

**WOMEN BREAKERS OF BABAÇU: A PROCESS OF CONSTRUCTION OF THE
TERM TRADITIONAL COMMUNITIES, COLLECTIVE IDENTITIES AND
KNOWLEDGE**

***MULHERES QUEBRADEIRAS DE BABAÇU: UM PROCESSO DE CONSTRUÇÃO
ACERCA DO TERMO COMUNIDADES TRADICIONAIS, IDENTIDADES COLETIVAS
E SABERES***

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TÉRMINO COMUNIDADES TRADICIONALES, IDENTIDADES COLECTIVAS Y
CONOCIMIENTOS***



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ABSTRACT: This study aims to identify the knowledge built by the experience of women who break babassu coconuts, and how they are understood as one of the fundamental elements for the promotion and affirmation of collective identity in the communities. Therefore, the contribution of women coconut breakers to the popular resistance movements and struggle for land cannot be forgotten. For this study, works were raised in which the concepts of traditional community and the extractive activity of coconut breakers are related, such as Lifschitz (2011), Rebelo (2012), and Almeida (2008). The methodology used was qualitative research through a bibliographic study, also using the technique of observation in the field research carried out in the Ciriaco Extractive Reserve, a municipality from Cidelândia (MA). Finally, consider that the knowledge constituted by coconut breakers is stories loaded with elements that contribute to their individual and collective, political, and social reproduction/construction.

KEYWORDS: Babassu coconut breakers. Knowledge. Traditional Communities.

RESUMO: O objetivo deste estudo é identificar os saberes construídos pela vivência das mulheres quebradeiras de coco babaçu, e como eles são entendidos como um dos elementos fundamentais para a promoção e afirmação de identidade coletiva nas comunidades. Para isso, foram levantadas obras em que as concepções de comunidade tradicional e a atividade extrativista das quebradeiras de coco estão relacionadas, tais como: Lifschitz (2011); Rebelo (2012); e Almeida (2008). A metodologia usada foi de pesquisa qualitativa por meio de estudo bibliográfico, usando também a técnica da observação na pesquisa de campo realizada na Reserva Extrativista de Ciriaco, município de Cidelândia (MA). Foi considerado, por fim, que os saberes constituídos pelas quebradeiras de coco são histórias carregadas de elementos que contribuem na sua reprodução/construção individual e coletiva, política e social.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Quebradeiras de coco babaçu. Saberes. Comunidades Tradicionais.

RESUMEN: El objeto de este estudio se identifica con nuestros saberes construidos como la vida de muchos de los bebés cocoteros, y cómo son entendidos como uno de los elementos fundamentales para la promoción y afirmación de la identidad colectiva en nuestras comunidades. de las quebradoras de coco está relacionada, pero según: Lifschitz (2011); Rebelo (2012); e Almeida (2008). La metodología utilizada es la investigación cualitativa a través de estudio bibliográfico, utilizando también la técnica de observación en investigación de campo realizada en la Reserva Extractiva Ciriaco, municipio de Cidelândia (MA). Consideremos que nuestros saberes están formados por rompecocos cuyas historias se basan en elementos que contribuyen a su reproducción/construcción de elementos individuales y colectivos, políticos y sociales.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Rompe cocos de babasú. Conocimiento. Comunidades Tradicionales.

Introduction

Before addressing the concept of traditional communities for women coconut breakers, it is necessary to understand the relationship between humans and nature and the existence of interference as ancient as human history. Changes in how humans perceive the world have traversed throughout the history of civilization, as well as their actions on the environment. Indeed, one cannot dissociate the history of humans and their cultures from the history of nature, in the sense that from the beginning, this relationship was filled with myths, rituals, and magic, as for every phenomenon in nature, there was a god, such as the god of the sun, the god of the sea, of the wind, of the river, of the forest, meaning these were considered divine relationships. With the emergence of modern science, the universal concept of nature loses this religious and mystical connotation, being redefined in the understanding that some social phenomena, according to the Darwinian perspective in the 19th century, comprehend nature as physical or evolutionary matter.

