

Misnaming Social Conflict: ‘Identity’, Land and Family Histories in a *Quilombola* Community in the Brazilian Amazon

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Abstract. This article addresses an internal conflict that arose in an Amazonian village when it adopted an officially recognised *quilombola* identity. It argues that this issue, which tends to be interpreted in terms of identity, is in fact primarily social. Indeed, the divergent positions adopted by different groups of relatives need to be examined in relation to the dynamics of socio-economic differentiation linked to family histories. The article shows that the conflict related back to power struggles between dominant groups of relatives and that the questions about the limits of the group reflected preoccupations concerning who held legitimate authority to make decisions about the future of the village. By analysing some of the assumptions of the current debate about multiculturalism and ethnicity in Amazonia, this article contributes to the wider discussion about these issues in Brazil and, more broadly, in Latin America.

Keywords: *quilombolas*, Brazil, Amazonia, ethnic policies, internal conflict, social differentiation

The consensus within anthropology about the fluidity of social identities tends to be seriously put to the test once the question ceases to be one of theoretical approaches and ethical principles, and instead becomes a matter of specific groups confronted with major political issues, in particular control of their territory. In such cases the controversy can be extremely acrimonious, as evidenced by, among other things, the passionate debate about the notion of ‘indigenous peoples’ surrounding the publication in 2003 of an article by Adam Kuper in *Current Anthropology*, followed by that of Alan Barnard in

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Social Anthropology in 2006.¹ As Justin Kenrick highlights in his comments, the divergence of positions would seem to centre on the link between political practice and academic theory.²

The question of whether or not a legal category that names and defines a particular social group, and thus ascribes to it an identity, can and should be retained as an anthropological concept³ is also controversial in Brazil. This is particularly the case with the notion of the *quilombo*, or runaway slave community, as the 1988 Constitution ensured territorial rights to the descendants of such maroons. Indeed, researchers devoted to this topic have expressed their perplexity, pointing out that the term *quilombola* (resident of a quilombo) is not at all one of self-identification. Others have indicated the difficulty they experience in attempting to put to good use this state-imposed definition in order to understand the social realities under study. These doubts, questions or nuances are, however, scarcely apparent in the academic literature, in which authors prefer to stress how the historical definition of the quilombo, which stems from resistance to slavery, has been replaced by a broader, more sociological definition that allows for the inclusion of all groups previously designated as 'rural black communities'.⁴ Academics and activists contributed each in their own way to the registration of this redefinition by the state in its legal and constitutional texts. Political and professional issues play a role in this debate as well. On the one hand, researchers are concerned about having their studies misinterpreted by the detractors of the state policy of recognising quilombos. On the other, they also aim to demonstrate to state representatives that anthropologists are united in their views on this topic, thereby confirming the competence of specialists who from time to time prepare expert reports (*perícias*) at the request of government agencies, or who are employed by the latter on a full-time basis.

The calls for official recognition of a separate legal status for quilombolas were closely related to the social and juridical vulnerability of these populations in relation to large landowners, private companies or government organisations responsible for public development projects. Given this context,

¹ Adam Kuper, 'The Return of the Native', *Current Anthropology*, 44: 3 (2003), pp. 389–95; Alan Barnard, 'Kalahari Revisionism, Vienna and the "Indigenous Peoples" Debate', *Social Anthropology*, 14: 1 (2006), pp. 1–16.

² Justin Kenrick, 'Discussion: The Concept of Indigeneity', *Social Anthropology*, 14: 1 (2006), p. 19.

³ Barnard, 'Kalahari Revisionism', p. 7.

⁴ On this process, referred to as 're-semanticisation', see Alfredo Wagner Berno de Almeida, 'Os quilombos e as novas etnias', in Eliane Cantarino O'Dwyer (ed.), *Quilombos: identidade étnica e territorialidade* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora FGV, 2002), pp. 43–81. For a critical perspective, see José Maurício Arruti, 'Quilombos', in Osmundo Pinho and Livio Sansone (eds.), *Raça: novas perspectivas antropológicas* (Salvador: EDUFBA, 2008), pp. 315–50; and Véronique Boyer, 'A construção do objeto quilombo: da categoria colonial ao conceito antropológico', *Antropolítica*, 27 (2009), pp. 131–55.

it is not surprising that the emphasis on conflict with outsiders is an essential part of both academic and political Brazilian documents on quilombos. Another type of conflict is also mentioned – namely, the often very pronounced internal tensions that can arise within groups seeking to adopt a common strategy in order to have their land rights implemented. However, these accounts are seen as minor, secondary variations in the paradigm of small populations struggling against an external enemy. Thus, comments on such internal tensions invariably argue that the faction hostile to the change in status is under the influence of ‘larger’ actors, and of ‘agents exterior to the local political structure’.⁵ Reading these accounts, one comes away with the impression that the underlying desire of these populations is for legal recognition of their difference, and hence any unwillingness to share this goal can only be interpreted as a sign of ‘false consciousness’ and political alienation.⁶

From this point of view, the territorial boundary serves not only to protect the population against external threats and dangers. It also keeps others at a respectable distance in order to favour a sort of ‘insularity’⁷ in a given geographic space in which a mode of existence grounded in particular values, norms and social practices can thus be maintained: in other words, it grants the conditions of reproduction of what one can call perhaps an ‘ethnic group’. Therefore, a ‘political dispute’ between poor peasants and large landowners could also be interpreted as a conflict between descendants of slaves (quilombolas) and descendants of slave owners, thus demonstrating, without requiring any further justification, that ‘the slave past is still symbolically alive’.⁸

Some works, based on detailed ethnographies, allow one to understand the terms of a debate that is both theoretical and political. Jean-François Véran demonstrates the role played by institutions, Black Movement activists and Catholic Church representatives in the emergence of ‘ethnic’ quilombola demands.⁹ José Maurício Arruti looks closely at the political arenas in which

⁵ Luís Fernando Cardoso e Cardoso, ‘A constituição do local: direito e território quilombola na comunidade de Bairro Alto, na Ilha de Marajó: Pará’, unpubl. PhD diss., Federal University of Santa Catarina, 2008, p. 97.

⁶ See for example Caroline Ayala and Cíndia Brustolin, “E eles têm documento do gado?": violência simbólica e dominação numa comunidade quilombola de MS”, paper presented at the 26th Meeting of the Brazilian Anthropological Association, Porto Seguro, Brazil, 2007.

⁷ This term is from Anath Ariel de Vidas and Odile Hoffmann, ‘Beyond Reified Categories: Multidimensional Identifications among “Black” and “Indian” Groups in Colombia and Mexico’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 35: 9 (2012), pp. 1596–614.

⁸ Carlos Alexandre Barboza Plínio dos Santos, ‘Quilombo Tapuio (PI): terra de memória e identidade’, unpubl. Master’s diss., University of Brasília, 2006, p. 202.

⁹ Jean-François Véran, *L’esclavage en héritage (Brésil): le droit à la terre des descendants de marrons* (Paris: Karthala, 2003).

classificatory struggles are played out, and reflects on the state's power to name the various groups.¹⁰ Jan Hoffman French, for her part, points out how 'self-identification is experienced as a product of struggle' and also how foundational narratives and local cultural practices are reshaped as a function of choices made by the community.¹¹ And Miriam de Fátima Chagas demonstrates that the institutional vision of a 'single and mono-political subject', reflected in the legal obligation to set up a local association as the sole interlocutor with the public administration, is 'in contradiction with the dynamics of internal relations characteristic of communities'.¹² Yet other scholars note, albeit without analysing the relevant evidence, that the internal conflicts about quilombo status constitute a means of continuing earlier disputes around questions of inheritances, personal rivalries or generational conflicts.¹³

The description and the analysis that I set out here, of an internal conflict arising from a petition for land-title regularisation as a quilombola community in a village in the Amazonian state of Amapá,¹⁴ seeks to contribute to a better understanding of such tensions without reducing them to mere epiphenomena. Taking this ethnographic example as my starting point, I argue that there is no single interpretation of the divergent positions adopted by the different groups of relatives. I also argue that the identity dimension is not central in this case: everybody, in all groups, recognises themselves as quilombolas. In order to understand the internal disagreements we must consider the intersections of different aspects: the spatial dimension – that is, the place of residence of the individuals; their relationship to the land, on which few of them still work, and which in some cases makes them feel trapped; their positions in relation to their relatives, which allow some of them to rise to leadership; and their degree of prosperity, which reflects socio-economic differentiation linked to family histories. I present the arguments of the two opposing factions in the village, indicate the place in the social structure of the four groups of relatives identified and highlight the diversity of projects that each of them advocates. I thereby show that the questions concerning the limits of the group reflect

¹⁰ José Maurício Arruti, 'A emergência dos "remanescentes": notas para o diálogo entre indígenas e quilombolas', *Mana*, 3: 2 (1997), pp. 7–38; and *Mocambo: antropologia e história no processo de formação quilombola* (Bauru: EDUSC/ANPOCS, 2006).

