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Conflict and the Interpretation of Palmares, a Brazilian Runaway Polity

ABSTRACT

In recent years, historical archaeologists have increasingly interested in exploring how to use material culture to study conflict and how the interpretation of their sites is affected by modern perception. Grounded in a dialectical epistemology, the experience of past peoples is considered part of an ongoing social confrontation between social actors. Archaeologists tend to consider cultures as neatly bounded homogeneous entities. The holistic, monolithic nature of cultures has been put into question by several empirical and theoretical studies. In northeastern Brazil, a large maroon kingdom called Palmares developed in the 17th century, and people have often interpreted it in two ways. Some prefer to stress the African character of the polity, while others emphasize the diversity within the community. Archaeological research at Palmares produced evidence of a heterogeneous society, an interpretive model that does not follow dominant epistemological schemes and prejudices.

Introduction

In recent years historical archaeologists have become increasingly interested in exploring how to use material culture to study conflicts and struggles. They have also become interested in how interpretation of the past is affected by modern perceptions. For instance, in 1999 volume 3 of the *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* dealt with "Archaeologies of Resistance in Britain and Ireland" and volume 33 (1) of *Historical Archaeology* was concerned with "Confronting Class." A bit earlier, modern perceptions were the subject in *Historical Archaeology* 31 (1) in "In the Real of Politics: Prospects for Public Participation in African-American and Plantation Archaeology" and in "Archaeologists as Storytellers" (*Historical Archaeology* 32, 1). Both subjects are also at the heart of several chapters of an edited volume on historical archaeology (Funari et al. 1999), with contributions from all over the world. The same issues are also behind the initiative of a new scholarly archaeological

journal, *Public Archaeology*, spearheaded by the Institute of Archaeology (University College London). Conflicts in the past and conflicts in the interpretation of the past are thus a growing concern in the discipline.

Society is always characterized by conflict and grounded in a dialectical epistemology; the experience of past peoples is considered as part of an ongoing social confrontation among social actors (McGuire and Saitta 1996:198–204). Historical archaeology, in particular, deals with societies split by class divisions, whereby the producers of surplus labor are distinct from the appropriators. Exploitation generates a continuous, open conflict and inner contradictions in society (Saitta 1992), and the forces of domination and resistance are ever-present (Frazer 1999:5). The interpretation of these conflicts is malleable and subjective (Rao 1994:154). Historical archaeologists can view the past as a set of complex texts, intertwined to form a discourse (M. Hall 1994:168).

If conflict and subjectivity are part of both evidence and the interpretation of evidence, a variety of views are inevitable, and archaeologists cannot avoid taking a position. There are different ways of knowing the past, and historical archaeologists must address the question of who is entitled to know—who can participate in the process of giving meaning to the past (Mueller 1991:613). In this context, this article deals with academic and lay interpretations of a 17th-century maroon kingdom in Brazil (Palmares) and explores the different approaches to its past. Archaeology can be a powerful tool for uncovering subaltern histories (Franklin 1997:800) and for empowering people. The struggles over the interpretation of the runaway settlement provide a good example of archaeological relevance to society at large. As is usual with archaeological research, this paper probably poses as many questions as it answers (Delle 1999:32), but rather than proposing a supposedly correct interpretation, this paper fosters a pluralist discussion of the subject.

Documents, Archaeology, and Conflicts

Attempting to describe and interpret what occurred in past cultures requires the incorporation of texts and artifacts (McKay 1976:95; Orser

1987:131; Ober 1995:111). The documentary and archaeological data may be thought of as interdependent, complementary, and contradictory, *at the same time* (Little 1992:4). It is often the case that many scholars are not aware of the existence of thousands of unpublished documents, most of them in vernacular languages. Many of them are in Latin, the *lingua franca* of the modern world until the very recent past (Lee and Markman 1977:57). To cope with the task of interpreting conflict within society, a multidisciplinary approach is necessary in order to combine textual analysis with such disciplines as sociology and anthropology, among others (Small 1995:15).

