation of unity amongst residents under one large Catholic umbrella. While the assertion of difference between Catholics and Evangelical Christians is a secondary effect in the current climate of religious tension in Itamatatua.

The strong symbolic connotations of drum beating, therefore, can also be understood as attempts to bring residents under the protective arms of their patron saint. And even bring back those converts who will reconsider their deep-seated connections with Catholicism and the Saint. The physical presence of the Saint in the villages, and the *batuque*’s singing and drum beating, spread and resonate across the vast lands of Santa Teresa, seeking to recuperate some of the ‘lost’ territory currently occupied by Evangelicals.

Promises made, promises paid

It should be clear, then, that the annual celebration of the *feira* of Santa Teresa is, in many respects, the culmination of Itamatatiua's religious life. For many years, this has also been an important event in the festive calendar in the area and an opportunity for encounters within the Baixada. As Borges told me in an interview, it was during the *feira* of Santa Teresa in October of 1993 that one of the first meetings of the still unborn Black movement in Alcântara took place.

We participated in the *feira* of Santa Teresa, in Itamatatiua. The Black people of the *quilombo* of Frechal, from Mirinzal, because they had received in 1992 the title of their area, which is an 'extractive reserve' (*reserva extrativista*), they came with the *Dança do Congo*, which is a Black dance, to redeem a promise to Santa Teresa. The group of the CCN-MA came, people from the SMDH, they all came so we could have a meeting ... so we had the first meeting during the *feira*, I met the people of Frechal, and from then on ... in January of 1994 we had the first meeting of the *movimento negro* in Alcântara.

The case of Frechal,¹³⁶ departing from Mirinzal, a municipality about 200 km away from Alcântara, to redeem their promise to Santa Teresa, is by no means unique. Every year, hundreds of people visit Itamatatiua during the October celebrations either to 'redeem a pledge/promise' (*pagar promessa*) or just to partake in the religious ceremonies. In the two annual feasts I attended, in 2015 and 2016, I spoke to dozens of people who had come to redeem their promises from places that far exceeded the limits of the Saint's land. Two women from Palmerandia, a municipality in the Baixada Maranhense, told me they had been coming to the *feira* every year 'ever since the parents of Luisa were still alive'. 'We have a very strong faith in Santa Teresa and Our Lady *Aparecida*', one of them said. 'In the old days, this *feira* was an important pilgrimage for the entire Baixada and beyond. It was our

¹³⁶ Frechal was the first *quilombo* in Maranhão, and one of the first in Brazil, to have its communal territory demarcated and protected (as '*reserva extrativista*'). See further: Almeida 1996.

Círio [de Nazaré],¹³⁷ said the other, emphasizing the importance of the *feira* in Itamatatua as a religious reference in the region, even though the Saint had no bearing on land issues for those communities outside her territory. As Hertz (1983) observed, in his pioneering essay on pilgrimage, for the Catholics participating in the Alpine rite, '[t]he greater the gathering of pilgrims, the "finer" the festival is judged to be and the more the saint is honoured' (1983: 60). Similarly, many Catholics who participate in Itamatatua's *feira* emphasize the great numbers of people attending each year. An elderly woman from São Bento, neighbouring municipality of Alcântara (and bordering the north-western part of the lands of Santa Teresa), said she had been coming to the *feira* every year for the past 14 years. Ever since she made a promise to Santa Teresa when her granddaughter was born with a skeletal deficiency. 'I had heard of the *feira* before because it was widely spoken about and I had been wanting to come, but I only started coming after I made my promise to Santa Teresa', she said.

As all devotees know, making a promise to Santa Teresa entails an indispensable obligation: its payment once the wish has been fulfilled. In the ditties they sing, *caixeiros* always remind devotees that, like the Saint, they too need to keep their promise and pay. One chant goes:

Teresinha, Teresinha	<i>Teresinha, Teresinha,</i>
Saint who works miracles	<i>Santa de fazer milagre</i>
Whoever owes her a promise	<i>Quem dever promessa a ela</i>
Needs to pay before he dies	<i>Antes de morrer que pague</i>

Stories about the Saint 'asking for her payment' (*cobrando a promessa*) abound. In one of my visits to Benedita's house, we were sitting in her front yard on a fresh afternoon when I asked her about making a solemn vow to Santa Teresa.

¹³⁷ *Círio de Nazaré* (The Taper of Our Lady of Nazareth) is one of the largest Catholic celebrations in Brazil and takes place in the city of Belém, Pará state. Celebrations start in August and the main procession concludes the festivities on the second Sunday of October (the time frame largely coincides with that of Itamatatua's *feira*).