¹¹ Jan Hoffman French, *Legalizing Identities: Becoming Black or Indian in Brazil's Northeast* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), p. 15.

¹² Miriam de Fátima Chagas, 'A política do reconhecimento dos "remanescentes das comunidades dos quilombos"', *Horizontes Antropológicos*, 7: 15 (2001), p. 225.

¹³ See for example Alba Lucy Giraldo Figueroa, 'Relatório antropológico de reconhecimento de quilombo do Rosa, município de Macapá, Amapá', Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária (INCRA), Coordenação Geral de Regularização de Territórios Quilombolas, DFQ, Superintendência Regional do INCRA do Amapá, 2007.

¹⁴ A Federal Territory from 1948 to 1988, Amapá is now one of Brazil's 27 states.

worries about who holds legitimate authority to make decisions regarding the future of the village. My emphasis is therefore, above all, on an essentially social question that has been formulated in what appear to be identity terms. I demonstrate that this conflict relates back to power struggles between dominant groups of relatives, pointing out also the *modus operandi* of clientelist logics within the family sphere. Before addressing these issues, a brief reminder of what is meant by the term 'quilombo' may be helpful, in particular what the Brazilian state understands by the word 'quilombo'. Such clarification is indispensable since winning legal land-title on the basis of quilombola status involves legally specified categories, as well as the complex administrative framework that the communities have to deal with.

The Institutional Quilombo

Initially used by the colonial authorities to refer to places in which black maroons took refuge, the term 'quilombo' was later disregarded by anthropologists, who associated it with the phenomenon of 'tribal regression'. During the 1980s, however, it emerged as the symbol of historic resistance to slavery and an emblematic example of the contribution of black people to the formation of Brazilian society. Under pressure from activists in Brazil's Movimento Negro (Black Movement), it ultimately came to represent a model of social organisation for the descendants of slaves. Territorial rights in their favour were written into the 1988 Constitution: 'Final ownership shall be recognised for the remaining members of the quilombo communities who are occupying their [ancestors'] lands and the state shall grant them the respective title deeds [to these lands]' (Article 68 of the Temporary Constitutional Provisions Act). The state then created a body connected to the Ministry of Culture, the Fundação Cultural Palmares (Palmares Cultural Foundation, FCP), responsible for carrying out a census of groups thought to be quilombolas,¹⁵ entering their names in the General Register of Remaining Members of Quilombola Communities and then granting them 'certificates of self-definition' (*certidões de autodefinição*). Between 2004 and 2012, the FCP issued 1,826 such certificates.¹⁶

¹⁵ According to the FCP there are 3,524 such communities; see <http://www.palmares.gov.br/?p=3041>. All internet references were last checked in June 2014.

¹⁶ According to the FCP's current data, most of the quilombos recognised by the institution are situated in the states of Bahia, Maranhão, Minas Gerais, Pernambuco and the Amazonian state of Pará. Amapá, for its part, has 54 quilombola communities; however, the available information does not allow one to detail their distribution between rural and urban areas, or their characteristic features. For that, one has to consult the anthropological literature, which, apart from the book by Jan Hoffman French cited in note 11 above, presents a stereotypical picture of the situation. For a critical review of the literature, see Véronique Boyer,

Although the promulgation of Article 68 appeared, at the time, to be no more than a mere concession by the government on the occasion of the centenary celebration of the abolition of slavery,¹⁷ the first quilombola land claims were filed as early as 1992, and their numbers have increased constantly ever since.¹⁸ The state, obliged to work out how Article 68 should be applied, drew up institutional arrangements that would subsequently be modified several times. The responsibilities linked to the physical delimitation of land, initially vested in the FCP, were transferred to the Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária (National Institute of Colonisation and Agrarian Reform, INCRA). In all cases, the Associação Brasileira de Antropologia (Brazilian Anthropological Association, ABA) has played a crucial role as the official partner where expert appraisals are concerned.¹⁹

In the early 2000s, the federal government took steps to further the quilombola cause. In 2003, it created the Secretaria de Políticas de Promoção da Igualdade Racial (Secretariat for the Promotion of Racial Equality Policies, SEPPPIR) and in 2004 it launched an ambitious initiative, the Programa Brasil Quilombola (Brazil Quilombola Programme, PBQ), involving no fewer than 23 ministries and federal organisations.²⁰ The rule adopted by the Brazilian state for awarding the quilombola category is the principle of self-definition. All a 'community' purportedly has to do in order to obtain an official certificate attesting to its inclusion in this category is to indicate its quilombola identity to the FCP. Any group in possession of this document could then, in theory at least, apply to INCRA for delimitation of its territory and land-title regularisation. But the way ahead before reaching this point is still long since it involves, at best, a dozen or so unavoidable stages, including: an application for a petition to be filed, the certification operation by the FCP, the writing of the Technical Report of Identification and Delimitation,²¹ the examination of the

'L'anthropologie des quilombos et la constitution de "nouveaux sujets politiques": de l'ethnie à la race et de l'autodéfinition au phénotype', *Civilisations*, 59: 2 (2011), pp. 157–78.

¹⁷ Jean-François Vêran, 'Les découvertes du *quilombo*: la construction hétérogène d'une question nationale', *Problèmes d'Amérique Latine*, 32 (1999), pp. 53–72.

¹⁸ There are currently more than 1,167 being processed, but only 123 titles were issued between 1995 and 2012. INCRA, *Quadro atual da política de regularização de territórios quilombolas no INCRA*, 2012, available at www.incra.gov.br/index.php/estrutura-fundiaria/quilombolas/file/109-quadro-atual-da-politica-de-regularizacao-de-territorios-quilombolas-no-incra.

¹⁹ See French, *Legalizing Identities*, pp. 92–9. See also Véronique Boyer, 'Os quilombolas no Brasil: pesquisa antropológica ou perícia político-legal?', *Nuevo Mundo/Mundos Nuevos* (2011), available at <http://nuevomundo.revues.org/61721>.

²⁰ The PBQ has multiple aims. For further information, see www.portaldaincra.gov.br/acoes/pbq.

²¹ The Technical Report of Identification and Delimitation consists of an expert anthropological report, a land register extract (*levantamento fundiário*) and a cadastral extract listing the relevant quilombola families, prepared by the leaders of the community.

petition by the Regional Decisional Committee of INCRA, the publication of the petition in the *Diário Oficial da União* (*Official Journal*), the transmission of the file with the petition to the various federal authorities responsible for the administration of other types of territory, and a survey of the land-title situation in order to detect any possible overlap with environmental conservation areas, areas of national security, indigenous lands and so on. Depending upon the results, the petition will then be sent on to different institutions. Finally it is referred back to the national president of INCRA, who publishes a certificate setting out the limits of the territory. After the relevant expropriations, cancellations of false title deeds and/or displacement of untitled, small non-quilombola landholders, INCRA topographers carry out the 'physical demarcation' of the overall boundaries of the property. Finally, the local Quilombola Association (*associação quilombola*), which receives the definitive title deeds (comprising clauses of indivisibility, inalienability, imprescriptibility and non-mortgageability) in the name of the 'community', must have the deeds entered into the records of a notary's office in the municipality.²²

The petition for territorial recognition on the basis of quilombola status is, then, a lengthy process in which numerous institutional actors each play a part, not only at the federal government level but also at the state and even municipal levels. In order to help it in its dealings with the authorities and enable it to face the daunting set of administrative hurdles involved, a Quilombola Association can call upon the assistance of the Defensoria Pública da União (Federal Legal Aid Office, DPU), which stands up for the individual and collective rights of the poorest members of society,²³ or ask for the aid of the sixth chamber of the Ministério Público da União (Federal Prosecution Service, MPF), which defends the rights of ethnic minorities. It can also count on the advice and support of a civic organisation, the Coordenação Nacional das Comunidades Negras Rurais Quilombolas (National Coordinating Committee of Black Rural Quilombola Communities, CONAQ),²⁴ when drawing up its petition and during official meetings, since this organisation's officials have more information at their disposal than do local communities, and spare no effort in informing the latter of their rights and awakening their 'ethnic consciousness'.²⁵

²² For further information, see Comissão Pró-Índio, *Como se titula uma terra*, available at www.cpisp.org.br/terras/html/comosetitula_caminho.aspx.

²³ The DPU, which replaced court-appointed barristers in 1994, became a permanent institution in 2009.

²⁴ CONAQ, which was founded in 1996 on the occasion of the first national quilombo congress, describes itself as 'one of the most active participants in the black rural movement in Brazil'. It has representatives in 22 of Brazil's 27 states, according to information available at <http://quilombosconaq.blogspot.fr/>.