Traditionally, conflict has been interpreted by the dominant groups in a society (Molyneaux 1994:3). Until 40 years ago, historical archaeologists directed their attention almost exclusively toward the wealthy and the famous, contributing to the maintenance and reinforcement of conservative ideologies (Orser 1998b: 662). Gradually, archaeologists began to follow their colleagues in the humanities and the social sciences in turning their attention to subordinate groups (Orser 1998a:65). Examining the material evidence of subordinate groups offered the opportunity to have a more comprehensive access to traditionally underrepresented groups (Guimarães 1990; Funari 1993). Even though some scholars not well acquainted with material culture studies openly questioning historical archaeology's ability to contribute to the understanding of the past (Burke 1991), several books and papers published in recent years confirmed that material evidence is particularly important to the understanding of the intricacies of conflicts in society (Fitts 1996:69).

How to interpret conflict in society depends directly on how we understand society itself. Traditionally, archaeologists considered that cultures are neatly bounded homogeneous entities (Mullins 1999:32). This idea comes from the well-known (and by now classic) definition created by Childe (1935:198): "Culture is a social heritage; it corresponds to a community sharing *common* institutions and a *common* way of life [emphasis added]." This definition implies harmony and unity within society, a commonality of interest, and thus a lack of conflict (Jones 1997a: 15–26). The roots of this understanding of social life lie, on the one hand, with Aristotle and his definition of society as a *koinonia*, that is, as a

partnership (Aristotle *Politica*1252ª7).). Sharing values in a homogeneous culture means accepting generalizing features and common traits shared by everybody (Aristotle 1328ª21).

Homogeneity is a concept informed by capitalist nationalist movements (Handler 1988) and in direct opposition to an internationalist, proletarian Marxist approach, so clearly explained in the Communist Manifesto: *Proletarier aller Länder, vereigt euch!* ("Proletarians of all countries, unite") (Marx and Engels 1954). Cultures and nations were seen by bourgeois ideology as bounded, unified entities, and history was conceived as the product of the actions and events associated with such homogeneous entities. This bourgeois search for national solidarity was criticized time and again by Marx and Engels (Marx 1970), a point emphasized by several commentators in recent studies commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Communist Manifesto (Funari 1998; Löwy 1998).

In this context, the concept of archaeological culture can be understood. Bounded material complexes are assumed to be a product of past ethnic groups because, it is said, people within such groups shared a set of prescriptive norms of behavior that were learned at an early age, and, therefore, they produced a common culture. The very notion of early-age indoctrination is inspired by the use of schools for forging nationalist identities in a bourgeois perspective, as was most notable in the case of France after the French Revolution. Archaeological entities are interpreted in the same light as organic units equivalent to bourgeois nations. Contradictions and struggle in society are only epistemologically possible if society is heterogeneous, and the dialectic between homogeneity and heterogeneity in society can be seen in this light (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Hobsbawm 1992; Confino 1993; Penrose 1995).

In this context, generalizing implies homogenizing, and there is a growing dissatisfaction with using this normative approach to interpret social life (Skidmore 1993:382). The holistic, monolithic nature of cultures and societies has been questioned by several empirical and theoretical studies in the last decades (Bentley 1987; Jones 1997a). Homogeneity, order, and boundedness have been associated with the a priori assumption that stability characterizes societies, rather than conflict, a clear conservative *Weltan-*

schauung (worldview). It is also a nonhistorical approach, implying that all Catholics are, were, and will be superstitious, or that all the Africans are, were, and will be gregarious. However, a growing body of evidence and critical scrutiny of social thought has challenged this traditional view, considering society as heterogeneous, with often-conflicting constructions of cultural identity. The theory of contradictions at the root of Marxist dialectics is the key for criticizing both bourgeois individualism and artificial homogeneous communities.

