

Quilombola of Macacos Community, São Miguel do Tapuio City, Piauí State: History, Use and Conservation of Plant Resources

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ABSTRACT

The Quilombola dos Macacos [African descendents] community is located 26 km Southbound from the city hall of São Miguel do Tapuio city – Piauí state, in a vegetation transitional area, predominantly of caatinga. The study aimed at surveying the history, use and modes of conservation of plant resources by the community. Botanical collection and semi-structured interviews were carried out, for an ethnobotanical, socioeconomic and cultural survey. The population of 106 inhabitants lives on subsistence farming, small breeding of domestic animals and wild animal extrativism, occupying an area of 2000 hectares approximately. The agricultural system adopted is the traditional cut-and-burn, using the area for three or four years following a period of fallow not less than six years. The homegardens have a great cultural importance, approaching the family and neighbor bonds and being used as well for vegetable production, complementing nourishment. They use a peculiar language of rural regions and they incorporate rhymes, called “*décimas*”. The main cultural manifestation is expressed by the *reisado* (typical dance followed by traditional songs) and the superstitions and popular beliefs are marked by the Aziague day (Unlucky day). Among the modes of use of the vegetal resources, the categories medicinal (74 species), fodder (62), edible (58), mellifluous (47), and woody (45), are manifest. The environment awareness is verified, especially in the use of species considered to be a good lumbering and medicinal resource, since these deserve special attention, for they have their extraction limited, aiming at their maintenance and conservation. A real possibility of loss of knowledge was observed in the community, mainly because younger generations demonstrate a lack of interest in keeping this knowledge alive, by seizing upon new cultures.

Keywords: qualitative ethnobotany, *quilombola*, traditional knowledge

INTRODUCTION

A relevant aspect in the traditional cultures definition is the existence of a management system of the natural resources, determined by the respect to the natural cycles and by their exploitation within the recovery capacity of the species of animals and plants used. Therefore, Diegues and Arruda (2001), define traditional societies as human groups, culturally distinguished, which historically reproduce their way of living, somewhat isolated, based on social cooperation modes and specific forms of relationships to nature, traditionally characterized by the environment sustainable management. In this instance, it can be found the quilombolas (i.e., black descendents brought to Brazil as slaves, and that now are relatively isolated in some regions), which could manage to survive after slavery in Brazil, by the end of the nineteenth century, but who have been socially seen recently, due to the struggle for the land, which, in general, they have no deed.

The quilombos are characterized, as other traditional communities, by the strong bond they have to the environment they live on where it is usually seen a high level of preservation of the natural ecosystems (Andrade *et al.* 2000). They are communities whose families survive from farming and vegetal extrativism (Andrade *et al.* 2000).

According to Centro de Geografia e Cartografia Aplicada (CIGA), of Universidade de Brasília (UnB), there are 2228 remaining rural African descendents communities in the country, but, only 1209 certified with a self-recognition Title, awarded by Fundação Cultural Palmares (2008). From the 33 communities located in Piauí, we have pointed out for our study the Quilombo dos Macacos, in São Miguel do Tapuio City, which is located in an area of vegetation transition, with elements of Cerrado, semi-deciduous forest

and predominance of caatinga (Vieira 2008). In this ecosystem, according to Tabarelli and Vicente (2002), the environment degradation is as high as 60% of its area, together with the lack of scientific expertise and the greatly reduced number of Conservation Units in its dominant area; such a situation reflects, unmistakably, the absence of policies to the conservation of its biological diversity and other natural resources.

The ethnobotanical works accomplished at African descendents communities revealed the survival of their culture, regarding the use of plants, their habits and the Afro-Brazilian everyday customs, quoting Camargo (1988), Berg (1991), Albuquerque and Chiappetta (1996), Albuquerque (1997), Albuquerque and Andrade (1998), Lühning (1999), Serra (1999), Abreu (2000), Franco (2005), Franco *et al.* (2007), and Vieira (2008).

This study aimed to conduct an ethnobotanical, historical, socioeconomic and cultural survey of the *quilombola* community of Macacos, in São Miguel do Tapuio – Piauí, Brazil, and this can contribute to the preservation and conservation of these resources.

It is clear that there is a need for carrying out studies in areas of caatinga, aiming at retrieving the knowledge gathered by traditional communities, recognizing its importance and observing that there is not only the economical exploitation of the vegetal resources, but, knowledge acquired by inherited tradition of the elders, which can lead to their maintenance and sustainable use.