²⁵ Other actors, such as representatives of the Church, also play a role in this consciousness-raising. On their role in the Brazilian north-east, see French, *Legalizing Identities*.

Lagoa dos Índios: The Conflict

The conflict tearing apart Lagoa dos Índios broke out, paradoxically, just as the toughest hurdle in the administrative procedure was about to be overcome: obtaining the anthropologist's expert report. In October 2009, INCRA in the state of Amapá called in an anthropologist from its office in the state of Acre, some three hours away by plane, in response to a petition filed in 2002 by a 'community' that had received a certificate of recognition from the FCP in 2005. In an earlier version, the petition implied that a state prison and a private university would be expropriated, which was something INCRA considered unrealistic. The proposal, which anthropologist and expert Ronizia Gonçalves now had to evaluate, concerned a far less extensive area of some 700 hectares. The land-tenure situation of the area for which title was being requested was quite vague: title deeds, whether legally acquired or not, existed for some of the plots of land, others had been purchased informally or inherited, and the status of yet other plots remained unknown. There was just as much variation in the area of the plots, ranging in size from the quite extensive, belonging mainly to non-residents, to tiny holdings, sometimes hardly any bigger than the surface of the houses built upon them. In any case, however, there were very few agricultural plots.

Immediately upon the arrival of the anthropologist, a meeting of the authorities (the Federal Prosecution Service and the Federal Legal Aid service) and members of CONAQ was organised in the village, located some ten kilometres away from the capital Macapá, in order to obtain the permission of the *comunidade* to collect the data required to draw up the report.²⁶ The anthropologist, who stated that on this occasion she heard a certain number of dissenting voices, noticed that the scale of contestation had increased when she came back the following March. By then most of the inhabitants, including those who had supported the project on her previous visit, were against the idea of a quilombo. The situation was so explosive that several people told her that 'it is going to end up with people being killed' ('isto vai dar em mortes') – which was later repeated to me – and she found herself prevented from making a start on the topographical survey by 'threatening individuals' who saw the INCRA logo on her official car and presented themselves to her as 'family members'.

The federal judge in charge of the case made an identical assessment of the situation. On 23 March 2010, in order to obtain a better understanding of the difficulties experienced by the 'community of Lagoa dos Índios', he called a conciliation hearing in a court building, at which representatives of the

²⁶ This data concerns family histories, 'traditions', religious beliefs and practices as well as the topographical survey.

various institutions (DPU, MPF, FCP and INCRA, among others) and officers of the Quilombola Association appeared. Along with the rest of the participants, he travelled to the area the following day, only to discover to his astonishment that the number of people opposed to the quilombo was considerably larger than the two or three that he had been led to believe. As described in the report on the events, the villagers appeared ‘fairly up-in-arms and agitated at the prospect of the community being recognised’, so much so that shouts of ‘down with the quilombo!’ (‘fora quilombo!’) were heard on several occasions, and ‘discussion among the inhabitants [was] so animated that the meeting had to be interrupted as much to prevent them from coming to blows, as to ensure the physical safety of those taking part in the judicial inspection’.²⁷ In order to break the deadlock, INCRA and the Federal Legal Aid office scheduled an attempt at mediation, held on the following 14 May. However, in June 2012 no ‘just and appropriate’ solution, to quote the judicial terminology, had been found that would put an end to the disagreement.

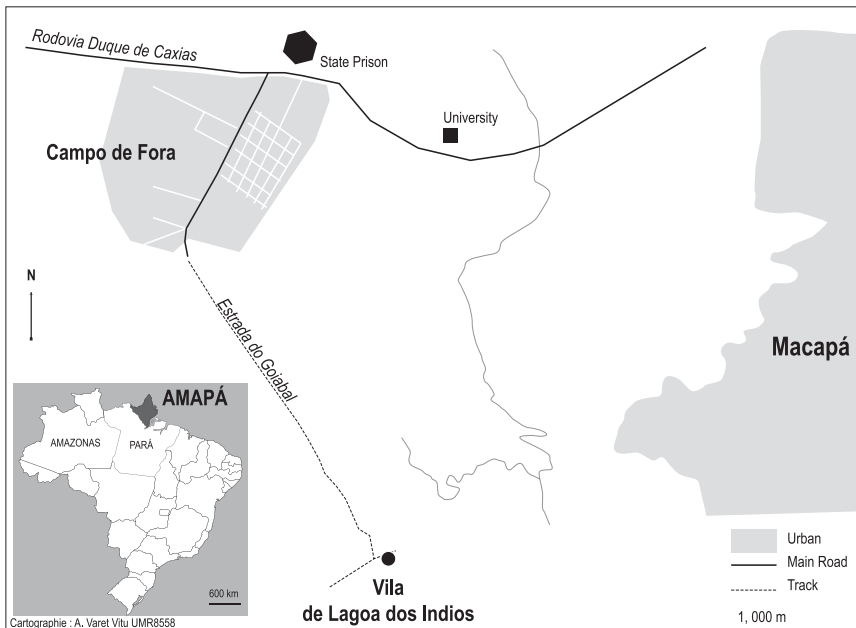
I met Ronizia Gonçalves at the University of Rio Branco (Acre) just as the mediation meeting was taking place. Learning that I was later planning to travel to the state of Amapá to pursue my study of quilombolas, and considering that my position as a foreign anthropologist unconnected to any of the local institutions would allow me to engage more readily with the different parties to the dispute, she encouraged me to make a close study of the conflict at Lagoa dos Índios. To aid in understanding of the case study, I should mention that all the different protagonists in the conflict referred to four distinct geographical spaces: the village of Lagoa dos Índios, the outlying location of Campo de Fora near the paved road, the city centre of Macapá and the flood-prone areas (*baixada*) of the capital (Figure 1).

I began by making contact with the local Quilombola Association, founded in 2009 when the climate had already become tense. Its president, Seu João, was a retired military policeman who lived in a house in the centre of the capital of Amapá, Macapá.²⁸ During our first interview, Caboclo²⁹ – as he was known familiarly – and his wife came to speak of spoliation, of the purchase of land by outsiders at prices far below market value, and of the fear felt by inhabitants of the hamlet (*vila*). In order to demonstrate certain relatives’ keen desire to return to Lagoa dos Índios and farm the land, he had invited along a first cousin, Pedro Tacacá, who eked out a precarious living in the baixada area

²⁷ Seção judiciária do Estado do Amapá – 2^a Vara, Auto circunstanciado de inspeção judicial, Poder Judiciário, Justiça Federal, Macapá, unpubl., March 2010, p. 3.

²⁸ All names of living people are pseudonyms.

²⁹ *Caboclo* is a mostly pejorative term used by town-dwellers to refer to inhabitants of rural areas. In Seu João’s case, it should be understood as an affectionate reminder of his childhood spent in the village.

Figure 1. *Map of Lagoa dos Índios*

Source: Anne Varet-Vitu.

of Macapá. Tacacá described how, 15 years earlier, his land had been expropriated as a result of a court judgement in favour of an agro-industrial businessman from the city, which obliged him to harvest all his manioc and remove his cattle within a fortnight. According to both men, who emphasised that a year earlier the 'community' in its entirety 'wanted to become quilombola', the present swing in opinion was due to the political alliances forged by certain relatives with 'outsiders' seeking to make an urban area part of the land to which the community had laid claim. The pair explained that, as these relatives were holders of legal title, they had detached themselves from Lagoa's struggle to recover its former territory, selling out to the *fazendeiros* (large landowners) and, in turn, using their influence to corrupt other close family members who were in an extremely precarious situation.

It should be noted that Lagoa dos Índios, which is located in an expanding area of the capital, was subject to land pressure and rampant property speculation. Thus a housing development, consisting of comfortable homes inhabited by middle-class families from Macapá, has been built in an outlying locality called Campo de Fora (literally, the 'Field Beyond'), which was situated at the start of the four-kilometre-long track leading to the vila itself. Seu Caboclo said that 'living under the quilombo regime, in accordance with

quilombola norms', would allow the 'community' to be 'protected by the law' ('amparada por lei'), since even the police would have to ask for permission to enter its land. Until then, the problem, a fairly standard one, seemed to be that of a group intending to defend its land from speculation due to the territorial expansion of the state capital. Thus, Seu Caboclo's pressing invitation to go and meet two female 'heirs' who were in favour of the quilombo cause, and whose seniority and therefore position in the genealogical tree served to legitimise his opinion, challenged this interpretation. His insistence, which was also to be found in the opposing camp, led the INCRA anthropologist, who had initially attributed the family quarrel to the influence of a developer seeking to change the status of this rural zone into that of an urban area, to suggest another line of explanation: that of long-running conflicts between descendants that were now re-emerging.