Karl Marx (1989) also adopted a concept called metabolism, which facilitated the understanding of mediation between society and nature. In this concept, it is understood that what drives this relationship is the process of labor, where the subject and the object (worker and raw material) are supplied by nature. Nature, therefore, is the dialectical relationship that occurs in the interaction of humans with the environment. "Nature becomes dialectical by producing humans, both as transformative subjects who act consciously in confrontation with nature itself, and as forces of nature" (OLIVEIRA, 2002, online, our translation). Faced with this assertion, humans modify themselves to eliminate the external nature of their externality, because, by mediating nature through their intervention, they have it for the achievement of their objectives.

It can be inferred then that humans ceased to see living nature, organic nature, and began to see it as a means of maintenance, using it to their advantage, as something technically manipulable. That is, nature is adapted in the face of technological and societal development. To do this, humans began to extract from nature much more than the resources necessary for their maintenance, seeing therein the possibility of making significant profits through the manipulation of the environment. "Humans begin to ignore the resilience of nature because they conceive it as an object from which they can and should take advantage" (ALBUQUERQUE, 2007, p. 48, our translation).

On the other hand, humanity perceives, for example, that deforestation, coal burning, and the construction of thermal power plants cause an imbalance in climatic conditions (rainfall) and biodiversity. However, amidst these discussions about the country's economic development and the worsening of nature, groups connected to concepts of ecology and sustainable development attempt to maintain environmental balance with practices traditionally linked to specific communities. These groups are protagonists in the fight for environmental preservation and bring approaches that include the proper use of natural resources.

From this understanding of maintaining environmental balance with practices traditionally linked to communities, we can also consider the concept of tradition. It is conceivable that actions passed down from generation to generation can also constitute a future. Therefore, when the symbols of a group persist in a repetitive manner, we can refer to this process as tradition⁴. Of course, these repetitive actions are relevant for understanding the present and, therefore, tend to be always relevant.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to identify the knowledge constructed through the experiences of the babassu coconut breakers, and how they are understood as one of the fundamental elements for the promotion and affirmation of collective identity in communities.

The research methodology is qualitative, as it addresses many specific questions, which, based on Minayo (2001), are concerned, in the social sciences, with a level of reality that cannot be quantified, meaning a reality that involves social relations that change and transform constantly, especially within a historical-dialectical movement.

In light of this, we initially engaged in a discussion on the concepts of Traditional Community based on the works of Lifschitz (2011) and Almeida (2008). Subsequently, we understand the historical process of the formation of the Babassu coconut breakers' struggle, movement, and resistance, represented by the *Movimento Interestadual das Quebradeiras de Coco Babaçu*⁵ (MIQCB) in Maranhão.

Furthermore, the entire process of immersion in the Ciriaco Extractive Reserve is reported and described, aiming to understand the constitution of the knowledge of the babassu coconut breakers of Cidelândia (MA).

⁴ In the studies by Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger in the work *A invenção das tradições*, published in 1984, it is possible to understand that tradition is established through the continuity of an appropriated historical past. The work presents invariability as an objective and characteristic, meaning that the past imposes fixed practices formalized by repetition. Another understanding arises from the concept of "invented tradition," in which we can have any socially constructed practice based on the idea of convenience and the achievement of efficiency generated by repeated routines.

⁵ Interstate Movement of Babassu Coconut Breakers.

Traditional community: its concepts and trajectories

Delving into the category of traditional peoples and communities, more specifically, it is possible to highlight that the nomenclature used to designate it has undergone some alterations according to the periods and historical moments experienced. Examples of this include terms such as: local populations, local communities, tribal populations, traditional populations, and forest peoples, among others. Studies on communities in the 1950s were comprehensive, meaning they lacked focus, as they discussed everything from ecology to the symbolism of beliefs and religious ceremonies. This can be exemplified by works such as *Uma vila brasileira – tradição e transição* (1961), by Emílio Williams, and *Família e comunidade* (1962), by Oracy Nogueira and Charles Wagley.