METHODOLOGY

Study area

The city of São Miguel do Tapuio is located 220 km away from

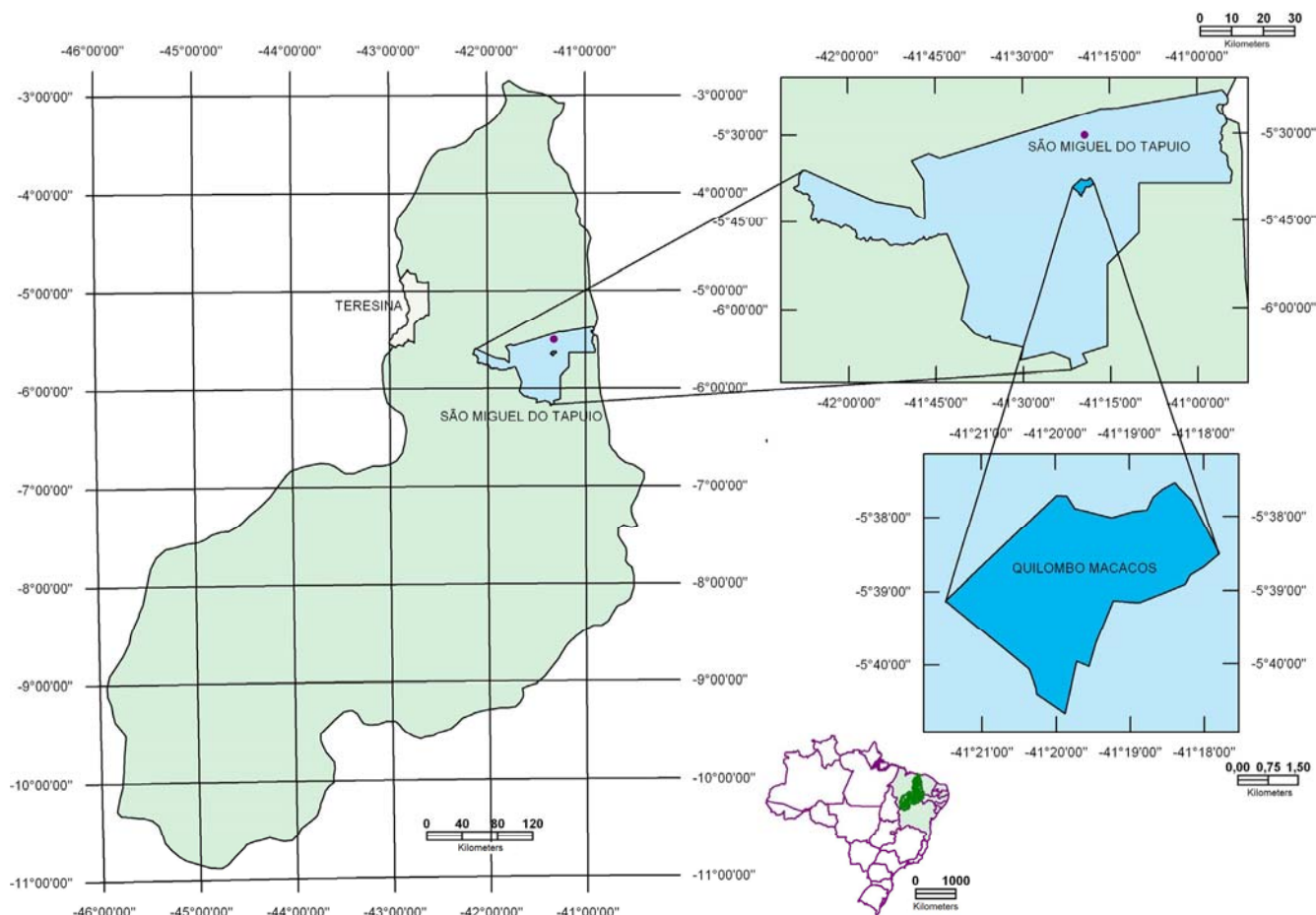


Fig. 1 Location of the study area, Quilombola of Macacos community, São Miguel do Tapuio city - PI. Source: Vieira (2008).

Teresina, the Capital City of Piauí, with a total area of 6533 km² (Fig. 1), corresponding to 2.61% of the total area of Piauí state, belonging to the micro-region of Campo Maior, being in the 172nd position in the State grade of social exclusion (CEPRO 1992; Lima 2003). According to CEPRO (1992), the vegetation type is of Cerrado and Cerradão. The climate is Warm and Semi-Arid, with a dry period that lasts six months.