She's alive you know. Because they redeem promises to her, she works her miracles... I've seen so far so many people redeeming a promise. Sometimes when we go to [collect] *joia*, people speak with the person who carries her [Santa Teresa] and say 'listen, I have a promise I need to pay for to the Saint, because I had made a promise, and she heard my requests, and I need to pay; and it needs to be today, and she [the Saint] needs to sleep here in my house. I need to redeem this promise because she is demanding it from me (*ela tá me cobrando demais*)'.

Marlene, Benedita's neighbour, standing outside her door and listening to our conversation joined in.

- 'I think she really is alive, you know why?', Marlene said.

- 'Oh, she is, she is alive', Benedita concurred.

- 'I made a promise to Santa Teresa when I was pregnant with Ruan. Don't you remember Benedita how I was sick during all nine months?'. Benedita nodded showing she did remember. 'So I promised when he will turn one years old I would redeem the promise, I would offer a candle the size of my son. And then...well...Ruan is already nine years old and I still haven't paid. I have already dreamed of her three times. She came to ask for the payment. She said to me [in the dream]: "Do it, do it". Every time I wake up (*me espanto*), I don't know the rest [of the dream]'.

- 'She's asking for the payment. You need to pay, she keeps asking', Benedita responded.

- 'It's always around the time of the *festa* that I dream of her. I think it is actually true. I think this Saint is miraculous'.

- 'There's the ditty that goes "whoever owes her a promise, needs to pay before he dies". She is alive, she works miracles. And she protects...she won't allow anything [bad] to happen [to the community]. Our place is rich [because of the Saint] ...they say she wanted to live in the poorest place of all'.

- 'The old people who tell these stories', continued Marlene.

Maria-Rita Ferreira, an elderly woman from Itamatatua who currently lives in the nearby village of Tubarão, has made and redeemed several promises to Santa Teresa. She told me about one time when she had promised to offer ten chickens as *joia* and then had to change her mind and told Santa Teresa that she would no longer offer ten chickens but would split her payment in half and keep five for her family. When Dona Maria-Rita left the house to buy some fish, wind blew strong, swirled the chickens, and shook them so hard that when she returned she found all ten of them lying on the ground about to die. She immediately figured out why this had happened and spoke to her Saint: 'Santa Teresa, all this because I said I would split them with you? You can lift your creatures up for I no longer need any'. Only a few moments later, 'she lifted all of them up and none died', said Dona Maria-Rita, who ended up offering all ten chickens to Santa Teresa.

Maria dos Santos had also delayed a payment once. 'I made a promise for my son', she said. She explained to me that her son went through a health problem and she had asked Santa Teresa to help him get well and that when he did, he would help organise the opening day (*mastro*).

Then three years went by before he could raise this *mastro*. Every now and then I would dream...I was dreaming of many people...procession, *bandeiras*, *caixeiras*...so one day I went to the church. I said: 'Santa Teresa? Santa Teresa you are asking for the *mastro*, isn't that right? But I will do it...don't ask me for it for I will do it'. So I told Neide: 'Oh Neide, Santa Teresa is asking me to pay for the *mastro*, I am dreaming of *caixeiras*, *bandeiras*...so many people coming at me'. She started laughing and said: 'You made a promise and you haven't redeemed yet, is that right?'. 'But I will do it', I said. So I did, and that was it. She [Santa Teresa] looks so beautiful when the time comes to pay for her *feira*. She is so pleased, you know. She looks marvellous.

‘*Joia*’, commonly translated as ‘jewel’, also has the meaning of ‘fee’ or ‘amount paid upon admittance as a member of an association, club, or society’.¹³⁸ Dona Luisa explained to me how *joia* outings emerged: ‘We never had to pay taxes [for land tenure] because this land belongs to the Saint. So instead of paying taxes (*foro*) we give the *joia* to the Saint’. By using the word ‘*foro*’, which also translates as ‘pension or fee the tenant pays to the rightful owner due to the use of a building or property’,¹³⁹ Dona Luisa directly linked the offering of donations for the organisation of the *festa* of Santa Teresa to the obligation of a land tenant. Since there was no other form of taxation (the Saint being the only owner) the *joia* has been a form of fee in exchange for the free tenancy the Saint offers to all inhabitants of her lands. It seems then, that ‘*joia*’ in the context of the *festa* is used to designate the symbolic contribution of the inhabitants. I use the word ‘symbolic’ here in the sense used by Lefebvre: ‘The Greek word: *συμβάλλεσθαι*, which gives us that word so characteristic of our religions and ideologies, “symbol”, means initially “to pay one’s share”’ (2014: 224). Each household contributes with anything it can offer: flour, rice, fruits, eggs, an animal, money, among other things. Although most devotees who offer their *joia* do not make the explicit association Dona Luisa made, they do think of their donation as a way of contributing to the organisation of the big celebration for their beloved Saint, or as payment for a promise they have made. These associations are intrinsic to the offering of the *joia*. In either of the two forms the *joia* is being offered (as a ‘payment’ for a promise, or contribution to the *festa* –essentially a ‘payment’ for land tenure), the Saint collects the offerings given by her Catholic children. Put differently, once a year, the Saint, in her capacity as landowner, physically visits all occupiers of her land and collects their contribution, given as a token of gratitude for the land and the protection she is offering.