Decades later, under the influence of Anthropology, Sociology, and Geography, studies on the Brazilian peasantry began, where the community is understood as small villages in rural areas and peasant life, following the organizational manner of fishing communities, rubber tappers, and other similar populations (BRANDÃO, 2015).

The community, in Tönnies' view, is a body, both in its physiological representation (a whole whose parts are reciprocally harmonized) and existential (the body in which the experience of the intimate and lived occurs). However, it is an expanded body, or rather, an aggregate of bodies that, by interacting in the same local space, constitutes an intimate and physiological unit, as if it were a single "living organism" (LIFSCHITZ, 2011, p. 13, our translation).

Javier Alejandro Lifschitz refers to Ferdinand Tönnies to develop a concept of community linked to a biological metaphor. However, from a legal point of view, these terms do not differ, as from collective expressions, social movements are organized and gain legal recognition from the State. It was in 2007, through Decree No. 6040, that the National Policy for Sustainable Development of Traditional Peoples and Communities (PNPCT)⁶ was instituted. In it, we can visualize definitions of "traditional peoples and communities," "traditional territories," and "sustainable development." The PNPCT also highlights, in its concept of "traditional peoples

⁶ The National Policy for Sustainable Development of Traditional Peoples and Communities is a Federal Government initiative aimed at promoting the sustainable development of traditional peoples and communities, with an emphasis on recognizing, strengthening, and guaranteeing their territorial, social, environmental, economic, and cultural rights, while respecting and valuing their identity, organizational forms, and institutions. Available at: http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2007-2010/2007/decreto/d6040.htm. Accessed on: October 2, 2023.

and communities," that it is through specific norms of each community that it is determined how the community will use natural resources.

Traditional Peoples and Communities: culturally distinct groups that recognize themselves as such, possessing their own forms of social organization, occupying and using territories and natural resources as a condition for their cultural, social, religious, ancestral, and economic reproduction, employing knowledge, innovations, and practices generated and transmitted through tradition (BRASIL, 2007, our translation).

In line with the cultural contribution mentioned above, Fredrik Barth (2000, p. 111, our translation) states that "the reality of all people is composed of cultural contributions." It is, therefore, constructed through mutual consent of collective actions. This implies that representations such as language, symbols, rituals, and environments are essential for understanding humanity and its habits.

Regarding natural resources, Almeida (2008) clarifies that treaties on their use are related to both agriculture and extractivism and fishing as a form of organization and mutual aid. The author also refers to solidarity ties as the set of inalienable rules that superimpose a physical composition of the territory, so that productive activities carried out by the group can be designated. It is worth noting that this connection is not only based on reference or belonging to the group or family but also on the degree of connection and empathy in conflict situations.

Therefore, communities are legally recognized and protected as such in Brazil, receiving attention and legal apparatus as they represent a more particular and fragile form of protection, facing threats to their very existence. "Thus, self-identification is the main criterion for defining the community" (MONEBHURRUN *et al.*, 2016, p. 445, our translation). Legally, the history of most of these traditional peoples is linked to the territoriality to which they belong, undergoing a long process of identity construction. The *quilombolas*, indigenous or Amerindian peoples, rubber tappers, artisanal fishermen, Pantanal inhabitants, backcountry dwellers, riverine people, *geraizeiros*, *caiçaras*, and coconut breakers are examples of groups that have emerged from struggles for territoriality and the guarantee of rights that recognize and value their traditional way of life.

Regarding the coconut breakers, it's worth noting that their activities are focused on collecting babassu coconuts and processing them into oil, olive oil, soap, and handicrafts. The coconut breakers fight for free access to the babassu palm groves, which initiates a discussion about territorial rights as traditional communities. To better understand the process of self-definition of the coconut breakers as a conventional community, Rebelo (2012) highlights the

ongoing debate among peasant women within the struggles of rural workers in which they were involved. The emergence of post-dictatorship social movements also gave rise to groups with strong identity elements in urban and rural areas, thereby expanding a more appropriate cultural diversity of their knowledge.