The quilombola dos Macacos community is located 26 km Southern the city hall, in a remote area. It has an area of about 2000 ha, where there are 106 individuals, distributed into 27 families, who live on subsistence farming and extensive breeding of hens, pigs, (she-) goats, rams, sheep, and in a lower degree cattle. They make use of the local plants to supply their lack regarding the use of vegetal resources (Vieira 2008).

The local vegetation where the resources used in the community are obtained from is characterized by the presence of elements of Cerrado and semi-deciduous forest, with a dominance of the biome caatinga (Vieira 2008).

They have an elementary school where the kindergarten to 4th grade classes are taught, and from the 5th grade on the students must head to another community or go to the city São Miguel do Tapuio to study. In this latter case, they stay all week long in the city, for there is only school bus on the weekends. The water supply system is carried out by means of gravitation, in a way that the waters of the Macados Swamp are dammed up, being then distributed through pipes to the residences. The community is not supplied with electricity, but they watch (public), TV supplied with solar energy power, captured by plates and accumulated into batteries (Vieira 2008).

Although they have the self-recognition Title of remaining African descendants community, awarded by the Fundação Cultural dos Palmares in May 2005, they still await the definite deed of their land dispatched by the Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária (INCRA).

Data collecting

Data were collected between January 2006 and April 2007, on two-weekly trips in rainy season and monthly trips in dry season. For the data referring to the history of the community, informal conversations were carried out to the older locals, who demonstrate to know the history of their forefathers. The socioeconomic information (age, marital status, income, housing and sanitary conditions), were gathered with the heads of the family through form filling at the 27 residences. The use and knowledge of useful plants were surveyed through semi-structured interviews, observation and the guided-tour technique (Albuquerque and Lucena 2004), applied to the key informants, over 35-year-old adults, recognized by the others as experts on the local vegetation and also for citing the use and knowledge of a greater number of species; these informants contributed to the enlargement of the species list and confirming of the cited species. The species were grouped into 13 use categories (edible, hallucinogenic, handicrafts and fibers, fuel, fodder, hygiene and cleaning, woody, magic-religious, melliferous, medicinal, ornamental, toxic and utensils).

The collection and picking of the botanical material were carried out following the methodology proposed by Mori *et al.* (1989), fortnightly in the rainy season and monthly in the dry one. All this material was incorporated to the collection of the Herbarium Graziela Barroso (TEPB) of the Universidade Federal do Piauí. The species identifications were accomplished based on specialized bibliography, comparisons to identified voucher specimens and experts' identifications.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

History

Based on locals' testimonials, the name of the community is derived from the great number of monkeys which existed in the region, by the time the first inhabitants came. It can be

said that the quilombo has indigenous and African roots, formed at least 150 years ago. Its first inhabitants were the Indian known as Bonifácia and her husband Clementino. Bonifácia found the lands hiding in the forests on a jaguar hunt. It is not known which city, town or tribe she belonged to, possibly to the Tapuias or Tacarijus that previously inhabited the area. Neither is it known how the couple met. From this marriage Clara was born, who later married the negro Marçonilo who was a slave, probably a fugitive from one of the farms of São Miguel do Tapuio; from this marriage Maria Clara was born, who in turn married José Lúcio, son of Francisco Firmino, who was also a former slave, and Vicença, who was an Indian, one of the most savage, it is said. Maria Clara and José Lúcio were expelled from the lands of the quilombo around 1947 by Mr. Moisés Bajur, who was a surveyor and took possession of the area, selling it later to Mr. Gabriel Soares Campelo, who named the place São Vicente, in a mass celebrated by Father Cláudio, who in the time was a vicar at the parish of São Miguel Arcanjo [Saint Michael Archangel] in São Miguel do Tapuio.

Many years later, precisely in 1975, descendants of Maria Clara and José Lúcio decided to live in the place now called São Vicente, as Mr. Gabriel Campelo's tenants, working in the sugar cane plantation and clearing the newly field, where they were paid only with part of the production. Later, there came the two other families (Miranda and Justino), also direct descendants of Bonifácia and Clementino. Besides being Mr. Gabriel Campelo's tenants, they were also submitted to the old practice of "coronelismo" and the so-called "halter vote" [domination vote], which everyone should vote for those indicated by the boss. Around the 1990s, there was a great quarrel between Mr. Gabriel Campelo and Mr. Manoel Félix (grandson of Maria Clara and José Lúcio), such a clash is considered the initial mark for retrieving the land possession.