¹³⁸ See entry at Michaelis online dictionary.

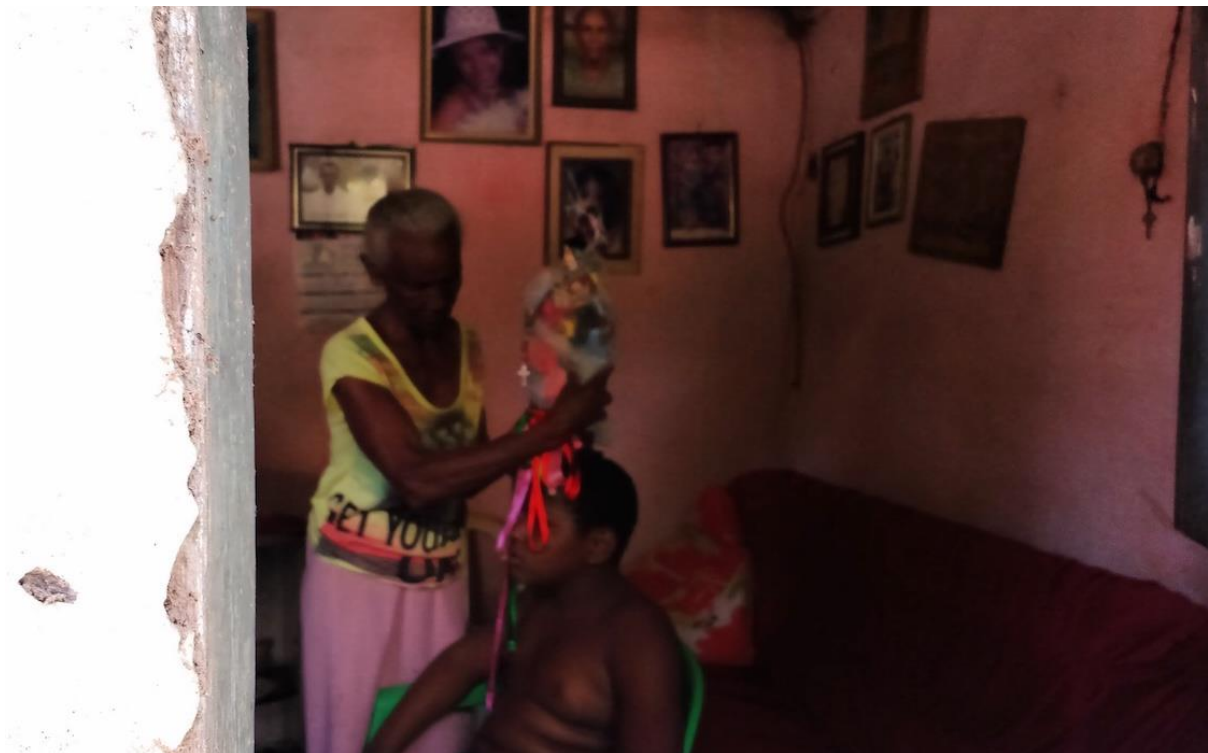
¹³⁹ See entry at Michaelis online dictionary.

If a household cannot afford to spare as little as a single egg or a handful of rice for the Saint it can still receive her visit. In the *joia* outings I accompanied, it was not uncommon for some devotees to ask the *batuque* to come in and receive Santa Teresa with great reverence without however being able to make a contribution of any form. They would apologise to the Saint and promise to give her *joia* on another occasion: on the day of the *festa*, or even the following year. ‘Some don’t have anything to offer but they still receive the Saint. This is absolutely fine’, said Ze Biô, from the *quilombo* of Jacaré, suggesting that it is a sign of respect towards the Saint for devotees to receive her visit even when they have nothing to offer. ‘The Saint knows who has means and who doesn’t’, added another man who was also accompanying the *batuque*. After all, the Saint is pleased to see all her children and to know that she is well-received in their houses.

The motherly relation with the Saint is not limited to residents of Itamatatuiá (although it is perhaps more strongly felt there) but spreads well beyond, reaching residents of all the village communities within her territory and even outside of it for that matter. Yvonne, for instance, when she saw Rosangela in need of a break from carrying the Saint’s statue, told her: ‘Give me Santa Teresa to carry for she is my mother in the name of Jesus’. For her children, Santa Teresa is a caring and loving mother. She can go to great lengths to protect her children. Yet, she may also show a face of anger and punishment, as the obligation to pay (and the fear or stress around pending payments) for a fulfilled promise suggests.



