

# Resistance processes: ceramics from the Quilombo de Conceição das Crioulas

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## **Abstract**

In times of restriction of the rights guaranteed by law, deconstruction of education, censorship of art, and devaluation of culture by the current federal administration, it is sought to think through, in the light of Hannah Arendt (2001), the sense of co-labor-action in material production, based on experiences related to the making-living of ceramics in the quilombola community of Conceição das Crioulas, located in the central sertão of Pernambuco, Brazil. To do this, the research that results in this article works between the resistance movements related to the land and the feminine, according to the material imagination of Gaston Bachelard (2001), to grasp the effects of retroactivation of co-labor-action on community resistance, starting from the way how the quilombola community of Conceição das Crioulas shares its territory and drives its practices.

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By means of a phenomenological nature and a qualitative approach, this article is grounded in the accounts and registers of the experiences conducted within the period from July 2018 to June 2019 and in the narratives of masters and people from the locality. It is concluded that the idea of co-labor-action in the making-living of ceramics at the Quilombo de Conceição das Crioulas constitutes a sense of fissure in the exclusion and cooptation of material production by the hegemonic system, if this is thought as a political action.

**Key words** ways of life; resistance; collaboration; ceramics; art/education; quilombola

## Processos de resistência: a cerâmica do Quilombo de Conceição das Crioulas

### Resumo

Em tempos de cerceamento dos direitos garantidos em lei, desconstrução da educação, censura da arte e desvalorização da cultura pelo atual governo federal, busca-se refletir, à luz de Hannah Arendt (2001), o sentido da co-labor-ação na produção material, a partir de vivências ligadas ao fazer-viver da cerâmica na comunidade quilombola de Conceição das Crioulas, situada no sertão central de Pernambuco. Para tanto, a pesquisa que resulta neste artigo transita entre os movimentos de resistência relacionados à terra e ao feminino, segundo a imaginação material de Gaston Bachelard (2001), para compreender os efeitos de retroativação da co-labor-ação na resistência da comunidade, partindo do modo como a comunidade quilombola de Conceição das Crioulas partilha seu território e movimenta suas práticas. De natureza fenomenológica e abordagem qualitativa, este artigo se fundamenta nos relatos e registros das vivências realizadas no período de julho de 2018 a junho de 2019 e nas narrativas de mestras, mestres e pessoas da localidade. Conclui-se que a ideia de co-labor-ação no fazer-viver da cerâmica do Quilombo de Conceição das Crioulas constitui um sentido de fissura na exclusão e cooptação da produção material pelo sistema hegemônico, se pensada como ação política.

**Palavras-chave** modos de vida; resistência; colaboração; cerâmica; arte/educação; comunidade quilombola.

## Procesos de resistencia: la cerámica del Quilombo de Conceição das Crioulas

### Resumen

En tiempos de restricción de los derechos garantizados por ley, desconstrucción de la educación, censura del arte y devaluación de la cultura por el gobierno federal actual, se busca reflexionar, a la luz de Hannah Arendt (2001), el sentido de la co-labor-acción en la producción material, con base en vivencias relacionadas con el hacer-vivir de la cerámica en la comunidad quilombola de Conceição das Crioulas, ubicada en el sertão central de Pernambuco, Brasil. Para esto, la investigación que resulta en este artículo transita entre los movimientos de resistencia relacionados con la tierra y lo femenino, según la imaginación material de Gaston Bachelard (2001), para comprender los efectos de retroactivación de la co-labor-acción en la resistencia de la comunidad, partiendo del modo como la comunidad quilombola de Conceição das Crioulas comparte su territorio e impulsa sus prácticas. De carácter fenomenológico y abordaje cualitativo, este artículo se fundamenta en relatos y registros de las vivencias realizadas en el período de julio de 2018 a junio de 2019 y en las narrativas de maestros y personas de la localidad. Se concluye que la idea de co-labor-acción en el hacer-vivir de la cerámica del Quilombo de Conceição das Crioulas constituye un sentido de fisura en la exclusión y cooptación de la producción material por parte del sistema hegemónico, si pensada como una acción política.

**Palabras clave** modos de vida; resistencia; colaboración; cerámica; arte/educación; comunidad quilombola.

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# Processus de résistance: céramique du Quilombo de Conceição das Crioulas

## Résumé

En ces temps de restriction des droits garantis par la loi, de déconstruction de l'éducation, de censure de l'art et de dévaluation de la culture par le gouvernement fédéral actuel, on cherche à refléter, à la lumière de Hannah Arendt (2001), le sens de co-labeur-action dans la production matérielle, basé sur des expériences liées au faire-vivre de la céramique dans la communauté quilombola de Conceição das Crioulas, située dans le sertão central de Pernambuco, Brésil. Pour ce faire, la recherche qui aboutit à cet article transite entre les mouvements de résistance liés à la terre et au féminin, selon l'imagination matérielle de Gaston Bachelard (2001), afin de comprendre les effets de rétroactivation de la co-labeur-action sur la résistance de la communauté, à commencer par la manière dont la communauté quilombola de Conceição das Crioulas partage son territoire et déplace ses pratiques. Doté d'un caractère phénoménologique et d'une approche qualitative, cet article est basé sur les rapports et enregistrements des expériences réalisées de juillet 2018 à juin 2019 et sur les récits de maîtres et de habitants de la localité. Il est conclu que l'idée de co-labeur-action au faire-vivre de la céramique du Quilombo de Conceição das Crioulas constitue un sens de fissure dans l'exclusion et la cooptation de la production matérielle par le système hégémonique, si elle est pensée comme une action politique.