Heterogeneity, fluidity, and continuous change imply also that there are multiple entities that often change within society. Archaeology has a long tradition of identifying ethnic identities through material evidence, equating material culture, race, and language (Funari 1999a). This identification is grounded on a normative and homogeneous understanding of culture, being thus challenged by different studies. Ethnoarchaeological research has shown that cultural traits, artifacts, or attributes are often poor indicators of ethnicity (DeCorse 1989:138), and the whole notion that a fixed, one-to-one relationship persisted between specific types of material culture and a particular identity has been criticized (Jones 1997b:63). Material culture cannot thus be considered as a straightforward indicator of an ethnic group (Vansina 1995). It is in this overall theoretical context that this paper deals with a unique African-Brazilian runaway settlement known as Palmares. The concept of a "Palmares archaeological culture" implies the runaway inhabitants shared a set of prescriptive norms of behavior that were learned at an early age and, therefore, they produced a common culture. When archaeologists reconstruct culture histories on the basis of material culture's supposed homogeneity, they are producing a representation of the maroon, which is suited to a nationalist perspective, underplaying conflicts within Palmares itself. In this chapter, I look at how several identities were being formed through the selective use, by conflicting social groups, of particular aspects of the material world.

African-Brazilian Resistance: Palmares

Slavery was prevalent and accepted in the Christian and Islamic medieval world. Those who followed the customs of classical Antiquity during the Renaissance also reinforced the institution of slavery. They all believed that the leisure provided by enslaved labor to an elite allowed civilization to flower (Wood 1989; Martínez 1995:86). In Africa, conquerors would enslave defeated enemies and neighbors (Thomas 1997). In Europe, bondage was widespread; serfdom being referred to in the learned documents of the period by the same word used to refer to slaves: *servitus*, serfdom and slavery at once (Verlinden 1974). Slavery was also widespread in Africa, and its growth and development were largely independent of the Atlantic trade (Thornton 1992:74). Slavery was introduced in Brazil in this overall context. The Portuguese colonizers first used native inhabitants and later introduced Africans to work on plantations and elsewhere in the colony.

The Portuguese developed sugar plantations in Brazil early in their colonial history, and by 1570 there were already several estates combining African and Native South American slave workforces. These Portuguese plantations were in the northeast of the South American colony, while sugar processing and financing was in the hands of the Dutch who managed to occupy Pernambuco in 1629, in the Northeast of Brazil, staying there until 1654. At the beginning of the 17th century, runaway slaves settled in the hilly forest area. The scattered hideouts, consisting of several villages, developed in the foothills from 45 to 75 mi. inland from the coastal plantations, stretching more than 100 mi., running roughly parallel to the coast (Figure 1). During its initial years, Palmares (palm groves
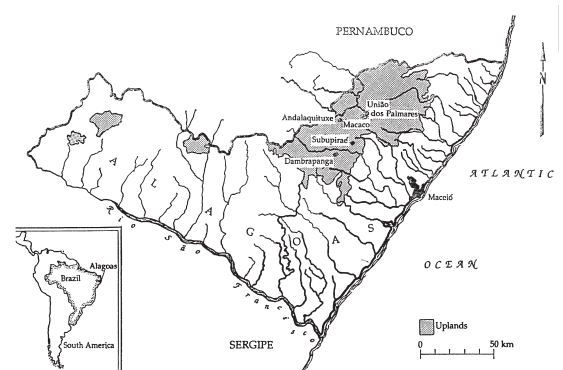

FIGURE 1. Map of Palmares settlements in the State of Alagaos, Brazil (Orser 1992b:13).

in Portuguese) derived its name from the many palmetto trees (Allen 1999:144).

The first expedition against Palmares in 1612 attests to the importance of the kingdom, already in its first years of development. The polity continued to grow, and the Dutch considered Palmares a serious danger, attacking it several times. In the mid-1640s, Palmares already was comprised of nine separate villages: Andalaqui-tuche, Macaco, Subupira, Aqualtene, Dambra-banga, Zumbi, Tabocas, Arotirene, and Amaro (Figure 2). Two place names are Amerindian (Subupira and Tabocas); one is Portuguese (Amaro); and the other six are Bantu (Funari 1999b:322). Macaco, the capital, was also known as Potbelly Hill (*Oiteiro da Barriga* or *Serra da Barriga*). After the Dutch left Brazil, the Portuguese carried out several expeditions against Palmares with a systematic campaign to destroy it, beginning in the 1670s (Funari 1999b). Between 1670 and 1687 under the rule of Ganga Zumba (great lord), there seems to have been an active trade between Palmares and coast settlers (Rowlands 1999:333). From the late 1670s a new ruler of the polity, King Zumbi (spirit in Bantu) was in charge of the defense of the maroon.