Picture 20: The *batuque* plays and sings inside a devotee's house



Picture 21: Receiving Santa Teresa's blessings

A socio-religious ‘system’

Zé Roxo is one of the few interlocutors of mine in Itamatatiua who does not identify as Catholic or Evangelical. He says he has repeatedly been approached by Evangelicals who tried to invite him to join their worship but he has chosen to keep his distance. Although he may no longer see himself as Catholic, he and his wife continue to offer their *joia* to Santa Teresa every year. For Zé Roxo and his wife, Dona Zelma, their loyalty to Santa Teresa is more a matter of ‘keeping a tradition’ and contributing to an important event for the local community, rather than an issue of religious faith. He said (my emphasis):

They tell many stories about this Saint, many indeed.

And those of us who are not Catholics we have her here as the patron saint of this place.

I see there is Our Lady *Aparecida* in the Sertão, who is the patron saint over there, and so on....

I mean, *every place has its system, its order*, right?

What I am saying is, a saint might not work miracles but she also does not provoke anyone, right? It’s true, right? [laughing].

Thinking of the institution of a patron saint as a ‘system’, in the words of Zé Roxo, is perhaps a useful way to comprehend both the role of *joia* and that of the *feira* as ‘instruments’ for its maintenance and continuation. From this perspective, these ceremonies, to use the words of Durkheim again, are ‘intended solely to awaken certain ideas and feelings, to link the present to the past, the individual to the collectivity’ ([1912] 2001: 282). In other words, to perpetuate the ‘system’. Intrinsic parts of the latter are the land tenure and environmental preservation rules, circumscribed by religious faith, under the guardianship of a custodian (*encarregado/a*).

The land custodian is a fundamental part of this 'system', since she is entrusted by the Saint with the great responsibility of being her 'representative' who will protect and cherish the rules of the system for all the Saint's children (and non-religious residents who respect land rules). Political geographer Edward Soja (1989) has argued that 'actual human geography' transpires as 'a competitive arena for struggles over social production and reproduction, for social practices aimed either at the maintenance and reinforcement of existing spatiality or at significant restructuring and/or radical transformation' (1989: 130). The land custodian's duty is to reassert, and reinforce, not only the presence of Santa Teresa across her territory but also the religious and territorial links amongst all residents that will enable the group's social production and reproduction without radical transformations. Hence, maintaining the political status quo in the Saint's land is the custodian's greatest responsibility.

If we think of *joia* as '*foro*', or a form of taxation for living on the Saint's territory, as discussed above, then the offering of *joia* should be expected from all residents irrespective of their religious views. Seen in this light, it is not so surprising to see that some Evangelicals set aside their religious faith and choose to offer their *joia*. This may also be why the recent Evangelical convert, mentioned earlier in the chapter, kindly asked the *caixeiras* not to beat the drums, but happily agreed to offer his contribution for the organisation of the *festa*.

And this is also why the tensions between Catholics and Evangelicals are perhaps most strikingly manifested during the *joia* outings. The decision *not* to give *joia* is not a passive one but a clear stance *against* the Saint, her *festa*, and ultimately the collective associated with her. In the words of Lefebvre (2014: 224): 'the "sacrifices" which everyone had to make for the festival –gifts, contributions from each family and each household– appeared as a down-payment for the future. To refuse to participate would have been to set oneself apart from the community'. If, paraphrasing Latour, we see the social as a processual movement of

associations always in the making or in the remaking, then the refusal to offer *joia* equals a failure to enable or renew a previously existing connection (2005: 8-9).



Picture 22: Receiving the Saint's visit

As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, I am here interested in the things Santa Teresa's children do in order to produce a Catholic social. And especially, in the public performance of such acts, and the people's participation in them, that *make* the Catholic space. To explore, in other words, how Catholic space is constituted. As social and human geographers have long suggested, 'space in itself may be primordially given, but the organisation, and meaning of space is a product of social translation, transformation, and experience' (Soja 1989: 79-80). The lands of Santa Teresa, therefore, open up as a 'sociopolitical arena' (Hatuka and Kallus 2007: 147) where 'social facts are *located*' (Logan 2012: 508; citing Abbott 1997: 1152, emphasis in the original) and continuously negotiated. This negotiation 'takes place in contexts, but it is conducted in the light of strategies, which imply temporal schemas by which the deposits of the past might be converted into desired

future outcomes' (Peel 2016: 542). In that sense then, the constitution of a given space is an ongoing, open-ended, and socially constructed process (Loopmans, Cowell, and Oosterlynck 2012: 700).