**Mots-clés** modes de vie; résistance; collaboration; céramique; art/éducation; communauté quilombola.

## Introduction

Dominating the land, through agriculture, has allowed the human/cultural groups to organize and establish housing, thus creating and improving their technical knowledge, their tools, and their processes of agricultural production and earth science.

Symbolically, through material imagination<sup>1</sup>, the cultural groups see the land as a matter of conquest, as well as a matter of human will achievements, translated into abundance/food and objects of use – such as ceramics.

For many peoples, land is the basis of cultural, political, social, and economic relationships; among them there is the quilombola community of Conceição das Crioulas, located at the 2nd District of Salgueiro, Pernambuco, about 550 km far from Recife City.

Going back to the oral history (Rodrigues, 2017) about the origin of Conceição das Crioulas, the female storytellers tell us that, in the mid-18th century, 6 black women settled in the lands of the central sertão of Pernambuco and inaugurated a process of struggle

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<sup>1</sup> Daniele Perin Rocha Pitta (2017, p. 21, our translation) explains that, in Gaston Bachelard, “the symbol allows establishing the agreement between the ‘self’ and the world; that the four elements (earth, air, water, and fire) are the ‘hormones of imagination.’ The symbol is, therefore, dynamic and starting from this finding Bachelard sets the relation between symbol, image, and imaginary. ‘The key word that corresponds to imagination is not the image, it is the imaginary. The value of an image is measured by the extent of its imaginary aura. Thanks to the imaginary, imagination is essentially open, evasive. In the human psyche, it is the experience of openness, the experience of novelty.’ Thus, we think that material imagination is realized through the imaginary that each cultural group builds around its symbolic relationship with the four elements; in the case of this article, with an emphasis on the element *earth*.”

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and resistance that reaches the current days, marked by the conquest of their lands and by confrontation in order to demarcate and provide these lands with titles.

Mendencha Ferreira, Francisca Ferreira, Francisca Presidente, Francisca Macário, Germana Ferreira, and Romana are the names of these female warriors who demarcated their place in the world and constituted their way of doing things: resist by living and produce with their hands.

The community's name was a tribute to Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception – to whom a promise was devoted:

The most usual in the narratives of their descendants is that those women planted and spun cotton and went to sell products in the city of Flores, Pernambuco. With this, they managed to buy three leagues in a block of land<sup>2</sup>. They also report that, fleeing from a war, a black man, named Francisco José de Sá, who carried with him an image of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, joined them. Coping with the difficulties and the wish for freedom, together they made the promise that if they were not found and managed to become owners of this territory, they would donate a piece of land where they would build a chapel in honor of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception and the community would be named as Conceição das Crioulas (Rodrigues, 2017, pp. 16-17, our translation).

From that period to the present time, significant advances were obtained in the battles of the quilombola people, such as: a) in the sense of their recognition by the federal government and its public policies; b) in the demarcation of lands and in the reappropriation of other lands that had been taken by farmers; c) in the acquisition of community schools; and d) in the adoption of a pedagogy inherent to the community<sup>3</sup> in its pedagogical plan. However, they keep on fighting against silencing, armed conflicts, land invasions, continuing threats, invisibilization, repression, discrimination, and violence suffered by the community.

Currently, the setbacks in constitutional rights acquired have been tackled: the right to land; the right to life; the right to history; the right to culture; the right to education; and the right to protected territory. In a broader reading, Brazilian politics itself is the problem in the case of social policies. In another sense, things advance by slow steps and configure electoral mechanisms rather than being problem-solving, and, according to this order, key

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**2** “In 1998, Conceição das Crioulas was recognized as a remnant of quilombo by the Palmares Cultural Foundation [Fundação Cultural Palmares – FCP] and in 2000 the FCP provided the community with the title to an area of 16,865 hectares” (Carvalho, 2016, p. 11, our translation).

**3** A pedagogy inherent to the community has been built in Conceição das Crioulas, related to symbolic and cultural issues, named as *Creole Pedagogy*. According to Master Márcia Juçilene do Nascimento (2017, p. 111, our translation), “the creole pedagogy, a term created during the PPP revisit workshops, is based on the thought of a school education that is firmly grounded in strengthening the history and identity of the population of Conceição das Crioulas.”