In this debate, the coconut breakers represent new social subjects who ensure the valorization of their knowledge, the community they live in, and the babassu palm. Through the demands and political organizations of these women, in an attempt to reshape their history, they achieved recognition as "traditional communities."

Babassu Coconut Breaker Women

The extractive activity has become an important means of family subsistence and identity construction for peasants. In fact, with the dynamics of extraction, the women coconut breakers build economic autonomy in relation to the market and the entire community.

In the face of the multiple forms of representation of women in the community's social and economic life, the extractive activity gains increasing visibility by consecrating women as autonomous. The political strength of women, especially coconut breakers, has a social history to be observed.

It is worth highlighting that the mobilizations and cooperatives of Rural Workers enabled the organization of leadership that, together with many communities from other states, organized the Interstate Meetings of Babassu Coconut Breakers, the first being in 1991 in São Luís, Maranhão. With the II Meeting in 1995, the *Movimento Interestadual das Quebradeiras de Coco Babaçu*⁷ (MIQCB), was born, and from then on, the breakers gained greater support in the production and commercialization of babassu coconut by-products (ALMEIDA, 2008).

An important aspect to be emphasized is that the dynamics and political articulation formed within the Movement led to a search for rights and recognition and placed the babassu coconut breakers in a position of speaking power, which, in turn, carries a legacy of achievements and leadership positions in the community.

Non-formal learning can also be observed in the coconut breakers' political and organizational processes. According to Pinto (2015), the day-to-day interaction with various social subjects is a form of education and transmission of knowledge, values, and wisdom traditionally constituted by communities. Therefore, non-formal education allows men and

⁷ Interstate Movement of Babassu Coconut Breakers.

women to consecrate their cultural and worldly knowledge into tools that transcend the physical location to which they belong.

Thus, non-formal education presents itself in the context of social relations, through new educational models, understood as knowledge constructed through interaction with others, in various spaces seen as non-formal learning spaces (PINTO, 2015, p. 95, our translation).

It is within this understanding that the participation of individuals in diverse social discussions within or outside the community becomes important. The construction of pedagogical attitudes enables democratic relations that foster the development of collective work and the politicization of new social actors, aiming to build a just society for all.

Almeida (2019) refers to the babassu coconut breakers as "social agents" due to the organizational form of their tasks, the transformations of labor relations generated by babassu coconut, environmental preservation strategies, research work, narratives, and life stories of these women, and the plurality with which they self-define: "breaker and indigenous," "breaker and *quilombola*," "breaker and rural worker." In this way, the women breakers of babassu coconut become capable of producing and reproducing knowledge.

Therefore, this non-formal learning is intrinsically linked to the traditional knowledge of a people, which in turn uses and transmits this knowledge to subsequent generations. Traditional communities employ this knowledge to preserve and maintain collectively practiced everyday practices.

Methodological Approaches

From the perspective of the popular knowledge experienced by the babassu coconut breakers women and the MIQCB movement, we can perceive a richness of productions on this theme. Also, investigations in postgraduate programs at the *stricto sensu* level, in the states of Maranhão, Pará, and Tocantins, contribute to advancing debates on interculturality and popular and rural movements throughout the country. In this sense, this research aims to contribute to a greater expansion of scientific productions involving regional traditional communities, especially the babassu coconut breakers.

Scientific research is built from questions and inquiries that will provide knowledge not previously understood. According to Minayo (2002), science is a way of seeking information that is neither definitive nor exclusive. Regarding the Social Sciences, with their historical

object, the author points out that the researcher gives an intellectual meaning to the work, "but human beings, groups, and societies give meaning and intentionality to their actions and constructions" (*Idem*, p. 14, our translation). And since the object of Social Sciences is essentially qualitative, the methodological procedures adopted are pertinent to qualitative research.