Starting with the quarrel, there has been a great motion around the house, joining the Rural Workers Union of São Miguel do Tapuio, the Federação dos Trabalhadores em Agricultura do Piauí (FETAG), and later, the Quilombola Movement.

In 1999, Association of Rural Community Quilombo dos Macacos was founded, with Registration of Corporate Taxpayers [CNPJ] number 03.834.697/0001-94, which holds 38 registered families, but, only 27 live in the place, integrated to the Rural Workers Union of São Miguel do Tapuio and they have a representative at the Quilombola Coordination of Piauí. Today, a monthly meeting on the third Saturday of each month is held, in which they discuss the community's internal issues and also the information divulging of the Quilombola Movement in Piauí. On May 9, 2005, the Palmares Foundation certified the community with the Self-Recognition Title, and it is now considered as a remaining African descendants community.

Still today, there is no final judgment on the process. This troublesome strife has increased these last four decades and before the Brazilian State, it is verified as the last formal community call requested for mediation and social intervention, dated from March 2002, according to INCRA's report (2006), it is almost certain the land possession. By the end of 2007, INCRA finished delimiting the area; they have now only to dispatch the deed to the quilombolas, according to the Federal Law No. 4887 of 2003, which regulates the remaining quilombo lands.

Socioeconomic and cultural profile

The community is composed of 27 families, with a total population of 106 people, distributed in the following age groups: 41 persons from 0-15 years old, 28 men and 13 women; 30 persons from 16-30 years old (15 men and 15 women); 20 persons from 31-45 years old (12 men and eight women); nine persons from 46-60 years old (four men and five women), and six persons over 60 (four men and two women). It can be observed that in the age groups 0-15,

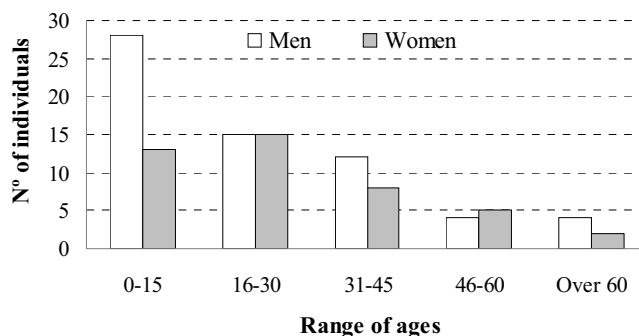


Fig. 2 Population arrangement by age groups in the Quilombola of Macacos Community, São Miguel do Tapuio City/PI.

31-45 and over 60, men are dominant, while in the age group 46-60, females are dominant, and in the age group 16-30, there is equity between the genders (Fig. 2).

As for family organization, the community is basically composed of the Mirandas, the Félix and the Justinos, headed by the oldest individuals, Antonio Miranda, José Félix and Antonio Justino, respectively. The others come from these three families, holding a peculiar characteristic to the quilombo territories, which is the marriage between relatives. However, it can be observed that non-African descendants people coming from other regions were incorporated to the families, through marriages, fact observed also by Boakari and Gomes (2006, p. 42), on the socio-cultural mapping and characterization of eight African descendants rural communities of Piauí:

"In recent times, the new generations have married non-African men and women from outside their community. Thus, today there are some physically non-African individuals. The important to the locals is that these people who were not born in the community now help it."

The houses are built in the system of community help, and most of them are built out of bricks, made by the quilombolas [African descendants], and those used for the external walls are baked in oven and the ones used in internal walls are raw. There are five lath-and-plaster walled houses. They are tile-covered and the tiles are produced in the community brick factory. The floor is usually uncovered, that is, earth covered, some have a clay layer leaving a cement aspect, but in some residences the cement-covered floor is also found. It is also observed the existence of pavements only in front of some houses. Similar data are reported by Franco (2005), in a study carried out at Quilombo Olho D'água dos Pires, in Esperantina city - PI, differing only the roof covering type, which there most of the houses are straw-covered, which comes from the babaçu (*Attalea speciosa* Mart. ex Spreng.), abounding in the region.

The community suffers with electricity shortage, since they have not yet been benefited with the Federal Government's Rural Electrification Program, and they need to use diesel or kerosene lamps during the night. As for water supply, it comes from a small dam built in a swamp, which is named after the community; the water is distributed to the residences and to a fountain located "downtown", through gravitation, and only one residence does not possess piped water, due to a higher altitude where it is located.

