

Interview with Patrício Carneiro Araújo

Professor of Anthropology and researcher at Unilab, Patrício Carneiro Araújo, author of *Comida com gosto de política: alimentação e integração internacional numa nova diáspora africana* (2022), *Religiões e culturas alimentares: do cuidado ao controle dos corpos* (2022, no prelo) and *A mesa das autoridades: o comer e o poder no candomblé* (2021), among others, gave an interview for this edition of Raca to talk about his research experience in the field that involves *terreiro* food culture in Brazil.

When reflecting on this theme, Prof. Patrício emphasizes that, when it comes to the Brazilian people, there is a lot of *terreiro* inside us. This can be understood both through the theory of incorporation, according to which we are what we eat, in the sense that, to a large extent, our mentality was also built from the values preserved in the *terreiros*. As much as we don't know or don't want to admit it, much of what is done in the *terreiros* affects the way Brazilians are in the world. Therefore, when researching the food cultures of *terreiros*, we are undoubtedly expanding our understanding of what it means to be Brazilian. As we know, the way people relate to food reveals a lot about their values, beliefs, and way of being.

When researching food cultures, the ethos of the Brazilian people is also accessed, beyond the walls of a *terreiro*. For example, an Italian anthropologist who researched transnationalized *candomblé*, while investigating a *candomblé terreiro* in northern Italy, realized that, in that community, learning to prepare the food of the *orixás* is almost equivalent to an initiation rite into Brazilian cuisine. In other words, research on *terreiro* food cultures also reveals an anthropology of Brazil and the psychology of the Brazilian. That is the reason why it is so important to research the food cultures of the *terreiros*; understanding the *terreiro* and its food cultures is, ultimately, understanding Brazil and the Brazilian.

Candomblé is a religion of food. And it is difficult to find a *terreiro* of any Afro-religious or Afro-indigenous expression in which there is not a marked presence of food and meals. In the world of *terreiros*, all relationships established between people and divinities, spirits, forces of nature and ancestors take place through the

mediation of food handling. As a religion that is structured through the extended family model, even the bonds between the members of this large family – whether living or dead, those who have been, are or will come – have food as an important vehicle of communication. All spiritual communication between the different worlds and those who inhabit them depends on the handling of food and the offering of food. Among *terreiro* people, for example, praying can mean preparing and offering food. And, even after it has fulfilled all its ritual role, food, even in the process of decomposition, will receive complex ritual care.

Food must always be healthy; otherwise the deities would not accept them. This means that *terreiro* food will always be healthy. From the moment you buy grain at the market, fruit at the fair or an animal in a corral, until the moment you discard the remains and residues in a river or in the forest, food receives reverence as a very sacred thing.

The connection established with food in *Candomblé terreiros* is one of deep respect, reverence and gratitude. The aesthetics of “saint foods”, on the occasion of offering to the deities, for example, is a strong indication of how much the relationship between people and food passes through a field of extreme reverence. Therefore, as it leaves the commercial circuit and enters the ritual circuit, food metamorphoses, ceasing to be a commodity and assuming the sense of a present and a gift. It is certain that food acquires a sense of exchange. However, the exchange will never be in the same sense of restraining the other. It is always in the sense of “pleasure”. This word is used a lot in the *terreiros* world: “please the *orixá*”. And to please him is to offer him fresh, beautiful, fragrant, tasty food.

Everyday life of a *terreiro* and its ritual life is a true school on dealing with food. In a *terreiro*, both the preparations for the deities (*orixás*, *inquices*, *voduns*, etc.) and for the people are mostly based on *in natura*, minimal and hand-processed food. The culinary recipes are made from animal, vegetable, and mineral derivatives, which ensures a healthy and adequate diet.

In this sense, *terreiro* food crops are fully in line with the recommendations of the Food Guide for the Brazilian Population (2014). This is perhaps one of the first

lessons to be learned from the *terreiros*. In these environments, every relationship is mediated by food handling; in the same way; the people of *terreiro* know the origin and course of what they eat. Depending on the location and conditions of the *terreiro*, there are also those who create and grow part of the food consumed. This could be seen, for example, in the recent research that produced the *Inventário dos Povos de Terreiro do Ceará* (2021), in which Professor Patrício also worked.

A *terreiro* feeds a lot of people! Taking this as a reference that in 2020 Prof. Patrício produced the article *A cozinha e a sala de aula como lugares de comer e de saber: um diálogo entre a Lei 10.639/03 e a gastronomia dos terreiros* (ARAÚJO, 2020), published in *N'Umbuntu em Revista*, in the Religions of African Matrixes Dossier: Education, Public Policies and Secularism. The idea that permeates this publication is that “if the classroom can be a kitchen, why shouldn't the kitchen be a classroom?” The *terreiro* is a field that has a lot to teach, including the public authorities. And the *terreiro's* kitchen has a lot to teach, including public policy on Food and Nutrition Security (FNS). So, why not take advantage of these traditional and ancestral knowledge and practices as a subsidy for thinking about FNS public policy?

The *terreiro* is not just a place for religious practice. It must be recognized that the *terreiros* as Territories of Traditional Peoples have much to contribute to the country, to our people and our culture. When reading Federal Decree 6.040/07, in order to understand the National Policy for the Sustainable Development of Traditional Peoples and Communities, of which the *terreiros* are also a part, it is evident that the *terreiros* and their people are part of what is usually called Brazil, Brazilian people and Brazilian culture. Thinking public FNS policies from and with the *terreiros* is fundamental.

In Brazil, hunger, racism and religious intolerance have always walked and continue to walk together. It is a terrible combination that has historically affected not only the black Brazilian population, but also the *terreiro* people and their sacred territories. While *terreiros* teach the world how to resist and survive, parts of the Brazilian population – and even the State, which should protect them – attack them in every way. In this sense, recognizing the *terreiros* as poles that participate in public

policies of FNS is not only to fight racism, including in its structural form, but also to recognize the civilizational contribution of African and black-Brazilian peoples who created *Candomblé* and presented us with this wealth, which is the world of *terreiros*.

Muniz Sodré already stated, in the 1980s, that the *terreiro* is the black-Brazilian social form that made possible a reterritorialization of African and Afro-Amerindian populations deterritorialized by the terrible business of slavery. In other words, the *terreiro* is not just a religious temple. The *terreiro* is also a traditional territory where life is lived and thought. Therefore, fighting racism and intolerance can start from the simple gesture of recognition of this virtuous territory that has so much to teach and nurture, and nurture well. Start by visiting a *terreiro*!