Qualitative research deals with a universe of meaning, motives, aspirations, beliefs, values, and attitudes, which correspond to a deeper space of relationships, processes, and phenomena that cannot be reduced to the operationalization of variables (*Idem*, p. 22, our translation).

In this sense, the author emphasizes that qualitative research brings particular issues of the natural environment, and the role of the researcher is to sharpen a broad view of social reality. This research is also conducted through research instruments such as observation and semi-structured interviews. Regarding observation, it was carried out with the babassu coconut breakers of the Ciriaco Extractive Reserve (MA)⁸, highlighting their daily routines and knowledge. We begin by referencing Trivinos' statement (1987), which describes:

Observing, naturally, is not simply looking. Observation is singling out something specific from a set (objects, people, animals, etc.), paying attention, for example, to its characteristics (color, size, etc.) (p. 153, our translation).

The type of observation used in qualitative research can be structured, where the existence of specific traits of the researched phenomenon is taken into consideration, meaning that the researcher can define beforehand the categories that will be observed. Moreover, the act of observing is, above all, being attentive to the people, things, and situations that involve one's object of study. It is an intellectual act capable of constructing a notion of the individual's reality and relationships with the social environment.

Regarding the semi-structured interview, as one of the data collection techniques used in this research, I begin by following Minayo's (2002) concept, which states:

⁸ The Ciriaco Extractive Reserve, located in the municipality of Cidelândia-MA, created in 1992 by Decree No. 534, and based on Law No. 9.985/2000 (Law of the National System of Conservation Units - SNUC), has an area of 8,106.75 hectares that encompasses the communities of Ciriaco, Centro do Olímpio, Alto Bonito, and Viração. In these areas, 350 families of extractivists lived, who were granted the right to use the space for their livelihood after the landowners were compensated. The activities carried out in the area by these families followed an organization and collective agreement, adjusting the breaking of the babassu coconut with agro-extractive activity (NEVES; PIZZIO; RODRIGUES, 2021).

The interview is a more common procedure in fieldwork. Through it, the researcher seeks to obtain information contained in the speech of social actors. It does not imply an unpretentious and neutral conversation, since it serves as a means of collecting the facts reported by the actors, who are both subjects and objects of the research, experiencing a certain reality that is being focused on. Its implementation forms can be individual and collective (MINAYO, 2002, p. 57, our translation).

Therefore, we understand that the interview is a verbal communication in which language and all its meanings are considered. Further corroborating Maria Cecília Minayo's perspective, I refer again to Trivinos (1987), who understands that the semi-structured interview offers ample opportunity for questioning, which evolves as the interviewee responds to the questions. Thus, the interviewee does not deviate from their line of thought and does not lose focus on the research, because the researcher participates in directing the questions. Therefore, the semi-structured interview not only appreciates the investigator's presence but can also offer freedom for the informant to enrich the investigation spontaneously.

This research also utilizes field notes as a means of recording information, an instrument which, as Maria Cecília Minayo calls it, is a "silent friend" of the researcher. Being part of the routine of field research, it should always be accessible and is something non-transferable. In it, the researcher can document details that add to other information from other techniques, such as interviews and questionnaires.

Regarding the ethical aspects of the research, we see that since Resolution No. 510/2016, the National Committee for Ethics in Research (CONEP) regulates research involving human subjects (BRASIL, 2016). Therefore, initially, authorization from the Research Ethics Committee was requested through the *Plataforma Brasil* for the study with the Coconut Breakers.

For the approach to be conducted, it was required that the participants express their agreement by signing the Informed Consent Form (ICF), through which they could consent or decline to participate in the research, without any burden.

Observing and dialoguing: about the knowledge of the babassu coconut breakers from the Ciriaco Extractive Reserve

It is worth noting that the aim of this study is to pinpoint and identify the knowledge constructed through the experiences of the babassu coconut breakers, as a traditional community. To achieve these objectives, I was at the Ciriaco Extractive Reserve (the research site), conducting the observation technique on 3 occasions, on January 5th, January 12th, and April 12th, 2021. These encounters aimed to gain preliminary knowledge of the reality of the Reserve, during which I observed the work routine of the babassu coconut breakers in the community. This observation will now be reported.