The cultural manifestations are present in the community and they offer to them self-identity. The *reisado* [typical dance followed by traditional songs] is the strongest manifestation, which takes place in January, on Santo Reis [Holy Kings, Jan. 6th] Day, on June Parties, and on events promoted by the quilombolas groups.

Religiosity is strong and all residents are declared Catholics. They pray the rosary on Santo Reis (January), and on Santa Luzia [Saint Lucy] (December), and they also don't work on Guarding Saints Days: Saint Joseph, Saint Michael Archangel, Saint John, Saint Francisco, Saint Anthony, All Saints and Sant'Ana Lady. On Sunday afternoons, religious instruction meetings take place at the community's

school. Due to the lack of regular priests, only two Masses a year are celebrated, usually in May and October, and they vary according to the priest's availability. On these opportunities, they celebrate in a single ceremony, baptisms, weddings, Death Mass and the Eucharist.

Beliefs and superstitions are also present in the community; one of them is that there would be two days in the year in which nobody should work, called "ill-fated" (inauspicious), days, corresponding to the first Monday of the months of April and August. On these days, nobody goes to the field because an accident or something like that may occur. The mode of speech is the one common to the rural region, with the inclusion of terms that are little known by inhabitants of the largest cities, rhymes, locally known as "décimas", are frequently declaimed in conversations.

In the cultivation system adopted by the members of local African descendant communities, the land is traditionally cleared by cutting down and burning the vegetation; just as described by Peroni (2006), many farmers, after three years of cultivations, abandon the land during a resting/fallow period of four years or over, using the species which grow in this land for food, construction or energy purposes, among others..., throughout the years. The largest part of the production is for their own food, which constitutes subsistence farming; however, when there is surplus production, the products are commercialized in the municipality of São Miguel do Tapuí, generating income for the acquisition of goods that are not produced in the community. Franco and Barros (2006b), also point out the subsistence agriculture practice among the members of quilombola community of Olho D'água dos Pires, in Esperantina-Piauí State, where there also is the commercialization of the surplus production and the cultivation of other vegetables to provide for the needs of the population.

Most of the population complements the family's income with resources from pensions and/or benefits granted by the Federal Government; it can be observed that 59.26% of the families are awarded with financial benefits, 11.11% receive pensions, 7.41% receive both financial benefits and pensions and 22.22% are not granted with any kind of benefit.

Use and preservation of plant resources by members of the quilombola community of Macacos

225 ethnospesies distributed into 62 botanical families were surveyed, being Leguminosae (38 species), Euphorbiaceae and Poaceae (15), Apocynaceae (9), Bignoniaceae and Convolvulaceae (8), Cucurbitaceae, Lamiaceae and Malvaceae (7), Anacardiaceae and Combretaceae (6), the most prominent families. When analyzing the data obtained in other African descendant communities of Piauí, it could be observed some similarities concerning the botanical families with a larger number of citations, as it is the case of Abreu (2000), who identified 57 plant species in the community of Mimbó, in the city of Amarante-PI, where the families Leguminosae (17 spp), Combretaceae (5), Apocynaceae and Anacardiaceae (4), presented the largest number of usable species; Franco and Barros (2006a), working in the quilombola community of Olho D'água dos Pires, in Esperantina - PI, registered a number of 177 species, being the families Leguminosae (27 spp.), Euphorbiaceae (10), Anacardiaceae and Cucurbitaceae (7), the most prominent ones regarding the number of species.

The species occur as herbs, ground-inclined herbs, shrubs, ground-inclined shrubs and trees, being found both in preserved areas and in brushwood areas or in yards.

It can also be observed an extension of the cultivations in the homegardens, being that space used by the local dwellers to complement their production. In all homegardens there is at least one kind of cultivation, being the vegetable gardens kept from a certain distance from the soil so that the animals do not damage the plants, in which chive and coriander are the most cultivated species. They also

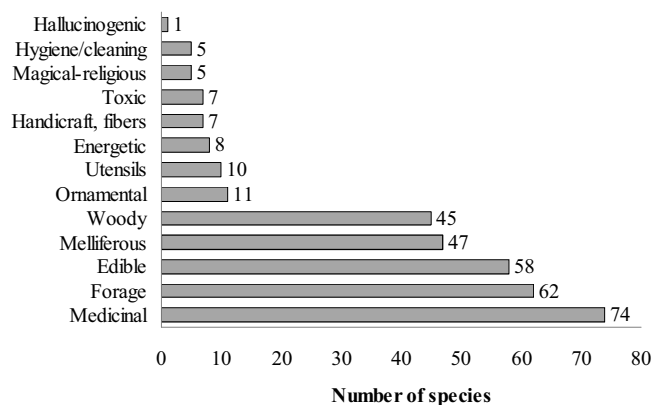


Fig. 3 Distribution of vegetal species into categories of use in the Quilombola of Macacos Community, São Miguel do Tapuí, Piauí.