I next went to Campo de Fora to meet the leaders of the group opposed to the quilombo: Juvenal, a history teacher in a small town in the interior of the state, and his father Roberto, the brother of Seu Caboclo and, like Caboclo, a former military policeman, who ran a little roadside bar and earned a living raising livestock. The pair first pointed out that the Lagoa dos Índios Residents' Association, of which Roberto had long been the president before Juvenal was elected, predated the Quilombola Association. They also told me that, since its foundation in 1995, the Residents' Association had always been run by 'people from here', thus suggesting that the members of the other association should not be considered as such. Both father and son rejected the idea that they were in favour of the projected urban area ('it should stay as it is' – that is, neither an urban area nor a quilombo), and were equally dismissive of the charge of corruption. In order to show that his decision had not been taken lightly, Juvenal was at pains to give a detailed assessment of the consequences of the change to quilombo status. There were, he considered, three positive elements: the recovery of possession of ancestral lands that would be impossible to sell off in the future, the prohibition on 'outsiders' moving onto their land and, finally, the possibility of securing funding for economic development. The negative points, for their part, boiled down to just two: the impossibility of selling 'what people had built with their own hands' to any buyer of their choice, and the fact that government money received would be channelled to the association and not directly to the families. These objections were presented as thoughtful criticism of the previous arguments, as though the rules that had previously been thought to be beneficial had proved inappropriate once put to the test of everyday experience.

The narrative of the conflict as told by Juvenal sounded, moreover, like the discovery of the actual reality behind the promises, whether those of the state or of individuals who claimed to have access to its generosity. According to

this informant, the idea of the quilombo had been sparked by a young woman called Clara who, in the late 1990s, came to live in the vila of Lagoa dos Índios with her husband, one of Juvenal's distant cousins. This particularly combative activist in the Black Movement, to which CONAQ was at the time affiliated, created a Women's Association, and then suggested to the president of the Residents' Association that he should mobilise the inhabitants with a view to the village becoming a quilombo. He refused, but found himself in a minority, as Clara, who had not hesitated to speak on the radio demanding that the authorities look into the question, was very popular at the time and convinced Seu Caboclo to set up a Quilombola Association to represent the 'community'.³⁰ This is why, according to Juvenal, when Clara told the residents of Lagoa dos Índios of the numerous advantages of quilombo status (land regularisation, implementation of projects, funding sent directly from Brasília without being channelled through the state and the municipality), they gave the idea a particularly favourable welcome. Clara's position was further reinforced in 2003 when she, who was close to the party in power,³¹ was put in charge of the distribution of basic food baskets (*cestas básicas*), which she had obtained for the residents.³²

By 2006, however, the relationship between Clara and the villagers had deteriorated to such a point that she was obliged to leave. The inhabitants accused her of a variety of misdeeds: letting food go rotten, having a manioc flour kiln built though it served no useful purpose, practising sorcery (*bruxaria, macumbaria*), perpetrating acts of violence and so forth. Internet research carried out by another of Roberto and Seu Caboclo's brothers, a university professor of literature, further contributed to the radical change in opinion. On discovering that ownership of the land would be collective, the latter, who until then had called himself a 'quilombola poet', declared himself outraged, broke off all contact with the Quilombola Association and forbade anyone – including me – from ever mentioning quilombos to him again. Just like his uncle Seu Caboclo, at the end of our conversation Juvenal gave me the name of a female 'heir' who, of course, shared his opinion on the question.

I still needed to know what would be the version of events offered by the inhabitants of the vila, the local symbol of the quilombo and the issue at stake

³⁰ This version is contradicted by official documents: indeed, the petition for land regularisation was filed in 2004 by the Lagoa dos Índios Residents' Association. It would seem that the two associations were not in disagreement at the time. Ronizia Gonçalves, 'Breve relato da pesquisa de campo', unpubl. report, MDA-INCRA/AC, Rio Branco, 2010.

³¹ The state of Amapá was governed from 2003 to 2010 by the Partido Democrático Trabalhista (Democratic Labour Party, PDT).

³² The distribution of such food parcels by institutions, individuals and companies to the poorest members of society is a widespread social practice.

in the dispute between the two associations. The first impression gleaned by the visitor was of Lagoa dos Índios as a fairly comfortable Amazonian village: the community centre was a solidly built construction with masonry walls, the primary school had been completely refurbished and, above all, there was a health centre that was a reference point for the whole state in the field of sickle cell anaemia. The vice-president of the Residents' Association, Pedro, a grandson of one of the female 'heirs' in favour of the quilombo, though himself against this initiative, emphasised that the building, in 2008, of the health centre in which he himself worked had radically changed the lives of the villagers. He explained that previously the 200 or so families in the area, who had given up producing field crops and raising livestock more than 20 years earlier, eked out a meagre existence, supplemented by the Bolsa Família (Family Grant) and by the sale of the fruit of a palm tree (the *açat*).³³ At present, he went on, nearly everyone had a regular income, with one or two close family members having been taken on by the centre or the school as a security guard, cleaner or receptionist.

Conversations with the villagers in general, living either in the vila itself or along the dirt tracks (*ramais*) in the surrounding countryside, confirmed what the president and the vice-president of the Residents' Association had said. Apart from Dona Maria, the female 'heir' mentioned by Seu Caboclo, her son and two or three other people, nobody seemed to want to entertain the idea of a quilombo. There were several recurrent criticisms. The first concerned the lack of fit between the juridical status of quilombos and the realities of Lagoa dos Índios: the principle of collective land ownership was, they said, rather awkward as all the land there had already been divided up into individual plots ('aqui já é tudo separado'). Questions were also raised about what the inhabitants would do with 'all this land': the elderly, it was claimed, were not strong enough to work, and young people wanted to 'study and go up in the world' ('estudar para se tornar doutores').³⁴ Lastly, like Juvenal and his father, the villagers were extremely hostile to the prohibition on selling their property to whomever they wished: 'the land will not belong to us any more, it will be the government's' ('a terra não será mais da gente, será do governo') and 'we won't be masters in our own homes any more' ('a gente não vai mandar na nossa casa'). Even if it was something of a pipe dream, they all wanted to be free to dispose of the land so they could 'pay for [their] children's studies' ('pagar os estudos dos filhos') or bear the cost of unexpected health-care expenditure. There was another final objection, less often heard: some people

³³ The Bolsa Família is a social welfare programme implemented by the federal government in 2003.

³⁴ This phrase implies the kind of social standing that comes from a certain socio-economic status which is conferred not solely by further education or professional qualification.

expressed concern about the fate of their neighbours who were not relatives and hence not quilombolas, though sometimes long-established residents, and who would be obliged to leave.

'Relatives' or 'Inhabitants': Two Factions and Four Geographical Spaces

All the different protagonists in the conflict distinguish the vila of Lagoa dos Índios from Campo de Fora. However, once they had taken into account the consequences of a possible change in the juridical status of the zone, the members of the group hostile to the quilombo seemed to consider that these two spaces were actually one and the same. They agreed that it was the inhabitants of the vila, whose presence was the reason for submitting the petition, who were mainly concerned with the future evolution of Lagoa dos Índios. But they also considered that the people living in Campo de Fora were just as entitled to have their say. Campo de Fora was, according to certain accounts, the first place to be inhabited by the new arrivals before they moved on to found the vila, and it lay, *de facto*, within the area whose land-tenure regime might be modified.

The criterion adopted by this faction for defining a community with shared interests and a common future was the current place of residence of the households. This was why, in conversation, the villagers designated the group formed by themselves and the inhabitants of Campo de Fora using the first-person plural, whereas they kept the third person for their other relatives. The upshot of this interpretative framework, centred on people's 'resident' (*morador*) status, was to deny any legitimate opinion about its future to anyone not living in Lagoa dos Índios.

This interpretation was energetically refuted by the pro-quilombo faction, which for its part brought into play a much broader category: that of 'relatives' (*parentes*). In this group's opinion, insertion into kinship networks, but solely by filiation, was what determined whether someone belonged to the 'family' and hence to the 'community of Lagoa dos Índios'. From this perspective, the inhabitants of the town centre born in the vila and their descendants, together with their cousins in the baixada, were indisputably just as entitled to the land. Unlike their opponents, the tenor of their arguments insisted less on the territory shared on a daily basis than on the many profound links connecting them to the place and its residents. They emphasised the pleasure they felt when they spent their holidays there or their interest in moving there definitively so they could farm the land, along with their status as heirs or their commitment to defending the interests of the people in the vila, working for the improvement of their living conditions and so forth. If the outcome of their petition to INCRA was favourable, they stated, it would give all their 'relatives' living in precarious conditions a new chance in life.