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issues, such as that of the land of traditional peoples – Indians and quilombolas –, are at the mercy of abuses and the will of those who take office to exercise power. This fact resulted in the current deconstruction of the conditions already achieved.

Conceição das Crioulas is known for its legacy of struggles over more than 300 years of history in Brazil, by claiming its rights as a traditional people<sup>4</sup>, and by keeping the warrior spirit to fight for its territory, its life, and its freedom, besides the education of its descendants, by transmitting its traditions.

This land, turned into territory<sup>5</sup>, became a quilombola symbol, recognized by its cultural works, mainly the dolls of ‘caroá’ fiber<sup>6</sup>, which honor the female leaders of the community<sup>7</sup>, and traditional ceramic tableware, which go date back to the know-how to do the tasks and strengthen the tradition.

From the land to the territory, the research that results in this article moves between the private and the public, the individual and the collective, the profane and the sacred before the experiences with the earth, more precisely in the work with clay and ceramics, presenting and learning through the way how the quilombola community of Conceição das Crioulas shares its territory and drives its practices.

Thus, this article is an introduction to the issue of identity and ethical/aesthetic organization of the ways of life by the territory and by the community tasks, specifically those related to ceramics, seeking to grasp or ask questions about how people act collectively or, also, how the action towards a politically inscribed art/education takes place.

It is starting from the symbolic value of the land, territory of struggle, of tasks and knowledge, of art and education that aim to walk and share the exchanges experienced with ceramics in the community. Thus, the article addresses the ways of doing-living, taking

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**4** Art. 1 of Decreto n. 6.040 (2007, our translation) states that: “the National Policy for Sustainable Development of Traditional Peoples and Communities [Política Nacional de Desenvolvimento Sustentável dos Povos e Comunidades Tradicionais] – PNPCT, as set out in the Annex to this Decree, is hereby established.”

**5** Only in 2000 the community managed to obtain the first title issued by the FCP regarding a farm located on its lands – previously demarcated by the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária – INCRA), but it received the title of permanent possession only 12 years later.

**6** The caroá (*Neoglaziovia variegata*), also named as ‘coroatá’ or ‘gravatá,’ is a terrestrial or epilithic plant, belonging to the Bromeliaceae family, native to Northeastern Brazil; its leaves, arranged in rosettes, provide long fibers of great resistance and durability.

**7** According to Master Givânia Maria da Silva (2012, p. 159, our translation), “the choice of female leaderships for representing the community or telling the story took place through discussion and its was based on the role of each woman in the community organization process. Each of the characters occupies or occupied a major place in the community, in the most varied functions: spiritual healers, midwives, artisans, teachers, catechists, and community animators and one of the women from the original group (Francisca Ferreira), who, according to oral history, had the specific function of leading the occupation and conquest of the territory of Conceição das Crioulas as a member of this group of women who speak in and out of the community by means of their stories.”

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an updated look at the relations of the labor-work-action<sup>8</sup>, discussed by Hannah Arendt (2001), regarding her initial question:

- What are we doing?

With this, we think through the community movement and transformation along with the women-artists-artisans who lead the whole process.

This empirical study is part of a compilation of experiences based on reports and narratives by female and male masters, teachers, students, and community members, on photographic records and on videos, as well as on the review of MA dissertations of community women who participated in the actions resulting from the visits within the last 12 months: in July and November 2018 and in January, February, and June 2019.

Given the above, it is worth emphasizing the personal contradiction of one of the authors of this article, who is an industrial designer (designer), who came from the industrial process and mass/commodity production, carrying in the name of her profession some hostility to traditional production practices. Thus, an initial tension (ethical-aesthetic-relational) is placed in the research field and we must constantly distrust it as we relate to the groups, aware of this shock/imbalance. Therefore, the study becomes an opportunity to think through the meaning of being with the other, to rethink our in-pressions and experiences based on the exchanges and experiences in groups and communities that produce handicraft; on the unmasking of how these relationships have pressed/touched/shaped our essence, our truths, and how we seek to grasp them and act.

In this article, we aim to:

- a) Explain collective tessituras of the ways of life in Conceição das Crioulas through ceramics; and
- b) Reinforcing how being together and sharing lives in daily living may be or is a transgressive act of art/educating, in face of individualizing and mercantilizing practices and contexts.

To do this, we discuss, having Gaston Bachelard (2001) as a basis, resistance in the material imagination of the land as a key element and metaphor of the struggle for territory, as well as the cooperation of the other elements – water, air, and fire – in the relationship of the community with ceramics. Associated with imagination in Bachelard (2001), we observe the practice of resistance in ceramic material production in the light of Hannah Arendt (2001), discussing the meanings of co-labor-action in a collective and public work experienced in two specific moments: a) during clay removal from the clay pit, in January 2019; and b) during the building of the oven and the burning of clay pieces, in June 2019.

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**8** There is an update of the terms to classify labor – work – action, which became *labor/work – work/manufacturing – action*, having the 2010 review of *The human condition* [A condição humana] (Arendt, 2001) as a basis, because there were different interpretations on the meaning of labor due to the translation. However, we use these terms on the basis of the first classification, published in Arendt (2001).