Everything we do is embedded in space, and if we seek to understand how a particular place is *made* (or *unmade*), 'we must first ask who, or what, comes together' there (Potter 2010: 251 see also Gilmore 2013: 86, Hise 2004: 550, Mitchell 2002). The festive activities Catholics engage in, occur in the presence of their own public and their counterpublic. They contribute in important ways in constructing a Catholic sense of place and religious identity, while they simultaneously transform, and are being transformed by, the environment in which they take place. Catholic religious manifestations, therefore, transpire as 'ways of rooting in the territory', through which the children of Santa Teresa '(re)affirm a territorial identity with which they can reinforce socio-spatial relationships' (Moreira, J. 2011: 8).

The rituals and related practices that comprise the Catholic feast may 'reproduce conventional meanings' yet, given the ever-changing socio-religious context and the growing influence of Evangelical churches, they simultaneously 'press new associations' (Comaroff 1985: 253). In the words of Lefebvre: 'space and the political organisation of space express social relationships but also react back upon them' (Soja 1989: 81; citing Lefebvre 1970: 25, see also West and Bowman 2010). The 'dynamic tensions' that present themselves in different forms in the Saint's land, 'force themselves upon human experience and require reconciliation, thereby making of practice more than mere habitual repetition' (Comaroff 1985: 6). Drumbeat and *joia* offering, for instance, symbolically affirm alignment with the current political order. Struggling to prevent any 'radical transformations', that Evangelicals could cause, Catholics insist on maintaining their 'system'. Therefore, religious 'performative behaviours are not accidental but intentional, and they have an additional quality of being reflexive' (West and Bowman 2010: 279). The 'norms, values, and conceptual schemes'

Catholics deem essential to the maintenance of their socio-political and religious ‘system’, ‘get reproduced by and for actors’ (Ortner 1984: 154).



Picture 23: Santa Teresa visits a village

Who is the *festa* for?

We have by now well established who the participants of the *festa* are. But who is the main ‘audience’ of the *festa*? To whom are the festivities primarily addressed? Unlike ceramic production, and other cultural manifestations of Itamatatiua’s ‘*quilombo* heritage’, the *festa* and relevant rites, are first and foremost addressed to the local population. Or rather, the two do not address the same audience.

They both emanate from the community and the lands of Santa Teresa at large. As seen already, cultural production has, in recent years, been strongly attached to notions of a ‘*quilombo* identity’. It involves, and it is also addressed to, the local population but it is

primarily looking towards a wider audience outside the specific locality where it is produced.

Religious festivities, on the other hand, continue to be addressed, rather exclusively, to the local population.

Unlike ceramics, or other *quilombo* heritage expressions in Itamatatua, the religious festivities do not carry significant ‘heritage currency’ to attract the attention of outsiders.

Borrowing from Arizpe’s (2013) concept of ‘singularity’ (closely related to notions of ‘authenticity’), the *festa de Santa Teresa* does not, at first sight, sufficiently distinguish itself from other religious festivities in the region. Hence, while ceramics attract interest from the outside, the *festa* does not appear ‘singular’ (or ‘ethnic’) enough to attract the same attention.

As opposed to the cultural production, which is attached to an ethnic sub-group (*quilombola*) within the national state, the religious manifestations in Itamatatua tap into popular

Catholicism, a reference that cannot be branded ‘ethnic’; they are best described as ‘national’.

‘Cultural’ and ‘religious’ manifestations (as two encompassing categories) in Itamatatua, hence, deliver different messages and address different audiences.

As opposed to the rich, and increasingly popular at the national and international level, repository of ‘*quilombo* cultural heritage’ cultural manifestations tap into, the religious manifestations do not engage with ‘outsiders’ in the same way. In fact, they seem rather indifferent to them and have not tailored any part of the festivities in order to attract them. On the contrary, the messages produced during the *joia* and the *festa* cannot be deciphered by everyone. But they are understood by those who are familiar with the local context. The *festa*’s significance, in other words, is only determined by those involved in it: the people embedded in the local context.

Only locals, and those familiar with local history, can decipher the ‘hidden transcripts’ of the cognitive map of the lands of Santa Teresa and the significance of the collection of *joia* for the social ‘system’ that governs the Saint’s lands. The fervent dedication with which villagers invest their time, emotions and, to some extent, material resources for the successful organisation of the religious feast, shows that their participation in it is well beyond the ‘ceremonial and social obligations’ (Scott 1976: 9) and reveals the importance it has to them.

While ‘cultural heritage’ is projected onto a national and/or international audience with the expectation that its wider distribution may raise awareness of the *quilombo* land struggle and foster alliances with social agents, ‘religious heritage’ aims at the local population. The kinetic tracing of the shared territory in the *joia* outings; the importance of its collection as validation of membership of a larger Catholic family; the powerful presence of the Saint and her *batuque*; the symbolism of drumbeat and the ditties sung by the *caixeiras* all across their Catholic territory, first and foremost, resonate with local residents. The making of this religious feast is, therefore, a ‘form of cultural work undertaken by communities to produce the social relations inherent in a locality (or place)’ (Harrison 2010: 243). Spatiality, or rather, territoriality, itself a social product, ‘is simultaneously the medium and outcome, presupposition and embodiment, of social action and relationship’ (Soja 1989: 129).