prepare *farinhadas* (cassava processing season), the processing of cassava (*Manihot esculenta* Crantz), into cassava flour, *goma* (fine powder), and *puba* (fermented paste), carried out in a communitarian way, usually in the months of July and August. Only three dwellers have mud ovens suitable for *farinhadas*.

Thus, the homegardens are an extension of the houses, contributing also to enhance family and acquaintance bondings as well as to keep local traditions alive; they are also a space for social activities, where families meet at sunset time and where guests are welcomed; this fact is very common in all Brazilian northeastern region, being also reported by Amorozo (2006), as a usual event in communities of the northern region of the country.

The species were classified into 13 use categories, among which the following stand out: medicinal (74 citations), forage (62), edible (58), melliferous (47), and woody (45). Among those least mentioned are toxic plants (7), magic-religious species and those used in hygiene and cleaning (5) and hallucinogenic (1) (Fig. 3). Albuquerque and Andrade (2002a), Albuquerque *et al.* (2005) and Chaves (2005), also point out the medicine, food and lumbering categories as being most mentioned in the caatinga (cactus and shrubwood vegetation). The same categories are among the most mentioned ones in the mainland communities of APA Guaraqueçaba-Paraná, in areas of the Atlantic Forest studied by Lima *et al.* (2000), and Fonseca-Kruel and Peixoto (2004), although the vegetation is quite different from that found in the community of Macacos, demonstrating that these categories are the most cited in the vast majority of ethnobotanical studies.

The medicinal plants are a strong element in the culture of traditional communities and in the community of Macacos things are not different, since the medicine plants category was the most prominent one, corresponding to 32.88% of the useful species. Abreu (2000) and Franco and Barros (2006a) reinforce the affirmative that the knowledge of medicinal plants is highly scattered among "quilombo" communities in Piauí. The knowledge of medicinal plants is also mentioned in studies from caatinga areas, as verified by Albuquerque *et al.* (2005), Albuquerque (2006) and Lucena *et al.* (2007). Albuquerque and Andrade (2002a), besides emphasizing the medicinal category as being among the most cited, they also add that medicinal resources in caatinga suffer a high extractive pressure not only because of their local use, but for the existence of a wide consumption market.

Among the medicinal species used in the community of Macacos, the following stand out: *Himatanthus drasticus* (Mart.) Plumel (janaguba), *Myracrodruon urundeuva* Allemão (aroeira), *Tabebuia impetiginosa* (Mart. ex DC.) Standl (pau-d'arco) and *Opeculina macrocarpa* (L.) Farw. (batata-de-purga). The plants "capim-santo" (*Cymbopogon citratus* Stapf.), "boldo" (*Plectranthus barbatus* Andr.) and "erva-cidreira" (*Lippia alba* (Mill.) N. E. Br.), are also

widely used in the community, being cultivated in the homegardens and in the community garden.

The most common disease among the local dwellers is flu, which is mostly treated with honey-like syrups and teas, prepared from velame (*Croton heliotropiifolius* Kunth), bamburral (*Hyptis suaveolens* Poit.), hortelã-vick (*Mentha arvensis* L.), and erva-cidreira (*Lippia alba* (Mill.) N. E. Br.), among others. For the treatment of stomach aches they use tea prepared from leaf buds of guava trees (*Psidium guajava* L.), and for the treatment of high blood pressure, tea prepared from leaves of endro (*Anethum graveolens* L.), is used.

Besides the home medicines, they use the medicines indicated by the physicians that are part of the Family Health Program (FHP) that attend the community once a month. When the physicians diagnose some illnesses that need a higher care, ill people are taken to the city hospital. The hospital team is composed of physicians, dentists, nurses, nurse assistants and communitarian agents. Within the FHP team, nurses have experience in the treatment of affections with medicinal plants, as in the case of the seed of “mufumbo” (*Combretum leprosum* Mart.), employed in the treatment of gastritis. Periodical vaccine campaigns for children and old aged are performed.