Here, the prospect of the quilombo also represented a project for rebuilding the group.

According to the inhabitants of the vila and Campo de Fora, the much greater availability of land that the transformation into a quilombo would purportedly bring about was in fact a delusion. The numerous descendants of the founding couple, they stated, live not only by the lake, but also in the surrounding villages, and all these 'heirs' could claim the right to return. In that case, the mass arrival of 'relatives' would inevitably cancel out the benefits resulting from the restitution of the original land: however vast the area might be, the obligation to share the land would condemn each household to accepting a plot that would be insufficient for the needs of family reproduction. The group hostile to the quilombo was thus resolutely opposed to the principle of the return of 'relatives' who had 'sold their plot of land so they could leave' ('venderam as suas terras para sair'). 'We ourselves stayed on, whereas they bit the hand that fed them; they despised the community. Now they can see it getting bigger, and having something to offer' ('Nos ficamos, eles cuspiram no prato: a comunidade não prestava, não valia nada. Agora vêem que está crescendo, que tem alguma coisa para oferecer'). A litany of accusations aimed at quashing the idea once and for all was then unleashed: many people in favour of the quilombo were said to have sold plots of land, and some descendants to have dismantled their properties.

The theme of the 'sale of land', which was present in the discourse of both the proponents of the quilombo and their adversaries, deserves our attention at this point. In our initial conversations, the loss of the original territory of Lagoa dos Índios was put down to the intervention of outsiders from the city buying plots of land at below the market rate, or even forging title deeds. However, the idea that 'the land has been invaded' ('a terra foi invadida') was soon replaced by another, according to which the reduction in area was principally attributed to the cavalier behaviour of certain relatives. The proponents of change denounced the 'avariciousness' and 'greed for profit' ('cobiça', 'ganhança') of those who had divested themselves of numerous plots of land, sometimes selling them several times over to different people, and who were now only against the quilombo for fear of reprisals from the new owners. The opponents, for their part, were not to be outdone: the land, they claimed, had been lost through the fault of family members who, unaware of its true value or out of a 'desire to have a fun life' ('fazer a farra'), had virtually given it away (in exchange for an old refrigerator, some cast-off clothes and so forth). Legitimate heirs, who had suffered legal injury from these practices, had supposedly been obliged to buy small plots of land on which to build their houses, sometimes forcing them, so it was claimed, to go without food ('muita gente deixou de comer') in order to fund their purchases. Worse still,

it was said that some of them had to resort to 'squatting' the land of their ancestors, thus finding themselves in the situation of untitled landholders.

The reality of the drastic reduction in size of the territory of Lagoa dos Índios, whether through illegal appropriation of plots of land or their sale at knock-down prices, was indisputable, as witnessed by the numerous attempts by individuals to recover land in claims that, in every case, were rejected by the courts. The 'selling off the land' argument, which had as much a moral as an economic dimension to it, was also an accusation used to delegitimise the other side. What aroused general indignation was the decision taken by a 'relative' to get rid of land that ought to be part of the joint inheritance of all. There was, on this subject, no disagreement between the opposing factions, which both insisted on the greed and irresponsibility ('falta de responsabilidade') of their relatives. Put another way, both sides considered that the danger not only came from outside but also arose within the family itself. And this would explain the claims that 'the community here is not united. There are nothing but disputes' ('aquí não é uma comunidade unida. É só briga').

The confrontation between the two groups was, then, grounded in this shared pessimistic diagnosis. The pro-quilombo activists wanted the delimitation of an area of collective territory in order to prevent it being further dismantled; their opponents opposed this delimitation on the pretext that their relatives, who have so far failed to demonstrate their solidarity, 'only want the land so they can sell it on' ('só querem as terras para vender novamente'). Although the proposed solutions were radically different in concept and means, it should be noted that their objectives were quite similar: in both cases, the aim was to exercise control over those who were considered to be their own people ('a sua gente'). Indeed, while the official texts clearly provided that 'outsiders' would be expropriated or removed from the area ('desintrusão'), it did not specify who could be considered as an 'heir' (in a direct line or collaterally), or whether the presence of one category of heirs (spouses, descendants, collaterals) excluded the others, or over how many generations these rights could be transmitted, and so forth. For this reason, the question of knowing exactly who were the beneficiaries to be settled within the framework of Article 68 was insoluble.

Family History and Social Differentiation: The Trajectories of the 'Heirs'

The groups at loggerheads over the future evolution of the 'community of Lagoa dos Índios' thus called upon very different notions about its contours. Further, it was possible to point to a correspondence between an individual's place of residence and their opinion on the transition to a quilombo: those in favour of the idea lived predominantly in the capital, whereas those who were

opposed to it lived mostly in the vila or in Campo de Fora. But if the criterion of residence was a good indicator of an individual's convictions about the quilombo, this was not true of their place in the social structure.

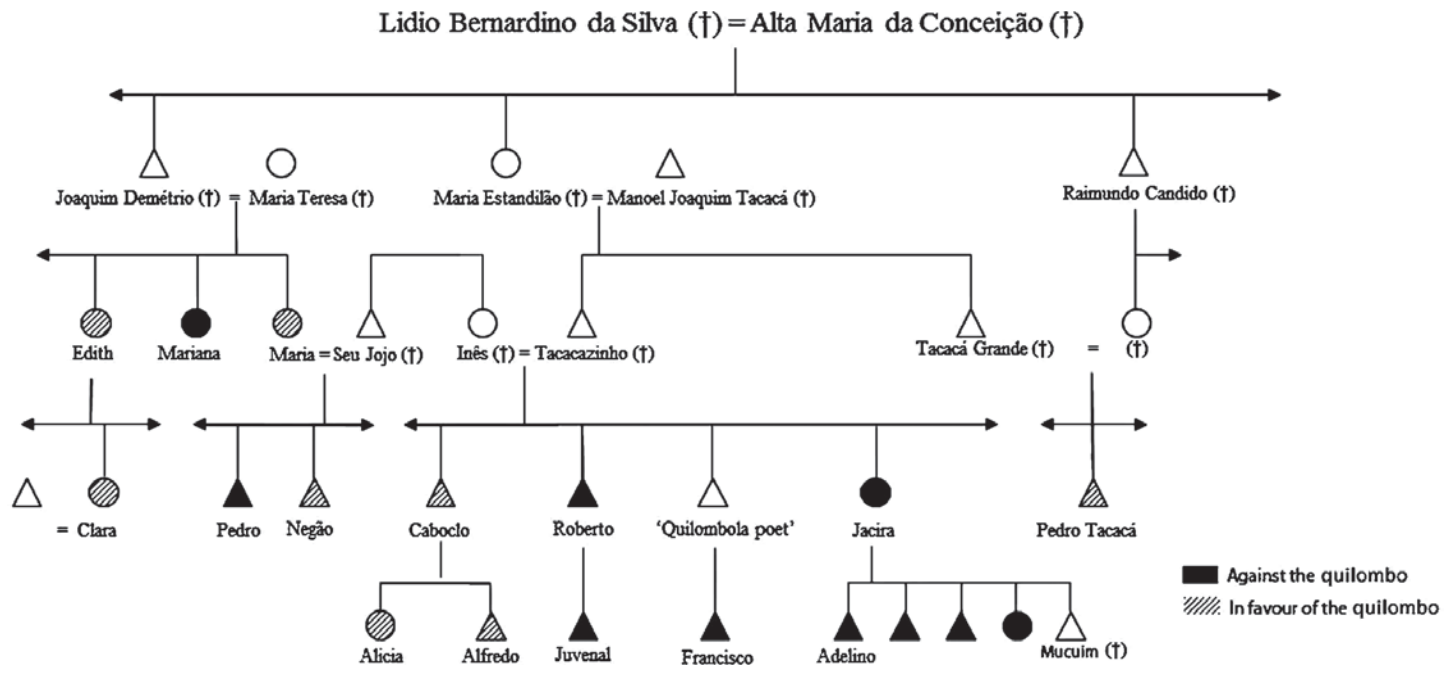
The rival factions resembled each other remarkably from the perspective of the socio-economic disparities that they exhibited. Some people had risen up the social scale (*subiram na vida*) through entry into government employment (as a secondary-school teacher, academic, psychologist or military policeman), while others had much more modest incomes, at times irregular or even non-existent (taxi driver, cleaner, domestic help, unemployed worker). In each of the opposing groups, then, there were 'poor people', in the vila or out on the floodplain, just as there were 'rich(er) people' in Campo de Fora or in the centre of the city of Macapá. The confrontation over the idea of a quilombo, therefore, cannot be seen simply as a struggle between 'big' and 'little' players – a fact which is particularly significant as all the leading figures, those who were the first to mention the names of incontestable 'heirs' in order to attest the validity of their positions, belonged to the better-off strata of society.