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## **Resistance in earth's material imagination**

The ceramics, the body, the dough, the clay pit, the oven are examples of images that constitute the community relations and traditions in Conceição das Crioulas and that, according to the theorist Gilbert Durand, creator of the Theory of the Imaginary, are part of a museum of images (from past, present, and future) culturally produced.

These images emerge through the redundancy and frequency of their appearances, existing in speeches/conversations, in gestures, in photographic records/videos, etc. It is from the emergence of each image, the way how it manifests and combines with others, that we discuss the community's symbolic organization in terms of resistance in Conceição das Crioulas, triggered by material imagination of the earth within the period from July 2018 to June 2019.

### ***The earth: body – collective – feminine***

To be in the quilombola community of Conceição das Crioulas is to experience collectively the resignification of the founding women and the women who maintain this territory. It is to revive the marks, the stories, the lives of every Francisca, every Maria, every mother, aunt, grandmother who is instilled in the Creole imaginary. They are present in the speeches of young people and constitute major references in their life relationships.

Likewise, to live the community is to have an experience with the earth in the sertão, strongly marked in the community's origin narrative. The earth, before the other elements of nature, is a solid body and it has resistance as its first feature. In Bachelard (2001, p. 15, our translation), "hard and soft are the first qualifications received by the matter resistance, the first dynamic existence of the resistant world." In this sense, a tension lies on the way how we insist and gather strength to withstand/overcome the toughness of a resistant matter. Material imagination takes great relevance in the con-tact with each other and it enables experiencing mutual r-existence.

In Conceição das Crioulas, hardness is fought with body firmness, collectively, in repetitive and continuous movements, which gradually take shape according to the will of all.

Here, we may speak of a stubbornness that: feeds/animates the struggle, because it is the right thing to do; and activates a time, an effort made to fight, to work, but also to rest – in order to recover/rearrange strength and struggle strategies.

As an example, the community is organized into groups that deal with specific issues – such as the land issue, education – and which, from time to time, are reorganized. This reorganization by alternation (stir the ground) of the people/leaderships, between the groups, may have the sense of not overloading or 'wearing down' those who are at the

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forefront of the struggle/action, as well as of giving fresh breath to the perspectives of each group or, also, to preserve the leaders' lives so that they are not targeted in conflicts.

This ambivalence between movement and rest is configured as a (cultural/political/artistic/educational) resistance strategy.

We can see in the relations between resistances and wills that the matters processed by the hands of female and male ceramist masters from the community also provide clues of a resistant making:

**1) By the power relation between different members**

Where, in relation to the lathe, the forces of gravity, of ancestry, the centripetal and centrifugal forces act in pottery making; or by mixtures of various types of clay, where different resistances are conferred to ceramics; or, also, by the physical body parts, such as the hands, whose right-to-left abilities are different; in the plurality of subjects, who perceive and act in different ways.

**2) By overcoming intimacy in conflict with exteriority**

When, in a decision, the subject gives up her/his personal will to the detriment of the group and agrees.

**3) By resignifying and coming back to the refuge after each creation**

When this return to the foundational mythical narrative<sup>9</sup> validates or reinforces and updates the moment that is established, or rather, each bowl, pot, and dish is a guardian of the Creole memory/ancestry.

In this first set of images, hardness, fight, movement, rest, doing with the hands configure values inherent to land resistance and to people's action in Conceição das Crioulas.

## ***The male water***

Another relation to resistance may be produced by a kind of tensioned cooperation between earth and water, "as water softens the earth or the earth provides water with its consistency" (Bachelard, 2001, p. 61, our translation), turning it into dough (Bachelard, 2013).

Water, an element of life, is scarce in Conceição das Crioulas. The semi-arid climate, with little rainfall, makes the community hostage to government neglect: people are dependent on water tank truck supplies.

The community pond, when it has water, is salty – it has excess salt, that is, it needs to be treated for consumption.

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**9** The mythical narrative is a set of universal (archetypal) images that equates existential issues: who am I? (identity myth); where do I come from? (origin myth); where do I go? (eschatological myth). The myth is what guides the existing relations of a given group, in time and space, "under the transforming and dynamic action of social situations" (Pitta, 2017, p. 21, our translation). It is worth emphasizing that the ordering myth is constituted in culture and by culture, therefore, it is defined by the cultural heritage of this group.

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In Afro-descendant religious practices, Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, patroness of the community, is syncretized with Iemanjá, female orixá connected to salty waters. It is “represented in the images as a matron, with bulky breasts, a symbol of fruitful and nutritious motherhood” (Verger, 2002, p. 68, our translation). Even in apparent contradiction, Conceição das Crioulas knew how to feed from the nutrients of its environment, its natural, social, art/educational wealth and provided a good return for this.