On January 5th, 2021, I arrived at the Reserve at 12:30 p.m. Next to the Babassu Coconut Processing Unit (see Fig. I), there was an open but masonry-covered shed, where 8 women were gathered. After personal introductions, I began observing. They had been sitting under this shed since 7 a.m., with sore legs and backs. They said they had only gotten up from the ground to have lunch. Lunch was prepared among themselves right there in the factory. There was a plastic bottle of water nearby and only one shared cup. However, each of them had a straw basket or an aluminum can next to them to put the babassu coconut kernels, and on the other side, a small bag to put the husks⁹.

⁹ Larva is found in the fruit of the babassu palm. Also known as "coco tapuru," "coró," or "bicho-do-coco," it is part of the culinary culture of the Northeast.

Figure 1 - Babassu coconut processing unit



Source: Authors' collection.

We stayed in the shed for another hour. During this time, I observed the relationships maintained among them. Some were sisters-in-law, godmothers, and friends for many years; I just didn't observe any mothers and daughters present. The dialogue didn't seem to have a specific focus. Conversations about marital relationships, routines, and household chores. "[...] *I got up at 5 o'clock, made food for the man to take to the forest, and came here*" (Mauriza). Additionally, commitments to church celebrations are made by almost all the breakers. They are also known as "the prayer women" for their habit of praying the rosary every day.

As they finished breaking for the day, around 2 p.m., they began to organize the tools and store all the almonds inside the factory. At this moment, the entire space of the babassu coconut processing unit was presented to me: the machines, the part of the building reserved for soap making, and the pantry. The breakers received the machines from a Suzano project. The names of the machines are under each image.

Figure 2 - Babassu coconut processing machines



Source: Authors' collection.

The oven is used to heat the coconut kernel after cutting. The press is intended to extract coconut oil. The decanter consists of a stainless steel barrel with a capacity of five hundred liters to store the oil. In turn, the forage chopper is used to crush the kernel for the extraction of coconut oil.

As observed in the images above, the traditional method of producing oil or olive oil is no longer in use among the coconut breakers of the Ciriaco Community. The adoption of technologies has significantly facilitated the production process of babassu coconut by-products. It is important to note that in the traditional method, the kernels are crushed in a mortar, cooked, and pressed to extract the oil. Subsequently, it is necessary to let the oil stand

for seven days. After this period, "the decanted oil passes through a filter, for further refinement, separating the oil from the dregs (by-product)" (CARRAZZA; SILVA; ÁVILA, 2012 p. 34, our translation).

However, with the introduction of coconut processing machines, obtaining a more efficient use of the kernels and, consequently, increased profitability becomes feasible. Training to operate the machines has revitalized and encouraged the community to value the coconut-breaking activity further and to develop entrepreneurial projects with greater profit potential.

In this space acquired by ATARECO¹⁰, women engage in various activities such as coconut cracking, cutting the kernel into small pieces, roasting the kernel, and oil extraction. They also produce handmade soap, and with the coconut husk, the women make charcoal, as shown in the image below.

Figure 3 - Products produced at the Babassu Coconut Processing Unit of Ciriaco



Source: Authors' collection.

When asked who made the soap, they expressed concern and explained that a soap-making course funded by a paper and cellulose company from Imperatriz was offered, in which many young women participated. However, these young women lost interest upon realizing that the income was unsatisfactory and gave up the work. Rosilene (2021) adds: "[...] *it's difficult because we need to crack the coconut. There aren't enough people to do all the work.*"

From this account, the need for younger labor among the coconut breakers is evident to ensure the social and economic reproduction of the community's families. This does not mean

¹⁰ In 1995, the Agro-extractive Workers Association of the Ciriaco Extractive Reserve (ATARECO) was established as a political and organized form of the traditional population of the Ciriaco Extractive Reserve (RESEX). Today, one of its main objectives is to lead and execute small projects within the reserve.

younger women do not break coconuts or engage in babaçu coconut-related activity. Rosilene clarifies that the knowledge produced by coconut breakers is generally used for subsistence, for the family's consumption, and that younger women do not engage in it for income generation. In this context, Rebelo (2012) reinforces that the objective of traditional communities is to promote the sustainable development of families and that coconut breakers value cultural diversity and their everyday knowledge.