This observation prompted me to take a closer look at kinship relations and family histories (Figure 2). Two of the versions of the origins of Lagoa dos Índios presently in circulation involved 'Indians': the latter reputedly gave or sold land to Lídio Bernardino da Silva and his wife, Alta Maria da Conceição, at the start of the twentieth century. According to a third account, the founding couple was granted the usufruct of the land by their employer. The only point on which there was unanimity was that Lídio and his wife were from Mazagão Velho, a village that lies some 60 kilometres away from Macapá.

The couple was said to have had 11 offspring: five of them disappeared from the family narrative as they purportedly went to live elsewhere, and three of them reputedly had very few descendants in the area. Most of the putative heirs, therefore, descended from the remaining three children. The first, Joaquim Demétrio, had five children, two of whom, Dona Maria and Dona Edith, both now over 70 years old and each with a large number of offspring, were sources of inspiration for the proponents of the quilombo. Among the children from the marriage of Lídio's second daughter, Maria Estandilão, to Manoel Joaquim Tacacá, only two sons, whose nicknames contain that of their father, were mentioned: Tacacá Grande and Tacacazinho. The branch descending from the founders' last child merged with that of the previous one, since the only daughter mentioned married her cousin, Tacacá Grande.

It was in the fourth generation that the trajectories of this kin group began to diversify. Nothing changed for the children and the grandchildren of Joaquim Demétrio; they remained in the Lagoa dos Índios area, where they earned their living growing manioc until the 1970s. The case of the descendants of Maria Estandilão was more complex, as social differentiation took place within the lineage between the descendants of one brother and

Figure 2. *Family Tree of the Descendants of Lídio and Alta Maria da Conceição*



those of the other. The children of the elder brother, Tacacá Grande, went on to leave the vila and try their luck in the capital, unfortunately without success, and ended up living in the flood-prone areas. The destiny of the six sons born to the younger brother, Tacacazinho, and Dona Inês was radically different. They went to Macapá to pursue their studies, most of them entering the civil service, in particular the military police, which at the time required neither secondary-school qualifications nor recruitment by competitive examination.

The inhabitants of Lagoa explained the divergence in these social trajectories by contrasting the choices in lifestyle and educational principles of the two couples, involving first cousins – one the son of Maria Estandilão, and the other the daughter of Joaquim Demétrio. The first household, formed of Tacacazinho and Dona Inês, invested in their sons' education. Wishing to guarantee them the means of continuing their education in the city, they did not hesitate to kill a head of cattle every year in order to have the necessary funds. For its part, the second household, that of Dona Maria and Seu Jojó, at the time showed signs of greater prosperity, since their herd had remained intact. Indeed, they did not believe that studying was accessible to the children of people like them. Some individuals recall hearing Seu Jojó exclaim: 'Whoever heard of the son of a poor family getting a qualification?' ('Quando se viu um filho de pobre se formar?') The strategy was however beneficial for the children of Dona Inês and Tacacazinho. The discrepancy between the two branches of the family was to increase in the following generations: some of Jojó's granddaughters described how they were reduced to begging in the streets of Macapá while the grandchildren of Tacacazinho were forging ahead at university.

The leaders of the two factions who were most vocal in the debate and in conflict with each other over the quilombo were not only better-off than their relatives, they also all descended from the union of Tacacazinho and Dona Inês. On one side, in favour of the quilombo, stood Seu Caboclo and his wife, son and daughter; and on the other stood his brother Roberto, the latter's son Juvenal, one of Juvenal's sisters, Jacira, and four of his children. The latter group also had the backing of a lawyer, the son of another of their brothers who, after proclaiming himself a 'quilombola poet', now kept himself well out of the discussion.

Two points need to be raised here. Firstly, the group supporting the quilombo project appeared to be in the minority within this phratry, made up of just one man and his descendants, whereas the rest of his brothers and their children were against it.³⁵ Further, the conflict found its most virulent expression within this family lineage. In the vila, the poorest people,

³⁵ 'Phratry' is a Greek term used to describe a kinship division made up of two or more distinct clans. These may be considered a single unit, but keep their separate identities.

the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Joaquim Demétrio, seemed anxious to avoid allowing the quarrel to have too much impact upon everyday relations: during interviews even the fiercest opponents of the quilombo preferred to wait until Dona Maria, who had high expectations of this project, was out of earshot before expressing their opinion. The climate was, on the other hand, much more pernicious among the descendants of Tacacazinho since his brothers, along with an uncle and his nephews, were no longer speaking to each other. It is clear, then, that the effects of the quarrel over the quilombo upon family ties were not the same in all the branches of the family.

Subtle Differences: Blacks, 'Remaining Members of a Quilombo', Quilombolas

Before turning to the interpretation of this conflict, let me emphasise that, despite their divergences, all the protagonists were in agreement on one point: Lagoa dos Índios, as a 'black community' (*comunidade negra*), should be defined as a 'remaining quilombo community' (*comunidade remanescente de quilombo*). This legal expression is generally replaced in the literature and in official documents by the term 'quilombo', without changing its substance. It may seem surprising that opponents of the quilombo systematically insisted on the community being identified by the full legal expression, yet energetically rejected its abbreviated form. It is however much less remarkable if one views them not as people passively affected by government policies but as fully fledged social agents, who are quite capable of discussing institutional categories, reinterpreting them and developing new strategies in their relations with the state. This is what the naming distinction demonstrates, to my mind.

It was in the early 2000s that Black Movement activists, who today are to be found in state and municipal bodies, began to use the term *negro* in the villages in the region from which they and their spouses originally hailed. If we are to believe Clara, the young woman who introduced the notion to Lagoa dos Índios, and also the inhabitants of the hamlet, things did not go at all smoothly at first: the lively reactions on several occasions came close to fisticuffs. However, by pointing out the advantages of joining the programmes aimed at quilombola communities that the government was setting up, and explaining that a quilombola is someone descended from a negro, the activists were able to get their voice heard and bring the population to appropriate the new terms.

These terms were now so deeply ingrained in people's minds that a swing of opinion away from the quilombo did not imply that speakers would stop using them. Thus the vice-president of the Residents' Association, who was previously the treasurer of the Quilombola Association, underlined the fact

that identifying oneself – and being identified – as a ‘remaining quilombo community’ had strengthened the group’s capacity for political mobilisation: ‘here, ours is a black community. We are conscious of this because we were abandoned. We consider ourselves blacks, as remaining members of a quilombo. For, when we form a remaining quilombo community, we don’t ask for things: we demand them.’

In this context, both the faction in favour of the quilombo and that against it were proud to exhibit the certification issued by the FCP. Indeed, all the villagers considered that this document represented a tangible sign of the interest now being taken in their situation by a state that had always previously showed itself to be blind and deaf as long as Lagoa dos Índios constituted an undifferentiated segment of the ‘people’. This document moreover soon seemed to demonstrate its efficacy in improving their lot. In a lawsuit against the owner of a private university accused of dumping its waste water into the lagoon, the final judgment explicitly referred to the ‘quilombola community of Lagoa dos Índios’ as the recipient of the damages paid: a sum of money that was to be used to finance the construction of the health centre and fund six university scholarships. And because of this, the quilombo proposal initially met with general enthusiasm.

Moreover, none of the inhabitants of Lagoa dos Índios were currently opposed to the idea of a differentiated treatment of certain ‘ethno-racial’ categories, be they labelled ‘blacks’, ‘Indians’ or ‘whites’. They even readily invoked the exception represented by the ‘remaining quilombo communities’ in order to obtain the particular attention of the authorities and specific funding. In all events, asserting a quilombola identity was also, then, seen as a means of accessing resources. Moreover, the members of the ‘remaining community of the quilombo of Lagoa dos Índios’ did not hesitate to say that they would be quite prepared to ‘become a quilombo’ if they were convinced that this would be to their advantage.

But what ultimately tipped the scales in favour of the anti-quilombo faction were the demands of the state. The state assumes that different groups necessarily function differently: in a highly inegalitarian society, it makes integration into the programmes aimed at quilombolas conditional upon the adoption of a strict principle of equality of all, or even of collectivism. While the inhabitants of the vila were prepared to be ‘symbolically’ different if this brought them concrete benefits, they had no desire to be subjected to rules that were different from those prevailing in the rest of society – in particular the obligation of collective land tenure and the impossibility of freely disposing of one’s possessions. What they found problematic was the imposition, as it were, of a difference in the conditions governing their existence that would limit their autonomy. And their position in this respect was so entrenched that they noisily contested the argument of authority advanced by Seu Caboclo’s

daughter when she asserted that the ‘policy for blacks’ (‘política do negro’) must be implemented because it emanates from the government.