Schematically, and with no intention to consolidate an idea whereby the two social worlds, that of ‘religion’ and that of ‘culture’ are irreversibly independent, we could think of them as relating more closely to the notions below:

Religion	Culture
Children of the Saint	Children of the Land
Catholics	Quilombolas
Kinship / religious community	Kinship / ethnic community
Grassroots actions mainly addressed to the local population	Grassroots actions mainly addressed to outsiders
Main aim: Re-assemble the Catholic social against the Evangelical threat	Main aim: Raise awareness of land cause as widely as possible (state/nationally/internationally)
Guarantee local disposition to defend the lands of Santa Teresa and reassert limits of the shared territory	Guarantee land titles

Table 1: Spheres of social action

These are *not* distinct social spheres or identities but rather a model to confer intelligibility to the oppositions I found in my data. The table above serves to show that in different situations one becomes more relevant and hence more accentuated than the other, and vice-versa. As Gledhill (2012) has argued: ‘subject positions’ are situational, ‘with one aspect of identity being appropriate for one context and another aspect ... more suited to managing different types of social interactions’ (2012: 8).

Irrespective of the 'subject position' Itamatatiuenses and Catholic residents of the other *quilombos* in the Saint's land find themselves in, their aim is to safeguard the collective territory and maintain their sovereignty over it. With the promotion of their cultural production they seek to forge alliances and spread the message of their land cause widely. With the realisation of religious *festivities* in honour of their patron saint, they seek to (re)produce religious cohesion and socio-political order.

We see then, that at the 'micro-level' the category of 'kinship/religious community' is analytically more useful than that of the 'ethnic community', which appears more useful at the 'macro-level'. To return to the discussion in the introduction to this thesis, 'ethnicity' ties to a grand narrative of ethnic struggles nationally and internationally. In Brazil, as explored already, '*quilombola*' is an ethnically circumscribed legal category of citizenship. It may, therefore, become an effective tool for harnessing interest at the extra-local level (whether regional, national, or international). Catholicism, on the other hand, does not resonate as strongly as it is neither a legally-protected status, nor a 'threatened' sub-group within the national state. Despite the growing number of Evangelicals in Brazil, Catholicism continues to be the dominant religion in the country. Hence, a Catholic festivity like the one on the lands of Santa Teresa can hardly gather attention, let alone support, from the outside. Its significance and, to a certain extent, its struggle for the recuperation of the territory under threat, can only be perceived, or deciphered, by those familiar with the local historical and socio-religious context.



Picture 24: The *batuque* sings and plays the drums around the *mastro*, in front of the church of Santa Teresa in Itamatatuiua.

Conclusion

In this final thesis chapter, I have argued that two polarised socio-religious spheres transpire in the over 50,000 hectares of land that comprise the territory of Santa Teresa, namely a Catholic and an Evangelical one. I have tried to show that the two spheres are competing with one another on both religious and territorial grounds. Both Catholics and Evangelicals set out their limits and often make explicit that they see no, nor wish for any, common ground between them. Building on the tensions around land use and the observance (or dismissal) of customary land rules explored in Chapter Four, this chapter focused on the ways each religious group manifests its presence in the territory of Santa Teresa. Disregard for land regulations by, mainly, Evangelicals transform a tension primarily about land into a religious one. Depending on the point of view, ‘the interests of the “political” and the “religious” may ally, peacefully confront each other, or oppose and exclude one another’ (Claverie 2008: 6).

Catholics feel threatened to lose control over an essentially religious territory, and together with parallel efforts to attain official land titles, they strive to maintain the Saint's territory strictly Catholic. The Saint's presence is always relevant and 'felt', especially through the widely circulated and well-known stories of her divine intervention and through the affectionate relationship between her and her devotees. What happens during the *feira* is 'the explosion of forces which had been slowly accumulated in and via everyday life itself' (Lefebvre 2014: 222). On performing 'traditional' rituals, Catholics are simultaneously contributing to the maintenance of their socio-religious 'system'.

I have *not* suggested that all participants/residents involved in the religious ceremonies and the festivities of the *feira* of Santa Teresa are also consciously mapping out territorial claims or manifest their conviction of their legal land occupation to their religious and territorial antagonists. After all, '[a]ction is not done under the full control of consciousness; action should rather be felt as a node, a knot, and a conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies that have to be slowly disentangled' (Latour 2005: 44). Instead, I have tried to show that in a rapidly shifting religious world, such as that of Itamatatua, 'religious actors' are immersed in a tense religious landscape (with each side largely positioning itself in opposition to the other) and, to a lesser or greater extent, through their actions they are 'capable of reconfiguring the scene of public debates' (Claverie 2008: 8).