The salt turns into stone, crystallizes in the absence of water, and joins the earth. An element of life is also an element of death (Bachelard, 2013). The body is the first to feel the dryness of weather. A dry body, without water, becomes fragile, unbounded, lifeless.

Like the land, access to water is part of the quilombola struggle. Community survival depends on it, as well as on agriculture and ceramic art.

In material imagination, both water and earth are female elements. However, in the material dynamics of the dough, the water masculinizes to penetrate/fertilize the earth. This relationship presents, in the combination of earth and water, the power of the hands. The latter meditate the mixture, establish an agreement between the elements when pressing one against the other or between the hands or shaking hands.

There is a way to press the dough, as well as to shake hands.

According to Bachelard (2013, p. 109, our translation):

When one has actually managed to penetrate water into the very substance of crushed earth, [...] then the experience of “connection,” the long dream of “connection” begins. This power to bind substantively, by the communion of intimate bonds, the worker, dreaming of her/his task, attributes it now to earth, then to water. Indeed, in many unconscious thoughts, water is loved due to its viscosity. The viscous experience brings together numerous organic images: they occupy the worker incessantly in her/his long kneading patience.

The act of kneading clay is a step where tact works better than sight. Sometimes, this task is delegated to a few people who know how to provide the dough with the desired consistency for the work of a ceramist/pottery maker, since it requires some sensitivity: of closeness; of force/pressure; of body action in order to provide the dough with cohesion; and of producing the bond of bodies/elements.

In the same way that the gesture of joining/kneading the elements produces the bind, the act of joining the hands brings union to the bodies, produces a collectivity. And this role is played by women:

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It is noteworthy that female protagonism is a major mark in the entire historical process of the community of Conceição das Crioulas. Historically, the main initiatives of struggle and resistance have been recognized as being led by women. It should also be noticed that during periods of community wars, men and women played different roles, but with a unique relevance, because it was not a matter of hierarchy but rather of complementarity (Rodrigues, 2017, p. 22, our translation).

In Conceição das Crioulas, the feminine stands out, when we speak of driving the collective, and the masculine cooperates (the earth receives the water).

Women are those who walk hand in hand with the community, they take the community by the hands. They carry the water, the earth, the dough, the fight. They fill their time with actions. Their bodies, haughty and curved by the walk, receive/enclose other bodies, the children – their descendants – and even other children (other struggles – they gather to other peoples from outside the community). They feed the community with their dreams, know-how to do the tasks, with their stories, in a process of continuous (self) construction/education and criticism. They feed the living embers, i.e. lands in the sertão.

## ***Unique flames***

The dough – earth and water – finds in fire a relation with time. Both the drying time – where the dry air of the semi-arid climate cooperates – and the given cooking time. According to Bachelard (2001, p. 69, our translation), “it is the time that comes to strongly individualize the matter.” It not only ensures cooking, but resistance.

This time is clearly observed through the community’s singularization movement, in the construction of its flavors, its values, and its conquests, and in the transformation of fragments and fractures, wounds, and pains during the experience – as a material memory. It is a knowing-living way, a kind of waiting in movement.

The dough must withstand the movement – molecule agitation – that comes along with the fire heat, not to produce anguish, but its own blazing and to be toned by the fight (Bachelard, 2001).

Resistance is produced by resisting. And it is this cyclical movement, of self-production, that the community lives in its daily life, resisting the sun, the heat, the lack of water, internal disputes within the community, family issues. Resisting the pressure of farmers, governments, prejudices, and discrimination.

Creole women/men, female and male teachers, female and male masters make/live/resist by repeating stories/memories for children and youngsters, creating pottery, dolls, their material culture. They resist because there is flame, blazing in what they do, in the way how each one, source of heat, cooperates to warm the community bosom:

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In the core there are the germs; in the core there is the fire that begets. What germinates, burns. What burns, germinates (Bachelard, 2008, p. 62, our translation).

They resist because they recognize themselves as *earth*.

From preparation to burning, no step can be rushed. The rhythm of the other, the dough, the fire is respected. The slow time (of the place) allows us to stop, to experience. The dough, one day soft and plastic, changes.

The fire that warms/heats also stiffens and fixates:

What was born in the water dies in the fire (Bachelard, 2001, p. 75, our translation).

While the body/dough can be modeled, it means movement/life; a stiff body contains within itself the possibility of creation. It is what gestures/actions have produced.

The *krónos*, in the image of fire, acts, on the one hand, making the community more experienced, insofar as it relates (is heated) with its environment; but, on the other hand, it determines, at each generation, a length of time to act, a limit (of life) to touch the future generation.

The speeches of community leaders brought with them the need and concern to act, while they still had time (they were warm), so that the youngsters engaged more strongly in quilombola causes, as well as cultural practices. They commented that their time – the freshness of life – was already coming to an end.

## **Ceramics as an element of resistance**

We shared a few moments of the community life in Conceição das Crioulas in July and November 2018 and in January, February, and June 2019. We were at the community to know the ceramic material production, which, we had heard, was in decline. We heard people/leaders/young people from the community and found that they faced difficulties related to the acquisition and burning of clay.