So, the ‘norms’ governing the quilombo were seen less as a protection against external aggression, favouring moreover the implementation of a number of ‘projects’, and more as limitations stifling the development of the village and bringing the risk of relegating it once more to oblivion:

The quilombo has an old-fashioned image; we don’t get anything out of it. The government signs a decree declaring us a quilombo and then forgets all about us. Another government comes along and they don’t know anything about it. The community is forgotten about, just like the indigenous areas. [The authorities] make great play of our roots, but they don’t want to do their job. The quilombo is just a way for ‘bigger’ people [*grandes*] to take things from us.³⁶

The state, perceived as a potential benefactor, took on the appearance of an authoritarian figure, similar to that of an all-controlling boss: ‘with the quilombo, the land will belong to the government’ or ‘the government will run everything’. Some statements were even more radical: ‘the quilombo means a return to slavery’; or again, ‘quilombolas are people who took refuge in the forest. We don’t want to live as in the past. Because we are free. But now, in the quilombo we are prisoners. It is reminiscent of slavery. I have already been a slave; I used to carry the manioc on my head. To my mind, *that* is slavery.’

The use of the term ‘slavery’ here no more referred to historical slavery than the allusion to the quilombo refers to the marronage studied by historians.³⁷ The reference period was, above all, individuals’ whole lifespans: the difficulties they had encountered in the recent past in producing their staple food (manioc flour), and the problems that their state-defined category currently seemed to cause them. The ‘return to slavery’, an expression reminiscent of the recurrent theme in Amazonian literature of the ‘return to captivity’,³⁸ should thus be understood as a metaphorical designation of everything that, in the residents’ minds, was constraining, in particular social relations that they had not chosen but which were forced upon them. In this framework, the quilombo cannot help but be associated with ‘regression’, ‘closing off’ and ‘privation’, all of which were incompatible with the ‘liberty’ that is supposed to bring ‘progress’ and, with it, access to the goods of ‘modernity’.

This is why there was an insistence upon the ‘remaining quilombo community’ simply emphasising local ‘roots’, while the quilombo itself was rejected for fear of entrapment in a new status. The inhabitants rejected the interpretation of the word ‘remaining’ that implied ‘what has survived, what is

³⁶ All citations are from interviews with local inhabitants.

³⁷ See, for example, Flávio dos Santos Gomes and Mary Del Priore (eds.), *Os Senhores dos Rios: Amazônia, margens e histórias* (Rio de Janeiro: Campus and Elsevier, 2003).

³⁸ Otávio Velho, *Besta fera: recriação do mundo – ensaios críticos de antropologia* (Rio de Janeiro: Relume-Dumará, 1995).

left' and that justified the targeted policies in favour of quilombolas;³⁹ rather, they considered that the word meant, above all, filiation and fidelity to their parents' efforts and choices. In other words, the identitarian element here appears linked not to ethnic survival, but to the social and historical 'struggles' waged by their forebears to ensure their survival: 'It will be a regression, investment will dry up. Now, we want something better. We do not despise our forebears, but they are the ones who made us get an education.'

Faced with the self-images reflected back at them by the different social actors involved (the state, activists, their better-off relatives), the residents of the vila had opted for an original arrangement, with strict limits between what was acceptable and what was not. More than a mere village (*povoado*), but less than a quilombo, Lagoa dos Índios had for the time being decided to assert itself as a 'remaining quilombo community' in order to try to preserve its (meagre) gains. This diversity of interpretation of the official quilombo category provides insights into the way in which people purportedly belonging to the same 'ethnic' group define their own particular interests.

The 'Poor' Versus Their 'Richer' Relatives

But we still need to understand why the conflict, which remained under control among the poor residents of the vila and Campo de Fora, had taken a much more acerbic turn among another group of individuals, who shared a different family lineage from the poor residents and who had all experienced the same upward social trajectory. First, we must take into account that the latter, whatever their position on the quilombo, had the same perception of their poorer relatives. Indeed, there were clear analogies in the way they spoke of those relatives. Thus, in discussion, the leading lights, whether for or against the quilombo, referred no longer to 'relatives' or 'inhabitants', but rather to 'they/them' (*eles*), which implied a quite different view of their opinion on the future evolution of Lagoa dos Índios. Admittedly, the use of this personal pronoun demonstrated a recognition of the specificity of the inhabitants of the vila directly concerned by the quilombo. But this mode of designation, which sharply separated villagers from leaders, was also an acknowledgement of the social differentiation that had taken place in the course of their families' histories. Put differently, it reflected their awareness of having joined another social group.

The socio-economic differences did not, of course, escape the poorest people, and they too pointed to these differences through their use of the

³⁹ This position echoes that of the committed anthropologists who denounce the 'frozen' vision of the state. See, for example, Ilka Boaventura Leite, 'Os quilombos no Brasil: questões conceituais e normativas', *Etnográfica*, 4: 2 (2000), pp. 333–54.

pronoun 'they'. The word generally appeared when, after giving the opinion on the quilombo to the anthropologist, they felt the need to express their perplexity to her, as shown in the following example:

Some people say that with the quilombo things will be worse than now, that there will be no money, there will be no buses. Others say that everyone will come back, and there will be fields. Nobody knows what the point of the quilombo is. I don't really understand this quilombo thing. *They* don't explain it to *us*. We wanted [it] but we didn't know [what it was].⁴⁰

While the 'rich' and the 'poor' mentioned in identical terms the existence of two segments within the kin group, they do not conceive of their connection in the same way. For the inhabitants of the vila and Campo de Fora, it was just as fundamental to stress what was common as to point out what was different. They in fact attached a great deal of importance to the status of 'relative', which was seen as ensuring the solidity of social relations. But they likewise stressed the social standing acquired by certain better-educated and better-off relatives. From their point of view, it was indispensable to closely associate the recognition of social differentiation that had facilitated access to new resources with the affirmation of a familial link that ought to make redistribution an obligation. It is unquestionably through these differentiated relatives, whose members were seen as 'people who know more about things than us' ('gente que sabe mais do que a gente'), that they could hope to insert themselves into broader networks of relations, and thus improve their conditions of existence. Moreover, the overwhelming majority of the villagers were less ready to give an opinion on the quilombo project as such than to express their confidence in the judgement of the leaders of one of the two factions: 'I'm part of the group in favour of the qui... what's it called again? Part of the Caboclo group...'; or again, 'Roberto is a good guy. He's done a lot for us. And he says that we won't gain anything by the quilombo.'

The problem was different for those who have risen up the social scale since, in their case, the issue was one not of delegating a power of decision but, on the contrary, of encouraging identification with themselves in order to have their leadership accepted. While very forthcoming on their sincere commitment towards the 'community' and their promise to work to its advantage, the most well-off took care not to insist on their social difference, and this may be why they shunned the use of the word 'we', in opposition to 'they'. The efficacy of the action that they claimed to be undertaking depended in this case on the 'community' being prepared to mobilise in their support, and accepting that they spoke for it and represented it in dealings with the authorities. This method worked well enough for a while as long as the whole 'family' (that is, the 'relatives' and 'inhabitants') stood behind Seu Caboclo's

⁴⁰ Emphasis added.

daughter, Alicia, to ensure her election to the Conselho Tutelar, a municipal body ensuring respect for children's rights. This system of representative delegation or co-optation, which could be described as a familial variant of clientelism, now ground to a halt, as the group of dominant relatives – the very people who, through their possession of 'knowledge', should be better able to understand the explanations given by the representatives of the institutions – was in complete disagreement over the question of the quilombo.

One should certainly be wary of concluding from the impasse in the procedure for the change to quilombo status that the 'poor' had remained passive when faced with the projects of their better-off relatives. No one in the vila believed any longer that having relatives who were well connected in local power circles, even as quilombolas, would guarantee the allocation of 'projects' beneficial to the 'community'. Other criteria then came into play when people were carefully weighing up the arguments of the opponents or proponents of the quilombo, such as their ability to remain 'simple'. Non-respect of this primordial value among the 'lower'-class groups gave rise to bitter criticism of Seu Caboclo's daughter, who 'only wants [things] for herself' ('só quer para ela'), and also of her cousins on the other side, Adelino and his brothers, who 'don't want to share the friendship of their relatives' ('não querem amizade com os parentes').

I would argue that the heightening of tension in the upwardly mobile branch of the family is understandable as a consequence of the transformation of Lagoa dos Índios in terms of place of residence into a quilombo. If the proposal were implemented, the people living in Campo de Fora would have to put their (according to them) hard-earned property into common ownership, while those who live in Macapá – that is, outside the area concerned – would hardly be affected.