It is difficult to estimate the number of fugitives living in the maroon polity. Josiah Baro carried out a Dutch attack on the kingdom in 1644 and claimed that there were 6,000 people living in the main settlement alone. This settlement, at the Potbelly Hill, was described as a village, one-half-mile long (0.8 km), surrounded by a double-stake fence with two entrances and agricultural fields. Out of 31 maroon people captured by Baro, seven were described as Amerindians with some mulatto children. The accounts suggest that some 20% of the maroon settlement population could be native in the mid century. In 1645 Jürgens Reijembach described the settlement of "Old Palmares" as a village with 1,500 people in 220 dwellings (Funari 1999b). In 1675 Manoel Lopes referred to 2,000 dwellings (Funari 1999b). None of these figures are reliable, but between 10,000 to 20,000 people lived in the nine villages, a significant population for 17th-century Brazil. Pioneers from the south of Brazil, known as Paulistas or *bandeirantes* (flag holders), destroyed Macaco (the capital of Palmares) in 1694 and the following year executed its leaders, including Zumbi.
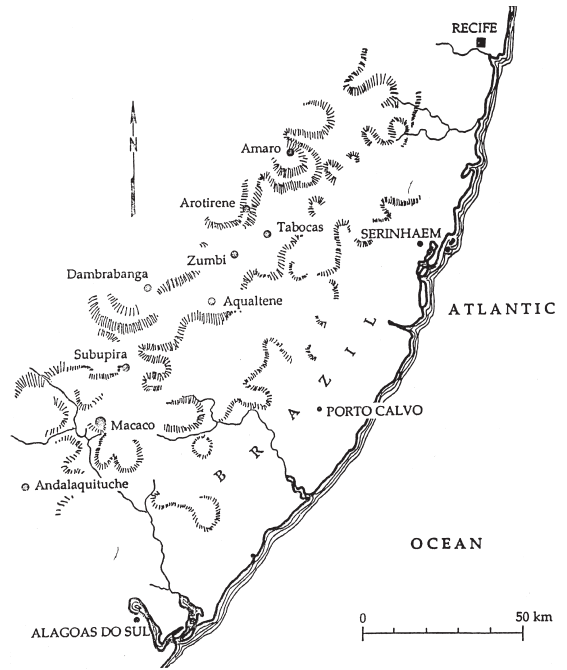

FIGURE 2. Map of Palmares villages (Orser 1992b:12).

In the 1980s Serra da Barriga (Potbelly Hill) was declared a National Heritage Site and archaeological fieldwork was carried out by an international team. Recognition of the importance of Palmares and the shortcomings of biased documents, written by the enemies of the rebel polity, prompted the formation of the Palmares Archaeological Project in 1992 by Charles E. Orser, Jr., and Pedro Paulo A. Funari (Orser 1992). Michael Rowlands (1999) has also worked on Palmares, and Scott Allen (1999) has continued the fieldwork, using it as the subject of his master's and PhD research (Figure 3).
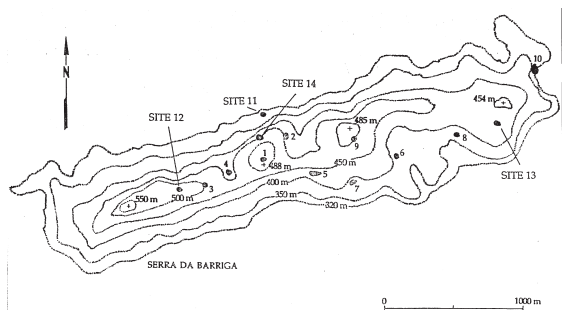

FIGURE 3. The location of sites found at the Serra da Barriga (Orser 1993:4).