The fodder category stands out as the second most mentioned category (27.55%), probably due to the local habit of breeding sheep, goats and bovine cattle, being this activity developed by a large number of dwellers. Ferraz *et al.* (2006), during a survey on the wood vegetation on the margin of the Navio river, in the municipality of Floresta – Pernambuco State, point out the fodder category among those with the largest number of citations, explained by the strong tradition of breeding livestock animals. *Tabebuia* sp (pau-d’arco-amarelo), *Capparis flexuosa* L. (feijão-bravo), *Combretum mellifluum* Eichler (mufumbinho), *Bauhinia pulchella* Benth. (mirrozim-fino), *Senna trachypus* (Benth.) Irwin & Barneby (besourinho), *Swartzia flaeingii* Rad. (jacarandá), *Mimosa caesalpinifolia* Benth. (unha-de-gato) and *Parkia platycephala* Benth. (faveira-de-bolota), were the most mentioned fodder species, whose leaves and flowers are the parts most appreciated by the animals. However, the cultivations of palma (*Opuntia ficus-indica* Mill.) and algaroba (*Prosopis juliflora* DC.), non native species but intensely used the Brazilian Northeastern region as source of animal food during drought periods, were not observed.

Caju (*Anacardium occidentale* L.), jatobá (*Hymenaea courbaril* L.), pirunga (*Erythroxylum bezerrae* T. Plowman) and pitomba (*Talisia esculenta* Raldk.), were the food category species with the largest number of citations, as well as cassava (*Manihot esculenta* Crantz), whose processing system is home and handmade, with a low scale production, mainly cassava flour for the family consumption. The use of edible plants is observed more or less intensely in local communities both in the Northeastern and in other regions of Brazil, as Lima *et al.* (2000), Albuquerque and Andrade (2002a, 2002b), Amorozo (2002), and Pasa *et al.* (2005), point out. As regards the caatinga, Albuquerque and Andrade (2002a, 2002b), affirm the use of these resources is much larger than one could initially suppose, for people tend to increasingly use a larger range of resources or, when under varied pressures, by conciliating traditional and scientific knowledge, could develop techniques for a better use of those resources, enlarging thus the possibilities of local development.

Among the mellifluous species, *A. occidentale* (caju), *Combretum leprosum* Mart. (mufumbo), *C. mellifluum* Eichler (mufumbinho), *Dioclea grandiflora* Mart. ex Benth. (mucunã), *H. suaveolens* (bamburral), *Martiodendron mediterraneum* (Mart. ex Benth.) Koeppen (pau-de-pedra), *M. caesalpinifolia* (unha-de-gato), and *Plathymenia reticulata* Benth. (candeia), are the most prominent ones. The mellifluous species blossom in different seasons, providing the hives with resources during the whole year; the environment is suitable for the production of honey for the flower-

ing resources are abundant and two water streams provide water the whole year; however, this activity is developed by only one dweller who has two hives in the surrounding of his residence. Torquato (2006), and Viana *et al.* (2006), during studies carried out in the community of Olho D’água dos Pires, Esperantina-PI and in the region of Abaeté – Bahia State, also point out the more than 50% of the species bear flowers for over six months, confirming, thus, the data obtained in the community of Macacos.

The timber category comprises the species used in the construction of houses, fences and furniture. For the construction of houses the species with a larger number of citations were *Aspidosperma pyrifolium* Mart. (pereiro), *Copernicia prunifera* (Mill.) H. E. Moore (carnaúba), and *Plathymenia reticulata* (candeia), which are used as roof timber. For the construction of fences the species most indicated were *A. cuspa* (Kunth) Blake (pereiro-branco), *Croton blanchetianus* Baill. (marmeleiro), and *M. caesalpinifolia* (unha-de-gato), being the bed-like (horizontal lines), and *faxina* (vertical lines), fences the most common types of fences. The species *A. pyrifolium*, *Tabebuia* sp. (pau-d’arco-amarelo), and *Amburana cearensis* Allemão (imburana-de-cheiro), due to their durability, low weight and their beauty are used mostly in the manufacturing of doors, windows and furniture like racks and principally *bileiras* (wood support for water jugs and glasses), manufactured by two members of the community; the durability, weight and beauty are also mentioned by Botrel *et al.* (2003) during a survey among dwellers of Ingaí-Minas Gerais State, when questioned on how they choose the wood used by them.