This article focuses on two specific moments, in January and June 2019, respectively: a) the removal of clay from the clay pit; and b) the building of the collective oven and the burning of clay pieces.

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## ***The clay pit***

We went to Conceição das Crioulas in January 2019, in order to know the clay pit at Sítio Paula and how the group that works with ceramics in the community removes clay. The Sítio Paula was the last farm reintegrated into the territory, in 2012, and it is located about 6 km far from Salgueiro downtown.

Previously, the Master MLS<sup>10</sup> organized our visit: she scheduled the car with the person who would help removing and transporting the clay and warned the other ceramists that those who needed the material could take advantage of the trip.

Master MLS tells us that, before she got into the territory, no one could remove clay from its clay pit. She recalled, with regret, the time when everyone knew that the land belonged to the quilombo, but that the farmer did not allow people to enter and remove clay. Then, she felt helpless, because she could not touch the land that belonged to her, which was on the other side of the fence. Such facts could have led to the disarticulation and discouragement of ceramic material production. We could grasp the difficulty and apathy that has arisen in the context of this practice. And Master MLS added:

*[...] today it is not simply a clay pit... it is a whole process [...] get out to remove clay there, it is a whole ritual.*

This conversation marks how difficulties build meanings that work to provide this community with cohesion. She could buy the clay, as so many other communities that do not have a clay pit do, but this is significant, in other words, it is key for everyone to work on a land that belongs to her/him.

We think of how many situations, constraints, coping events were needed for the community to finally recover that land, that clay. How long the community withstood this tension and how this time reaffirmed the community after every victory, even with a natural wear, a fatigue, which did not make it faint.

We arrived (figures 1-2) at the site in a group with 6 people: Master MLS; Master MLS' father; 1 male teacher; 1 community female teacher; and 2 authors of this article. And in the course of time, other people came along – it is worth mentioning Master MS and the car responsible for transporting the bags of clay, with 2 further persons.

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**10** To preserve the participants' identity, they are presented with fictitious names throughout the text.

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**Figures 1-2** Arrival at Sítio Paula, where the community clay pit is located



Source: Authors' personal collection.

The clay pit was a small, shallow hole in the ground. When the bags containing water and some food were hung, Master MLS and the male teacher began to dig using a shovel and a pickaxe.

The earth, dry, hard, and full of stones on its surface, was difficult to penetrate. Soil resistance caused the pickaxe to loosen from the handle. After some time, the male teacher put it back in the place and they started digging again. A reddish dust rose with the wind. The nine o'clock sun there looked like the midday sun in Recife City, in terms of intensity and heat. The dry sound of the metal beating on the hard ground and the spreading of stones completed the scene's aridity.

Who was not working lurked, on the edge of the clay pit or in some shadow nearby. For a few moments, those who were working stopped to rest and drink water and we talked for a while. Sometimes they also took turns using the hoe:

*[...] It's not a bad task, but it's not for everyone. (Master MLS)*

As the clay pit got larger (Figure 3), to the sides, due to the stones that prevented excavation, clay pieces appeared. At every stop for cleaning, enlarging, or deepening, everyone who was around entered the clay pit to collect clay pieces. They squatted down with bags next to them, which they filled until feeling satisfied (figures 3-5).

The experience was intense. That hole on the earthen ground – the clay pit – gathered everyone in its open (belly) and shared the best thing it had – its clay.

The sharing, like the (mother) land, was also done between the people who collected the clay blocks. A ceramist participating in the collection announced that she preferred

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to get the smaller blocks and those who were close contributed. Saying something was enough to have collaboration:

*Clay is very strong for our community members [...] it is an honor to be able to shape it, it is a gift [...] our mind generates thousands of thoughts, what can I create now, what can I transform? (Master MLS)*

**Figures 3-5** Group digging the clay pit and collecting the red clay



Source: Authors' personal collection.

The experience at the clay pit evidenced the earth's fecundity reverberated in the joy of being able to share the clay from Sítio Paula with no embarrassment and in the educational action of communicating individual needs to the collective and of informing ourselves to enter the activity. We were shown how to distinguish the clay blocks from the sand blocks, then we plunged into the clay pit along along with the other persons to collect clay as well. The pains, the disappointments, the tiredness, the embarrassment, everything was resignified when accessing the earth and through the possibilities that it provided/provides to the community:

*[...] there is a sentence that says so, the way is done while walking, and this path [...] was opened by our ancestors for us, there are so many things in our territory, valuable things [...] the territory we did not receive [...] it was conquered, by blood, by facing threats, through things that older persons taught us and that we teach today [...] today I am threatened due to the territory. (Master MLS)*

Grasping the struggle and the value of land – territory – turns it into life and also death. Threats are a reality for leaders. And, here, grasping the collective goes beyond the individual. It is a condition inherited from the ancestors.

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It did not take long until they filled their sacks and bags. After a glass of cold water from the clay jar, we returned to the car and came back downtown, everyone supplied with earth.