Scholars interpret the social history of Palmares in two different ways. For several maroon experts, runaway slaves formed communities where they could keep their original African cultures alive (Escalante 1979:74). Palmares can be viewed as an African settlement, since many of the place names and institutions were of Bantu origin (Kent 1979:180–181; criticism in Funari 1999b). Colonial documents have been used to substantiate the claim that residents of Palmares lived in the same way as they did in Angola (Boxer 1973:140; Edwards 1979:239). This belief became ingrained in the histories of the place by the 19th century. For instance, the German historian Heinrich Handelmann (1987) wrote in 1860: "*die innere Organisation des Quilombos, sowiet wir sie aus den spärlichen Nachrichten der Portugiesen erkennen können, erinnert durchaus an ein afrikanisches Staastwesen*" ("the internal organization of the runaway polity, as far as the few references from the Portuguese allow us to know, betrays its *complete* African polity character" [emphasis added]) (Moura 1990:141–182). The same assumption continued to be used in the last years of the 19th century by Nina Rodrigues (1976:77) who describes their state as "uncultivated as in Africa today." Recently, several other scholars have also advocated the African character of Palmares (Santos 1991).

Another perspective emphasizes the heterogeneous nature of Palmares. Several authors stress that African mores and traditions were suppressed in Palmares (Russel-Wood 1974:573), and that racism affected not only Africans (Skidmore 1993:31) but also Native Brazilians, Jews, Moors, and people of mixed heritage. Anthropologists studying religions of African origin in Brazil notice the synergetic nature of those religions, and maroon culture has been described as having a combination of African, European, and Amerindian elements (Genovese 1981:53; Schwartz 1987:69). Native Brazilians were enslaved and worked side by side with Africans (Curtin 1990:103). Runaways, both Africans and natives, interacted with Indians living in the backlands (Price 1995:57; Cròs 1997:80). Those that ran from colonial society included Africans, Indians, and members of other oppressed groups excluded from the colonial order (Moura 1988:164), such as people accused of being Jewish, Moors, Heretics, Sodomites, and witches.

Historians have found that at Rio de Janeiro, in the period from 1680 to 1729, Indians comprised 97.9% of the workers in the first decade and remained 41.5% of the workforce in the last decade (45.9% being Africans and 12.6% mixed) (Marcondes 1998:148). Other studies have shown similarities between Portuguese and Angolan *Weltanschauungen*: in the words of John Thornton (1981:188), "in most respects Kongo and Portugal were of the same world." The construction of distinctly African-American mores and communities is the result of the struggle of the exploited to build autonomous institutions (Glassman 1991:278). The archaeological material from the Serra da Barriga also produced evidence of a variety of cultural influences in the maroon settlement (Orser 1992, 1994; Allen 1999; Funari 1999b; Rowlands 1999). How can interpretive models and archaeology contribute to discussing conflict and heterogeneity at Palmares?

Heterogeneity and Conflict in Society in Palmares

Iberians, Portuguese, and Spanish were keen to Christianize the souls of new subjects (Hanke 1974:137) and enforce compliance with the Roman Catholic philosophy. Despite the efforts of the colonists to homogenize society, several European cultures coexisted in Brazil with different cultural mores. Marvin Harris (1972:216), accepting that the forces of homogeneity were overwhelming, imagines that enslaved people were trained to be apathetic, while the elite stayed in otiose consumption. However, slaves were not "socially dead"; they did not necessarily internalize their master's opinion that they were "brute beasts" (Glassman 1995:140).

In Africa, too, diversity was prevalent (Balandier 1970:61). Linguists argue that there were, for more than 3,000 years, several Bantu populations' movements (Vansina 1995:18). Therefore, Bantu dialects are not mutually intelligible. In America, Africans and their descendants spoke, a fortiori, European languages (Tardieu 1989:323; Lipski 1997:159), albeit significantly changed by the users in the New World.