Since many identify strongly as 'children of the Saint', it is through this identification that they claim membership in their social world and identify in opposition to other groups. Practices linked to religious festivities that take place in public spaces evoke memories and conceptions of a shared heritage, renewing (or failing to renew) social ties and associations between different actors. Even to those who choose to no longer acknowledge those ties, the *feira* of Santa Teresa serves as a visible reminder of both the Catholic presence and their assertion of territorial rights. By its very occurrence on the communal lands of the Saint's

children, the *feira* invites residents to participate in it and reinforces the links that compose the Catholic social world. Furthermore, the *feira* transpires as the most popular/participative form of political action (whether formal –e.g. community meetings, or informal –e.g. *quilombola* ceramic production). Finally, I have suggested that by strengthening Catholic religious ties, Itamatatiuenses simultaneously defend their identity as *quilombolas* in the face of the national state.

Thesis Conclusion

This thesis has grappled with issues regarding *quilombo* land, struggles to maintain sovereignty over it, and land insecurity. Focusing on the *quilombo* of Itamatatua, the symbolic and administrative centre of a compound of *quilombo* communities in the north-west of Maranhão state, Brazil, I sought to shed light on the ongoing struggles over land faced by the ‘children of Santa Teresa’.

More specifically, I aimed to bring new insights to the growing body of anthropological literature on Brazilian *quilombos*, as well as to anthropological discussions of subaltern struggles for land and human rights more broadly, by showing that in the context of Itamatatua:

1. The presence of Evangelical Christians is perceived as antagonistic to *quilombola* sovereignty over land.
2. The *quilombola* struggle is *not* solely ethnic.
3. Grassroots mobilisation in defence of land rights, through cultural and religious heritage, is an integral part of *quilombola* everyday life.

There is a solid corpus of anthropological works on Alcântara’s *quilombo* communities. Their ethnographic focus, however, has almost exclusively been monopolised by the land conflicts these communities have with the Alcântara Space Centre (CLA), Brazil’s near-equatorial space port. While I acknowledge the importance of the CLA for the entire municipality and its residents (especially with regards to the political mobilisation its creation instigated and the perpetuation of land insecurity in the area), I have tried to show, throughout this thesis, that there are other land antagonists that have not been taken into consideration.

In the ethnographic context I have focused on, different primary land antagonists transpired who do not fit into the categories traditionally treated as *quilombo* land threats (such as

agribusiness and large ‘development projects’). The growing presence of Evangelical Christians in the lands of Santa Teresa has been experienced by the majority of Catholic *quilombolas* as threatening to their effective control over land and natural resources.

While the growth of Evangelical churches in Brazil, and other parts of Latin America and the world, has spurred anthropological works that explore diverse aspects of this phenomenon, less attention has been given to aspects of territoriality. This ethnography attempted to shed light on a greatly underexplored *quilombo* land threat, and encourage a discussion of territorial bearing of Evangelical growth on *quilombo* communities. At a moment when Evangelical churches in Brazil continue to grow and the regularisation of *quilombo* land continues to face great obstacles, being attentive to such events on the ground and highlighting the issues at stake, reaffirms ethnography’s invaluable role as an instrument that gives unparalleled access to social phenomena and becomes the foundation of anthropological analysis.

Adding the expansion of Evangelical Christianity to the threats to *quilombo* territoriality already identified in the literature, and around which *Quilombola* land struggle has been structured, brings us before a bitter realisation: despite important victories achieved by *Quilombola* movements, the road for the final regularisation of *quilombo* territories is still long and more obstacles appear on the way.

Despite bleak indices, however, one might be justified to remain optimistic. Here, once more, anthropology’s main research tool, fieldwork, proves to be of indispensable value to nuanced understandings of specific places and the lives of the people who inhabit them. And it is our place, as anthropologists, to pay attention to the ‘small things’, found in small and big places alike, that can help us comprehend the complex milieux in which we find ourselves. This task is never easy. As Orin Starn (1991) has argued, for instance, anthropologists working in the Andes in the 1970s failed to foresee the emergence of the Shining Path in May 1980 because

‘the heavy deployment of ecological and symbolic approaches led to the oversight of political ferment in the countryside’ (1991: 64).