Few species were cited for the other categories, and can be distinguished those that well reflect the daily community practices: firewood and charcoal use, being the last one the most consumed since there are stocks in all households, and these stocks are mainly present in the rainy season, when charcoal production gets more difficult. Householders point out that they prefer using firewood and charcoal because they consider the food to be tastier than those cooked in the GLP stoves. This fact was also reported by Rodrigues *et al.* (2002) in a study carried out in communities from the municipality of Luminária – MG. Ramos *et al.* (2008a, 2008b) in a study with fuelwood in a caatinga area from the state of Pernambuco, Brazil, indicate a higher knowledge and use of firewood by local populations, being the charcoal consumption intensified only in the rainy season. They also add that wood durability, high calorific power, ignition and little smoke production are locally perceived as relevant attributes for a good fuelwood. These attributes were also reported by the “quilombolas”, mainly the wood durability and the little smoke production, besides the little spark production.

Magic-religious category also had few cited species, but a widely disseminated practice among the “quilombolas” is the use of plants to pray against “quebrante” (a kind of a mystic illness). These practices are disseminated in Brazil, as seen by Lima *et al.* (2000), Silva and Andrade (2002), Silva and Andrade (2005) and Franco and Barros (2006b). Another interesting fact is that all households plant the pião-roxo (*Jatropha gossypifolia* L.) to avoid the evil (enchancements), Concerning the cultivation of mystic plants, Shardong and Cervi (2000) and Franco and Barros (2006b), reported the cultivation of plants in the homegardens or in front of the households in order to protect the family from any kind of evil, since they believe that these plants have the power of intercepting those things that are not positive.

Several species reported as being usable in the community of Macacos were classified into more than one category of use, as it is the case of *C. prunifera* (carnauba), which was listed in five categories, revealing to be a versatile species, whose fruit is used as food, the stem is used in the construction of houses or vegetable gardens, the roots are used for medicinal purposes and from the leaves a kind of powder is extracted for the production of wax (this activity is developed by only one dweller, producing on average 450 kg of powder per year) but they can also be used for the manufacturing of brooms or as fertilizers after being

ground; and of *Brosimum gaudichaudii* Trécul. (inharé), which was listed in four categories (alimentary, fodder, lumbering and medicinal). Studies carried out by Abreu (2000), in the African descendant community of Mimbó-PI; Fonseca-Kruel and Peixoto (2004), in the Reserva Extrativista Marinha de Arraial do Cabo – RJ and by Pasa *et al.* (2005), in the community of Conceição-Açu-MT, confirmed the diversified use of the species, as it was observed in the community of Macacos, whereas Florentino *et al.* (2007), and Franco and Barros (2006), report that among all species considered usable in the agro-forest areas in the city of Caruaru - Pernambuco State and in the community of Olho D'água dos Pires-Piauí State, only a small amount of species are used for more than one purpose.

It was observed a common concern among the dwellers about preserving certain species, for considering them important in the maintenance of their traditions; two of them are classified by the IBAMA into the list of vulnerable species: *Myracrodruon urundeuva* and *Astronium fraxinifolium* Schott (gonçalo-alves); another species which has been deserving a special attention from the members of the community is *Amburana cearensis*, for being considered valuable, especially for its therapeutic properties. As regards the use of species growing in areas in which the land is its rest/fallow period for the purposes of firewood or charcoal production, such concern is also present. *M. urundeuva* and *A. cearensis* are also mentioned by Vieira and Alves (2003), as being important in actions of research for the preservation of the energy resources, for being considered of high importance for communities of the caatinga Region.

By comparing the qualitative results obtained in this study to those obtained by Abreu (2000), and Franco *et al.* (2007), who also developed ethnobotanical studies in quilombolas communities in Piauí, it can be observed that in spite of belonging to different biomes, the three communities have in common the fact that the local vegetation is a very important source of resources for their survival.

The loss and the incorporation of elements to the local culture were made clear in the testimonies of the dwellers when affirmed that in the past they use to keep food in fiber and straw baskets manufactured by members of the community and today they use pet bottles and plastic bags; the substitution of homemade cigarettes made from the leaves of fumo (*Nicotina tabacum* L.), that they themselves used to cultivate by industrialized cigarettes, purchased in the urban area of the city; and the substitution of natural repellents made from a mixed solution of babaçu nut soap and varied herbs by agricultural pesticides.

Despite this gradual loss of traditional knowledge, plant use is still observed in the community. Therefore it is urgently necessary to stimulate, mainly the younger community members, for valuing and absorbing this knowledge, in order to keep the local tradition alive.

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