Because Africans themselves were active participants in the slave trade and because slavery was widespread in Africa, African societies were not without conflict themselves (Thornton 1992:6, 74). These tensions carried over to the New

World, as some Brazilian freedmen were slave owners in their own right (Klein and Paiva 1996: 932), just as there was a slave-owning elite in Angola (Ferreira 1995:69). In this context, at least one historian believes that there was a ruling elite in Palmares that had many privileges (Reis 1995:17).

Archaeological research at Palmares revealed a significant amount of pottery, including Native, European, and mixed style pottery. Native pottery is handmade, using the coil technique with a sand temper. The pottery may be undecorated and, if decorated, carving, brushing and incising are the techniques most often used. The most frequently used colors for painted vessels are brown and red. Allen (1999:151) has identified four ceramic wares as Tupiguarani. European-style pottery consists of four varieties of lead-glazed earthenware. These glazed ceramics have a distinctive kind of opaque glaze containing tin oxide (Figure 4). This kind of maiolica was commonly used in the Iberian Peninsula since the reconquest (*Reconquista* in both Portuguese and Spanish) of southern areas of the peninsula from the Moors. The Moors had originally introduced glazed ceramics, and the conquering Christians adopted this glazed earthenware. Maiolica is found in most sites in the Iberian colonial world. However, at Palmares there was not fine maiolica but utilitarian, ordinary glazed wares. Perhaps

they were produced in the coast of Brazil or even in Europe, but they were not intended for elite use, considering they are crudely made.

The third kind of pottery was locally made Palmares ware (Figure 5). It is not a known European type, and it is quite different from native wares. In 1645 Reijembach recorded that Palmares inhabitants manufactured pots (Carneiro 1988). The ware is wheel-thrown and low fired, and the vessels are small, shallow, flat-based bowls. Palmarino pottery does not have temper, and it is finger smoothed on the inside, resembling some colonowares found at slave quarters in the Old South of the United States (Ferguson 1992). Some large storage vessels found at the Serra da Barriga are not dissimilar to Tupinambá Native pottery, but it could also equally be related to storing jars used by the Ovimbundu in Angola (Rowlands 1999:336).

There is a prevalence of African, native, colonial, and imported wares at Palmares. If fluidity is ubiquitous, as recent anthropological and archaeological literature implies, then instead of searching for Tupinambá, Ovimbundu, or
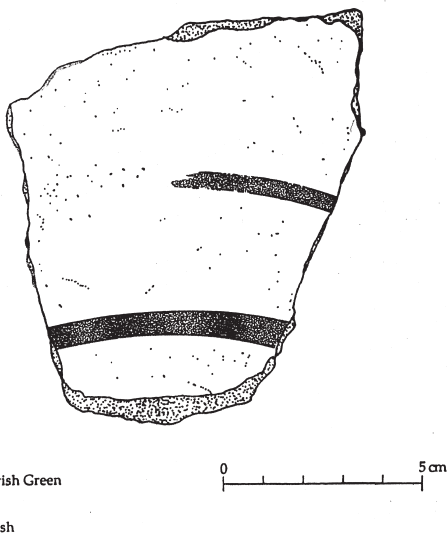

FIGURE 4. Banded maiolica found at the Serra da Barriga (Orser 1992b:37).
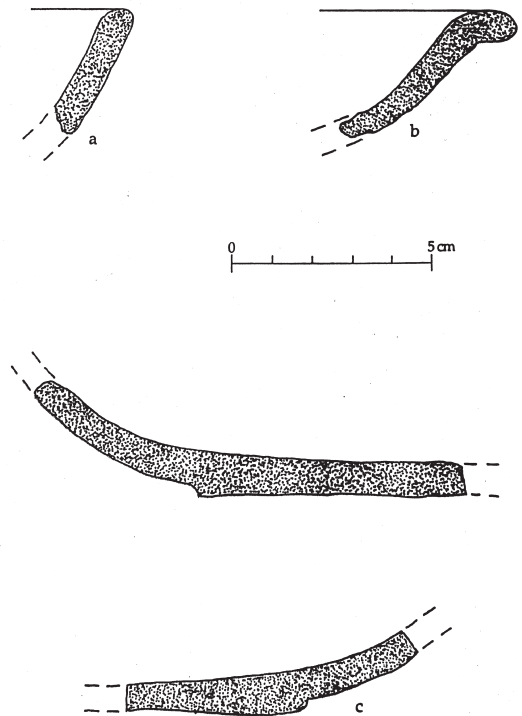