Place of residence and land-tenure status, decisive issues confronting everyone, were also crucial for the discursive construction of the link binding individuals to the 'community' and for the slant given to this connection in its telling. The brothers opposed to the quilombo trumpeted their right to give their opinion by virtue of their status as residents and joint landholders. They emphasised that, after living in the city for a time while they were studying and working, they had decided of their own accord to return to Lagoa dos Índios where 'life is quieter'. Roberto, who chaired the Residents' Association for a long time, raised cattle there; one of his nephews, Adelino, had a comfortable house built there, and another of his nieces hoped soon to have the means of improving hers. The social distance separating them from the inhabitants who had been unable to leave the area was, nevertheless, spatially inscribed: they had come to live in Campo de Fora, where wealthy families from Macapá (judge, lawyer, police commissioner) had also bought land, and not in the vila, where their poor relatives are concentrated.

The motif of geographical proximity and the decision to 'return' was absent from the discourse of the other faction. As they lived in the capital, Seu Caboclo and his children, for their part, instead insisted on their 'affective' closeness to the people of the vila, and on the 'defence of their relatives' interests, up there in the community: 'they and I are of the same blood, I know their difficulties, I help them a lot' ('são meu sangue, sei das dificuldades deles, eu ajudo muito'). Hence, according to them, the setting up of the Quilombola Association, presented as proof of this unfailing support, was a necessity in order to further develop the action of a Residents' Association that was held to be too timid. Further, as Seu Caboclo – who came to head the Residents' Association – underlines, the occupational status of his children allowed them to play a crucial role. The latter were indeed particularly well placed, since they moved in both the municipal and state government spheres of the public administrations responsible for so-called black populations: his son Alfredo, a nutritionist, ran the programme against sickle cell anaemia in the state of Amapá and the Lagoa dos Índios health centre that spearheads this effort; and his daughter Alicia, a psychologist, headed the Comissão Municipal para a Igualdade Racial Municipal (Coordinating Body for the Promotion of Racial Equality, COMIR).

Thus the quilombo conflict might be seen as the reflection of distinct political positionings within 'higher'-level apparatuses. But it could also be argued, more prosaically, that it was linked to the deployment of distinct strategies by the members of an upwardly mobile familial lineage in order to consolidate their social capital and economic situation. Most have devoted their energies, fairly classically, to accumulating property and/or land by coming back to live in the place where they spent their childhood and where land prices were still affordable. Some of their closest relatives had, for their part, demonstrated a sense of innovation by embracing the new orientations adopted by the federal government, as relayed by regional and municipal administrative bodies, in order to achieve visibility in the world of local politics. This institutional recognition was evident: as president of the Quilombola Association, which was presumed to represent the whole of the 'community of Lagoa dos Índios', Seu Caboclo was the privileged interlocutor of INCRA and the government legal aid office (DPU). He is also well connected to the Special Secretariat for the Defence and Promotion of Afro-Brazilian Populations (Secretaria Extraordinária de Políticas para o Afrodescendente, SEAFRO), a body that depends upon the state, through CONAQ, whose room is in the same building. This did not, however, mean that the opponents of the quilombo shied away from politics, nor that they were reluctant to exploit the possibilities offered by the discourse on debt and reparation. Adelino and his brothers wanted, for instance, to create a movement called PP-Afro within the Partido Progressista (Progressive Party,

PP), to promote affirmative action in favour of 'blacks' but within a very clear limit: there could be absolutely no change to the land-tenure regime in the sector in which they resided.⁴¹

So, only one of the lineages descended from the founding couple of Lagoa dos Índios experienced upward social mobility. By positioning themselves, in relation to their collateral relatives left at the bottom of the social scale, as intermediaries able to get the latter access to new goods and services, the descendants of Tacacazinho were able to form a locally dominant group. But the unity of the phratry was torn to shreds once one of its members raised the question of the quilombo. For it revealed that the routes taken by the brothers in order to improve their socio-economic situation had obliged them to defend interests that were not only distinct but also incompatible. The dominant group therefore found itself split into two competing factions vying with each other to position themselves as the only authentic leaders capable of relaying the voices of those of their relatives who had remained 'poor and disadvantaged'. Their influence on the latter became the precondition for their personal success.

Conclusions

The ethnographic approach adopted here challenges the metanarrative of quilombolas as resistance to landowners. In fact, it demonstrates that this conflict cannot be interpreted only as one part of the village falling under the influence of external actors, unless, paradoxically, one considers the Macapá relatives who support the quilombo project as external actors. The analysis of the interrelationship among numerous elements, in particular the social trajectories, territorial interests and political aspirations within an extended kin group, allows us to identify certain correlations, but it also highlights the existence of previous internal differentiation such as place of residence, socio-economic status and opinions about the quilombo. One can also observe that the definition of potential beneficiaries of Article 68 ('parents' or 'people') was based on the effects of social differentiation and relationships of domination and clientelism within the family group. In this sense, the paper contributes to a better understanding of how, in the Amazon, social identities are reinvented when historical conditions change.⁴²

This study shows that lived realities uniformly included in a single legal category are diversified not only from the cultural, geographical and historical

⁴¹ The PP evolved from the Aliança Renovadora Nacional (National Renovating Alliance, ARENA), the party of the military government (1964–85).

⁴² Mark Harris, *Life on the Amazon: The Anthropology of a Brazilian Peasant Village* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

points of view, which is commonly accepted, but also from the social one. This conclusion invites us to reconsider the assumptions made both by the state and, in recent years, by the Brazilian Anthropological Association, that quilombolas are homogenous groups, and that 'communities' are totalising wholes, unitary, united and egalitarian.

This intellectual idealisation, which also echoes how the discipline of anthropology has previously constructed the Other while denying its contemporaneity,⁴³ obscures the multiple links that people have with the outside world and the diversity of positions and interests involved in the process of a community demanding recognition as quilombolas. In fact, in the case presented here, as in others, being black does not appear to be the supra-determinant element: it is just one among many others.

More broadly, this study invites one to question the pertinence of political action based exclusively on an ethnic/racial difference. While analysing some of the assumptions of the current debate about multiculturalism and ethnicity in Amazonia, this article contributes to the wider discussion about this issue in Brazil and, more broadly, in Latin America. It challenges the usual terms of the debate on identities in order to return to their broader definition as 'categories of practice'.⁴⁴ By taking agency into account, paying close attention to local contexts and speeches, and focusing on individual subjects, we avoid reifying social groups and can more clearly see how people are able to position themselves in relation to new public policies, either adhering to, rejecting or redefining legal categories in order to tailor them to their own diverse social interests.

Spanish and Portuguese abstracts

Spanish abstract. Este artículo se refiere a un conflicto interno que se dio en una aldea amazónica cuando ésta adoptó una identidad quilombola oficialmente reconocida. Señala que tal situación, que tiende a ser interpretada en términos de identidad, fue de hecho primeramente social. Claramente, es necesario examinar las divergentes posiciones adoptadas por distintos grupos de parientes en relación a las dinámicas de diferenciación socioeconómica vinculadas a sus historias familiares particulares. El material muestra que el conflicto se conectó tiempo atrás a luchas de poder entre grupos dominantes de parientes y que las cuestiones acerca de los límites del grupo reflejaban preocupaciones relacionadas con quién tenía la autoridad legítima para tomar decisiones acerca del futuro de la aldea. Al analizar algunas de las asunciones del

⁴³ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

⁴⁴ For another example in the same state of Amapá, see Véronique Boyer, 'Passado português, presente negro e indizibilidade ameríndia: o caso de Mazagão Velho, Amapá', *Religião e Sociedade*, 28: 2 (2008), pp. 11–29.

debate actual sobre el multiculturalismo y la etnicidad en la Amazonia, este artículo contribuye a la discusión más amplia sobre de estos temas en Brasil y Latinoamérica.

Spanish keywords: quilombolas, Brasil, Amazonia, políticas étnicas, conflicto interno, diferenciación social

Portuguese abstract. Este artigo trata de um conflito interno surgido quando uma comunidade amazônica adotou oficialmente a identidade quilombola. Argumenta-se que esta questão que tende a ser interpretada em termos de identidade seja, na verdade, primordialmente social. As posições divergentes adotadas por diferentes grupos ligados por parentesco devem ser examinadas em relação às dinâmicas de diferenciação socioeconômicas relacionadas às histórias familiares. O artigo demonstra que o conflito relacionava-se a batalhas por poder entre grupos dominantes de parentes e que questões acerca dos limites dos grupos refletiam preocupações relacionadas com quem detinha autoridade legítima para tomada de decisões sobre o futuro da comunidade. Através da análise de alguns pressupostos do debate atual sobre multiculturalismo e etnicidade na Amazônia, este artigo contribui com discussões mais amplas acerca destas questões no Brasil e, de maneira geral, na América Latina.

Portuguese keywords: quilombolas, Brasil, Amazônia, políticas étnicas, conflito interno, diferenciação social