On January 12, 2021, I arrived at the factory at noon and found 6 women breaking coconuts. I sat down with them, and they were talking about what they enjoy doing in their leisure time. They all spoke of their love for fishing. They laughed a lot while recounting funny situations from fishing trips. Fishing is also a means of subsistence used by many traditional communities, predominantly indigenous and riverine communities. In these groups, knowledge is closely linked to water bodies and the appreciation of streams.

Changing the subject, I asked the coconut breakers about the tools used to break the coconut. They affirmed that the best ones are made of jacaranda and ivory wood. However, others, such as *sapucaia* wood, *ipê* wood, and egg yolk wood, are also frequently used. Dona Mauriza said she has been using an egg yolk wood tool for a long time and likes it. These tools are pieces of wood that assist in breaking the babaçu coconut, and when striking with the tool, it is necessary for the coconut to be well positioned on the axe and the hands to be firmly holding the coconut to avoid accidents.

The routine often involves breaking coconuts for up to 4 consecutive days (between 6 to 8 hours per day). After they manage to gather a sufficient quantity to process, they produce olive oil, oil, or soap. But they clarified that the hardest work is when collecting the coconuts in the forest. Almost all of them recounted a tale of danger or difficulty they faced in the forest, such as stepping on a snake, getting caught in a tree vine around the neck, falling into a hole with a bag of coconuts on their backs, or falling from the moving "*girico*" (tractor). It is worth noting that they laugh a lot at each other's stories. Dona Faustina adds that she always says her prayers, asking for protection before entering the forest.

On April 12, 2021, I was with the babaçu coconut breakers from 1:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. In this meeting, I was able to steer the conversation more. Five women were sitting breaking coconuts, among them were D. Mauriza and D. Faustina, who contributed significantly to the questions I raised. The first point discussed was about the most numerous and representative family groups within the Ciriaco reserve. In response, the families of D. Mauriza, D. Faustina,

and Mr. Colodino are the oldest and have contributed most significantly to the community's history.

Families are primarily responsible for preserving local culture and continuing extractive activities. Given that it is the members of the families who carry the memories of the struggles and achievements of the community. Among them, a bond of trust ensures the next generations follow traditions and maintain various forms of knowledge.

As we changed the subject, I inquired about the process of collecting *babaçu* coconuts in the forest, and they quickly reaffirmed that it is very heavy work and that sometimes they need to pay men to gather the coconuts, but they don't like it because the men pick up all kinds of coconuts, including the spoiled ones, so they end up going along. I then asked them to specify what a spoiled coconut is, and they replied that it is a coconut that is already "soft," with the fibers of the husk already torn. "The selection of the product is made based on the external quality of the coconut, prioritizing those that do not have cracks or imperfections in the fibrous layer (epicarp)" (SCHWARTZ, 2017 p. 65, our translation).

It is worth noting that they only gather coconuts from the ground, and that the *babaçu* coconut is available all year round, but the best times are between September and December, according to D. Faustina, as well as according to the authors below:

Coconut production can vary greatly. The peak flowering occurs between January and April, and the fruits ripen between August and December. The "strength" of the crop is concentrated from the dry period to the beginning of the rainy season and can vary depending on the region and natural conditions (soil, moisture, competition, etc.) (CARRAZZA; SILVA; ÁVILA, 2012, p. 14, our translation).

In this sense, the above authors corroborate D. Faustina's testimony and add that the *babaçu* coconut palm begins to bear fruit after 8 years, but its full production is achieved at 15 years. Understanding this cycle is essential so that the extractive women can manage¹¹ it and improve production.