FIGURE 5. Wheeled-turned pottery from the Serra da Barriga (Orser 1992b:35).

tout court "African" traits in pottery, it is more reasonable to discuss Palmares pottery. Glazed and unglazed maiolica and wheel-turned wares were found throughout Palmares. They were not Portuguese or Dutch imports but, rather, locally made wares used by ordinary people in the Portuguese colony. Hierarchy within the maroon community could also be seen in the differences within the settlement. Common pottery has been found in several sites, while a much less restricted distribution of glazed maiolica could indicate maroon elite areas. At one site in Potbelly Hill, imported wares appear with native and slave ceramics, suggesting that one section of the settlement may have been associated with an elite group. Judging from the ceramic evidence, the elite at Potbelly Hill were not homogeneous. They were a pluralistic elite, maintaining consistent and long-term trading or barter links with ordinary colonists on the coast. Rowlands (1999:340) interprets the evidence as indicating that Palmares was neither a multiethnic society of fusion and assimilation nor one of ethnic difference. It could have a more pluralist structure with relatively little differentiation in the material culture but increasing elite distinction in a specific area of the settlement. This evidence does not deny identity building at Palmares. Rather, the people of Palmares had a positive sense of their community. They had a common consciousness of themselves as a rebel group. Their common enemy provided them with enough solidarity to resist several onslaughts over the 17th century. Solidarity, however, does not imply the absence of friction, divisions, or even inner contradictions. In any case, the archaeological evidence strengthens the perception that Palmares was far from being homogeneous, having social hierarchies and inner conflicts as well as conflicts with the outside world.

Popular Perceptions of Palmares

Perceptions of Palmares need to be examined within the context of Brazilian society. From its inception, Brazil has been authoritarian and patriarchal, dominated by patronage, a "hierarchizable society," in the words of anthropologist Roberto DaMatta (1991a:399). Brazil has been described as a country with no citizens but with dependents (Schwartz 1997:2) and vassals (Velho 1996), privileges (DaMatta 1991b: 4) being granted to

people in power. The result is a most uneven society: the 10% richest people control 47% of the GDP, while the poorest 10% get only 0.8% (Natali 1998). Nowadays, Brazil boasts the 10th largest economy, just behind Spain and Canada, but it has an appalling distribution of income. Millions of poor people, indigenous peoples, landless peasants, and street children are looked upon as expendable (Pinheiro 1996). The social exclusion of indigenous peoples, homosexuals, landless peasants, and street children goes hand in hand with discrimination against several minorities and Brazilians of African descent who, despite accounting for roughly half the population, are conspicuously absent from positions of power and influence. This is due to several causes, not least a colonial heritage of patronage and patriarchal social relations. An aristocratic setting prevailed for the first centuries of the country's development, and when capitalism and modernity were introduced in the mid-19th century, subaltern groups were absorbed by the dominating hierarchical ideology and habits. The country was ruled by the military from 1964 to 1985, and the end of the dictatorship led to formal expressions of freedom. From the 1960s, Palmares has been a potent focus of attention by academics, activists, and ordinary people in their struggle for reinterpreting the past.