## ***The oven***

In the first week of June 2019, we accompanied the ceramist Master Valdik, from Tracunhaém, Pernambuco, on a trip to Conceição das Crioulas, in order to build, along with the community, an oven (Figure 6) to burn ceramics at the Handicraft Production Center (Centro de Produção Artesanal – CPA). This collective oven had been considered in the community since November 2018 and people discussed where to put it – at school or at the CPA?

**Figure 6** The oven



Source: Authors' personal collection.

On previous visits, we went to the houses of some well-known pottery makers to talk. The households we visited had broken ovens, just like the CPA. This fact discouraged people, demobilized them. The pottery makers did not burn their pieces anymore and, to avoid accumulating them, they stopped producing. Another issue was their shapes. The ovens were rectangular, including at the CPA, making it difficult to burn pieces due to poor heat circulation.

From April to June 2019, several people (friends, partners who knew Conceição das Crioulas) mobilized, moved by the community's cause, and contributed financially to build a collective oven. It was a major stage of contagion for the sharing movement, evidencing the power of collective making in community causes.

At the same time, in Conceição das Crioulas, the female ceramist masters warned everyone interested to participate in the building of the oven. It is worth noticing that

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the action and communication were put into practice by ceramist-women-leaders in the community. They invited pottery makers, teachers, and students. On the day before the oven was built, a female teacher organized all the materials needed for the project along with her group of youngsters from the Advancing Program [Programa Avançar], of the School “Professor José Mendes,” and they transported the bricks to the place where the oven would be built. They also removed clay from the clay pit, along with the local ceramist masters, and benefited it in order to shape pieces later, in a pottery making class taught at the CPA.

In this sense, building the oven triggered other art/educational activities. This allowed a division of tasks and costs and solidarity with one another and also provided the organization of the group of pottery makers and the production space.

On the day scheduled (June 4, 2019), we gathered the participants in a circle for a talk of presentations and acknowledgments (figures 7-9), before construction began. It was worth knowing the stories of 6 pottery makers present, their interests and their closeness in life processes. And the students spoke of their expectations both in relation to ceramics and other knowledge areas.

**Figures 7-9** Meeting before building the oven in the Handicraft Production Center



Source: Authors' personal collection.

To the surprise of all female and male masters and participating, the last student who introduced himself was categorical in affirming that he was there to learn and that he would be a future ceramist master. This 15-year-old boy, with a curious and determined look, took full advantage of the time with female masters and worked very hard to prepare the oven material. During an informal conversation, he said to know another girl from Sítio Paula who likes to produce clay pieces and two other boys from neighboring small farms. During the intervals, he sat next to Master VS, to learn how to shape clay.

Leaving for the construction, people demarcated the place in the vicinity of the old oven and the work began.

While Master Valdik advised the pottery makers in the execution (figures 10-12), the teacher proposed the students to organize a kind of audience in semi-circle, so that all

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could follow. At specific times, advised by Master Valdik, the teacher also asked the group to collaborate on some tasks: bringing the bricks closer to facilitate access; producing more dough, which would serve as a grout and seal coat; and picking up water to mix the dough. In short, she distributed activities – in an educational and supportive work, where everyone was invited to take part in the action and participate in the stages. Once the invitation was made, each student choose whether she/he would do something or just keep watching.

**Figures 10-12** Oven building in progress



Source: Authors' personal collection.

It is worth observing how the teacher's attitude reverberated in the students: immediately after she spoke, they looked at each other to determine who was going to work or who was not. After a few laughs and a quick chat, one of the students stood up and the others joined him.

Throughout the construction, Master ZV and Master MLS accompanied, exchanged ideas, asked Master Valdik questions, according to their curiosities. The building started early in the morning and lasted until late afternoon.

During lunch at the CPA, we talked about the possibility of burning pieces the next day as a first test. All the female and male masters agreed and they would take the goods late in the morning, because they had to get the wood to start the fire, yet.

The next day, we tried to burn the pieces and inaugurate the CPA's collective oven. Seeing the female and male masters bringing their products that, little by little, filled the oven was a moment of great emotion.

While the fire burned the pieces, the conversation heated up among the pottery makers: they exchanged ideas and information about the fire, the natural paint, and the color of pieces, as well as the oven maintenance. In short, they discussed details, told stories, smiled, warmed and bonded.

Before we could see the outcomes of those two days of intense work, we had to go back and the female and male masters would take products out of the oven (figures 13-14) the day after the burning. Afterwards, we learned that 100% of the products were available for use and all the pieces were cooked to perfection, without any stains or breaks.

**Figures 13-14** Oven output



Source: Authors' personal collection.

After the oven was finally built, it proposes to warm and feed the community retroactively. It comes to collaborate with the resistance processes of ceramics in Conceição das Crioulas.