In an attempt to reconcile formal with informal ways of political engagement, and not to overlook or dismiss religious, cultural, and other ‘symbolic’ spheres of social life as apolitical, I tried throughout this thesis to account for the ‘manifold ways whereby peasants have continuously engaged in their political worlds’ (Starn 1991: 65; citing Stern 1987: 9). This thesis has highlighted the importance of *quilombo* cultural and religious heritage as a vehicle for political struggle and land reform strategy, something that had previously not been given much attention in the anthropological literature. I have suggested that through the local ceramic production (intrinsically attached to notions of ‘*quilombo* heritage’) and the religious festivities in honour of the local patron saint, Santa Teresa de Jesus, residents create and mobilise an extensive network of collaborating agents. Through these grassroots acts of land defence, *quilombolas* bring visibility to their struggle for the final issuance of communal title deeds and collectively engage in the renewal of religious links between them and the affirmation of their control over the collectively inhabited territory. The shared understanding of place identities for the Catholic *quilombolas* in the lands of Santa Teresa, was seen to be ‘assembled through struggle, negotiation, and communication’ (Loopmans, Cowell, and Oosterlynck 2012: 700).

I have discussed some of the different ways the *quilombolas* of Itamatatua produce locality, e.g. through land use rules, farming, religiosity, ceramics. Furthermore, I have tried to show that their relationship with land is far more complex than a one-way relationship of ownership. The *quilombolas* of Itamatatua may feel that they are the legitimate heirs of the land of Santa Teresa but land is not a commodity that can be sold or bought, transferred or fenced off. Their relationship to it is reciprocal: they belong to the land as much as the land belongs to them.

Land, conceived of as the compound of the surrounding environment, transpires as the ultimate source of life for Itamatatiuenses. A multifaceted and mutable force, land is at the same time *the clay* manually extracted to be moulded into fired ceramic objects, *the earth* planted to yield the staple crops like manioc and corn, *the forest* which nurtures life (most importantly: the river, birds and animals, palm trees that provide food and extracts, and the wood necessary to build their houses and make fire), *the territory* which is owned by Santa Teresa and shared among her children, *the native land* on and from which they were born and which they inherited from their ancestors. Hence, this *quilombo* land, as any other, cannot be reduced to one or some only of those elements because it is the combination of all of them that renders it the community it is for its *quilombolas*.

This all-embracing understanding of land applies, in some ways, to heritage. As seen in the course of this thesis, heritage for the *quilombolas* of Itamatatiua is not just the material and immaterial aspects of their ‘*quilombo* cultural traditions’ but extends to the land and the community itself. Their dedication in ceramic work was seen as an effort to instil their values into the younger generations, help maintain an ancestral knowledge and practice, and diffuse their land cause widely. I have tried to show that *quilombolas*, as active political agents, are ‘radically aware’ of ‘the symbolic power involved in the activity of representation’ (Hall 1999: 7) and are managing their own collective representations as a means of raising awareness of their political struggles. The *festa* of Santa Teresa, on the other hand, which is an annual local assemblage of Catholics from across the Saint’s land, is ‘a celebration by the local society of its own continuance’ (MacClancy 1994: 36).

Another main theme that has emerged in this thesis, has been that of the non-exclusive ‘ethnic’ character of *quilombola* struggle for land. Ethnicity, Hall (1999) has argued, is ‘so often deployed to represent minority communities as immured in’ it, or is applied to ethnic groups to differentiate them ‘into another species altogether by their “radicalised difference”’

(1999: 12). What I sought to illuminate instead was that the defining element in the formation of Itamatatiua's distinct group identity was a special kin relation rather than an 'ethnic element', as it is commonly the case in *quilombo* ethnographies. In other words, what tied Itamatatiuenses together, ever since the foundation of their community, was not that they belonged to a different 'ethnic group' but that they consider themselves to be Santa Teresa's children. In fact, in Itamatatiua, and the lands of Santa Teresa at large, this is one of the major mobilising forces that unites residents against Pentecostal expansion.

My discussion of Catholicism in the lands of Santa Teresa has taken into consideration some of the classic works on Catholic celebrations, such as those of Hertz, Christian Jr, and Claverie, mentioned in different parts of this thesis. A recently-published volume, edited by Norget, Napolitano, and Mayblin (2017), has set to explore 'the many dimensions of Catholicism as a "world religion" in the broadest sense' (2017: 1). This volume, that brings together old and new anthropological works on Catholicism, seems to carve out an emerging field that grapples with diverse aspects of an 'old religion' from surprisingly new angles. However, given that the time of its publication coincided with the finalisation of this thesis, I have not been able to establish a dialogue between my data and the theoretical contours of the emerging field of 'anthropology of Catholicism' as advocated by the editors, or to draw comparisons with the contemporary case studies the volume contains.

Certainly, however, this conversation does not end here. On the contrary, it seems to me that it is only now beginning. There is much more to explore in relation to the main topics this thesis has grappled with, and especially with regards to Evangelical Christians as a *quilombo* land threat, which, as mentioned already, is a greatly underexplored topic in the literature. I wish to build upon this research in the future and, hopefully, other social scientists will too.

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