Serra da Barriga was declared a National Heritage Site in the mid 1980s after a mobilization by the Black Civil Movement (Santos 1985). Since the 1970s, activists used Palmares as a model for a modern-day state. Abdias do Nascimento (1995:26) spearheaded the movement for the establishment of a National Maroon State, inspired by the 17th-century Palmares "Republic," as the rebel state was called in the historical documents of the period. A communist interpretation of Palmares, following a Soviet *Proletkult* style (Campos 1988), interpreted it as a people's republic and Zumbi (the last leader of Palmares) as a people's guide, a Black "iron man" or Stalin (iron man being the translation of the nickname Stalin). Zumbi has also been presented as a learned Catholic novice, well acquainted with classical Latin war literature (Schwartz 1987: 82), and hailed as a mythic hero (Santos 1991). Recently, Luiz Mott (1995) proposed that the Black hero was also homosexual, leading a struggle against sexual prejudice. There has been a strong reaction by some leading Black

activists against this interpretation, for it could denigrate, in their opinion, the image of Zumbi. In 1995 President Cardoso addressed the country and called for the interpretation of Palmares as a multiethnic state, struggling for freedom and serving as a model for a democratic Brazil (Bonalume 1995; Funari 1996).

All these popular perceptions were grounded in a search for, struggling for, a less conservative understanding of the past, an interpretation that recognized the Brazil oppressed. However, a leading historian was probably the best interpreter of the elite understanding of Palmares. Evaldo Cabral de Melo (Funari 1996) in a popular news magazine interview said that "Palmares was destroyed and I prefer that it was so. It was a Black polity and if it had survived, we would have in Brazil a Bantustan." The prejudice Cabral de Melo expressed, *ex cathedra,* his *delenda Palmares* call, even 300 years after its destruction, says a lot about the prevailing and official understanding of dissent. In this context, the archaeological study of Palmares has focused the attention of the media and introduced the subject even to school textbooks, whose authors usually shunned the issue of Palmares altogether. The controversies around the multiethnic rebel polity served the purpose of countering the traditional and upper-class *odium* against popular dissent. The fight for freedom, be it interpreted by African-Brazilians or by the oppressed in general, is at the heart of the archaeology of Palmares.

Conclusion

Racism and discrimination against people of African descent is now widely acknowledged by several observers of Brazilian culture. Wage differentials persist today in Brazil, even after controlling for education and job experience, suggesting that labor markets are characterized by color-based wage discrimination (Lovell and Wood 1998:106). The popular myth found in Brazil, that this country is a color-blind democracy helps to mask, normalize, and internalize everyday racism (Goldstein 1999:573). However, discrimination is not restricted to people of African descent. There is discrimination against people of Native Brazilian descent, along with a plethora of ethnic groups, including Jews and Arabs, to name only those groups already harassed in colonial times. Several other

discriminations may also be added to the list: against people from the poor areas of the country and against several ethnic groups of recent immigration to the country, like the Italians and the Koreans. Prejudices can also be found against women and homosexuals.

In this context, archaeological interpretation is relevant. If societies are heterogeneous, comprising different and malleable social groups, it is unreasonable to look for purity and homogeneity in the past. If all societies are driven by divisions and conflicts and if all historical societies are characterized by class division, it is illogical to look for Edenic models in the past. The archaeological evidence from Palmares seems to confirm that heterogeneity existed in both colonial and maroon societies. Racism and discrimination led several activists to look for an African independent state as a model for state building. This reaction to upper-class mores and prejudices accepted some of their unreasonable tenets: homogeneity and racial purity. When archaeologists and engaged social activists accept racial purity and social homogeneity, they are simply using the same epistemological principles used by those they oppose. Archaeologists who defend Native Brazilian and African-Brazilian rights sometimes consider that pure Guaranis or Africans did actually exist and that their task, to defend their rights, includes the identification of pure ethnic markers. It also implies that different ethnic groups really have different mores and different genes. Again, accepting ruling concepts means accepting ruling prejudices: Europeans are rational, Indians are lazy; Africans are gregarious and good (subaltern) workers. Instead of this essentialism of bourgeois ideology, Marxism stresses internationalism and humanism (Levebvre 1988:87). The diversity of material evidence from Palmares does not seem to confirm purity or homogeneity, but this is no reason to deny its potential to challenge racial discrimination and hatred. *Delenda Palmares* can be challenged, not by finding racial purity but by exposing the social conflicts in a society that was so violent against different social groups that the only option was for them to flee.

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