## **Co-labor-action in material production**

The aridity of the Northeastern sertão is a good image to think of resistance in Conceição das Crioulas, because facing it involves: a) collective actions; b) mutual support; and c) shared and open community education, active, public. Resignification of personal stories and memories are sought through artistic production, a tradition that dialogues with time and an educational movement of living this collective territory, including singularities, discussing differences/divergences, thinking together on what is wanted to do and how people wish to live.

The ceramic material production itself has an intimate and individualizing atmosphere, especially if we observe the work of pottery makers, because of the very operating conditions of the lathe. However, in Conceição das Crioulas, the pieces are taken up with the hands, giving greater mobility for the bodies to act, to meet each other.

Simple life in the quilombo proposes a turn back in time, regarding the ways of doing, in order to address and update the meaning, for handicraft production, of a term aggregated and widely used, nowadays, in the neoliberal world of work: collaboration.

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The idea of labor, in ancient times, “meant being enslaved by needs, slavery inherent to the human life conditions” (Arendt, 2001, p. 109, our translation). It symbolized pain, poverty, fatigue, the effort of (and for) the body motivated/driven by the urge to sustain/nurture the very (existence) life. This fact implied the condition/action of (self)production and (self)consumption, retroactively, that is, producing what needs to be consumed and of consuming what is produced.

We may say that labor, which was turned into job by industrial society, marked by division of tasks, productivity, utilitarianism, and consumption and by (ab)use of nature and massification of cultures, has potentiated our weakness of survival/existence due to the planet’s exhaustion.

However, when observing the ‘poorness’ of an artist/pottery maker’s life, we see that, somehow, she/he keeps establishing a relationship with labor (that of ancient times), since her/his activity does not produce surpluses, nor turns her/him into a slave of market productivity. With a more careful look, we risk saying that, even if it is possible to produce similar objects (revolution-based) because of the lathe, in the case of pottery making, the artist/ceramist master remains connected to the immediate, to life-sustaining needs (with a particular time/rhythm), as opposed to serial reproduction and accumulation, which are the market rationale’s goals.

From this perspective, it is part of a utilitarian view to frame handicraft products, especially those of pottery making – characterized by their usefulness –, into the market as a ‘remedy’ proposal for the problems (eco-nomic bottlenecks) that we experience with the mass industry of commodities (plastified/pasteurized).

Thus, reflecting on the concepts of labor and work proposed by Hannah Arendt (2001), we think that the *animal laborans* of handicraft production – ceramic material production/pottery making –, by resisting the job of homo faber, can, in this act itself, exert a political condition for another understanding of the human being, of nature, and of the product (art-fact), subverting the rationale of dominant commodification. Following this reasoning, the idea of co-labor-action, so current, constitutes a sense of fissure in the exclusion and co-optation of handicraft production by the hegemonic system, if this is thought in (contemporary) handicraft production as a political action, in order to undo the misconception that work involves permanence, control, and use of time (of life), of (docile) bodies for a useful/utilitarian purpose of beings and nature.

Life is naturally co-labor-active in Conceição das Crioulas. There, people:

- Share their territory and interact observing their singularities in the region’s plurality, which houses Indian and Afro-descendant ethnic groups;
- Produce their physical, artistic-aesthetic food;
- Educate their children (all of them study in the community); and
- Face life and sudden events in solidarity, either when tackling water issues or in the struggle for their lands.

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## Final remarks

The brief walk through Conceição das Crioulas presented in this article makes us think through the gestures (the gestations), even the unconscious ones, done only in the rationality of bodies (of pottery makers, community, students, teachers), which triggered a crossing of boundaries, affections of what we learn about who we are and how our body is redone in contact with the other.

Experiencing Conceição das Crioulas puts into question “what we are doing” (Arendt, 2001, p. 13, our translation) of our (daily) lives, our bodies, and affections. This experience leads us to face our contradictions and to think of the wonder that this contact provoked/provokes, which we feel in our guts: the light bothers – clarity, sobriety, in the simplicity of life; the hot sun bothers – it heats, cooks the broths, the doughs, the relationships; the radiant earth bothers – productive, cyclical, nourishing in all of its phases and aspects; the thorny vegetation bothers – guardian of the freshness of its intimacy, resistant to drought, difficulties, fights, and struggles; and the freedom and intense sharing of that location bothers.

The ceramics that the community produces, as well as its other artistic practices, is embedded in people’s lives, reflects their dreams, realizes their struggles, resignifies their roots, and broadens their (our) path, in order to introduce (us to) with other ways of doing and making. It occurs in joint/collective action, constituting an exercise of sharing, listening, which seeks common goals.

The artistic production of Conceição das Crioulas is not only related to technique, to the making of pieces, or to the generation of income, but rather, it takes place in the sphere of the intellect, the understanding of its world relations, and the critical sharpening in terms of who they are and what they want. That is, it reinforces the struggle for reconstructing its identity mediated by an education that activates the interaction between subjects and the environment/territory. And, in this sense, it seeks to break (it breaks) with an instrumental rationality, historically constructed, produced by colonizing practices of thought, work, and subjects.

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