Furthermore, in discussing *babaçu* coconut craftsmanship, they quickly asserted that the community was unable to invest in craftsmanship, also because the tools are expensive and they have never had that kind of support. "To start, you need to have a good saw to cut it in half" (D. Faustina). They also mentioned the difficulty of working with craftsmanship and that there

¹¹ In areas with low density of *babaçu* palm trees, it is possible to promote condensation through the planting of palm tree seedlings. A selection of mature and healthy coconuts is made and spread in the management area.

was no one in the community with a vocation in this area, as they had had courses before but lacked interested individuals.

However, according to D. Faustina, craftsmanship is an area of great interest for local consumers and those from other states. There is a wide demand for products made from straw and coconut, such as bags, baskets, rugs, pen holders, earrings, and necklaces. She further emphasizes: "*And it brings in money.*"

It is pertinent to highlight Pinto (2015) and his discussions about the knowledge constructed in meetings and workspaces. The planning and discussions about concrete actions for the group are much debated during the coconut cracking in the external shed and when they are producing coconut by-products in the processing unit. The involvement in work and knowledge solidify into products that generate the subsistence of their families.

However, in the moment of experiencing the coconut oil processing unit, Dona Faustina addresses the lack of public policies and investments that could mature these discussions constantly addressed by the *babaçu* breakers. There are attempts to change the scenario and working conditions, but they are halted by the lack of support from public administrators and local entrepreneurs.

At the end of the observation experience in the Ciriaco Extractive Reserve, more specifically in the Ciriaco Community, it was possible to notice that in this collective life, especially in peasant life, women are of great importance in the process of transmitting knowledge, spirituality, cultivation, and domestic activities.

Final considerations

The "*quebradeira de coco*" is a woman who breaks coconuts, or rather, who breaks "a lot" of coconuts. "*Quebradeira*" is the woman who fights for the collective causes of the coconut breakers and the community. She is a woman who understands that her daily struggle is a social practice and that her knowledge is what collectively constitutes her. She is the woman who builds an effective relationship with the natural resources she uses, in this case, the Babassu forests.

The objective of this article was to identify the knowledge constructed by the babassu coconut breakers and how it is understood as one of the fundamental elements for the promotion and affirmation of collective identity in communities. To do so, it was necessary to conceptualize Traditional Peoples and Communities and highlight elements that characterize

the babassu coconut breakers as a traditional community. In this sense, the discussion about the emergence of the first traditional communities linked to the fight against environmental imbalance is notable. Group actions that debated the harm to nature as a result of economic development.

Of course, we could not overlook the history of struggle and resistance of the babassu coconut breakers to constitute themselves as political subjects in the face of the antagonism of the State. As this process of formation was collectively constructed, it was of great importance to emphasize the historical and legal milestones that pointed to the organizational structure of the Interstate Movement of Babassu Coconut Breakers (MIQCB), which is active today.

Finally, in an attempt to understand how the knowledge constituted by the *babaçu* breakers is shared from generation to generation, field research was conducted in the Community of Ciriaco, in the Ciriaco Extractive Reserve. Starting from an observation in the aforementioned Reserve, it was possible to see the richness of culture and knowledge by listening to conversations in the circle, mixed with the sound of the mallet striking the coconut. It was not just a moment of breaking the *babaçu* coconut, but also a moment of sharing daily routines and family experiences, domestic work, situations experienced in the forest while gathering coconuts, participation in other social groups such as church, and all the extractive work in the *babaçu* coconut processing unit.

Therefore, we understand that these stories, filled with knowledge, constitute elements that contribute to the individual and collective, political, and social reproduction/construction of the *babaçu* breakers. In other words, the traditional knowledge passed down from generation to generation in the communities is grounded in the ways of "doing," "creating," "narrating," and "living." It is relevant to emphasize that the *babaçu* breakers struggle to keep alive the rich values and courage of the **past**, to try to preserve socio-environmental balance in the **present**, and consequently translate into a better and more valued life in the **future**, in all aspects, for the families of traditional communities and the extractive workers.

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