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Organizing Indigeneity Among the Xukuru do Ororubá of Brazil

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Organizing Indigeneity Among the Xukuru do Ororubá of Brazil

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*To my friend Lula Marcondes*

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## ABSTRACT

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2010

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This study examines the relationship between indigenous identity, ancestral land, and socio-politics in Brazil. The author analyzes the practices by which contemporary indigenous communities in Brazil physically reclaim their land from cattle ranchers and the impact of these practices on their self-representation, ideology, and social discourse. The first section of the study provides a historical overview of cultural politics from colonization to the 1991 Constitutional Decree that guaranteed Indians' rights allowing for the demarcation of ancestral lands. The second section examines the Xukuru do Ororubá in Northeastern Brazil with a focus on their struggle with local cattle ranchers and government officials as they move from peasant-farmers who rented their ancestral land from *fazendeiros* (ranchers or plantation owners) to legal occupants of their demarcated territory. The third section introduces the organization made up of Xukuru and non-indigenous advocates at the helm of projects in "sustainability", and analyzes how and why these projects promote a new subjectivity and become an emblem of indigeneity and land ownership.

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# INTRODUCTION

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To explore the issues of indigenous land in Brazil and the historical struggle between its de facto and de jure occupation, I have focused my ethnographic research on one indigenous community in particular to complement historical sources. This research with the Xukuru do Ororubá yielded insight into the nuanced ways in which a community can resist sociopolitical persecution and marginalization, engaging in “identity-based” mobilization rather than “class-based” (French 2). In evaluating their projects in sustainability, it is possible to see how a community reframes their collective identity if one listens to the discourse behind their projects. And by evaluating this discourse, it is possible to understand the significance of a well-organized and well-defined cultural identity in the struggle to protect their human rights and survival. These projects of sustainability and the social organization and process behind them serve to define the physical boundaries of their land as well as the boundaries of their indigenous identity.

This study seeks to provide a basis for understanding the relationship between indigenous identity, ancestral land, and socio-politics in Brazil. The purposes of my analysis are two-fold: to examine the practices by which contemporary indigenous communities in Brazil physically reclaim their land from cattle ranchers and the impact of these practices on their self-representation,

ideology, and social discourse. My discussion focuses on the Xukuru do Ororubá who have spent the past decade organizing their members and transforming their territory into a “sustainable” community in an effort to understand how a more developed subjectivity resists their historic marginalization by hegemonic social and cultural discourse and perception.

During the course of my research, I have found that cultural heritage is a waning feature of Brazilian identity as it develops rapidly into a globalized country. Brazilian ideologies of cultural heritage have assigned the native population a significant role in the nationalist identity. But despite public proclamations of fraternity with Brazil's original inhabitants, the hegemonic perception of the native population has been based on their objectification and the marginalization of their agency.

Chapter 1 provides a basis for understanding the contemporary role of the indigenous population in Brazilian society by examining it in a historical and political context. Analysis of the impact of conquest, slavery, and religious conversion on the indigenous population is essential to understanding contemporary patterns of racism, violence, and social stratification. Through a study of the history of the relations between the indigenous population and the Brazilian polity imposed upon their territories, this chapter provides an overview of cultural politics from colonization to the 1991 Constitutional Decree guaranteeing their rights and allowing for the demarcation of ancestral lands.

Chapter 2 examines the Xukuru do Ororubá community and their struggle with local cattle ranchers and municipal government officials as they move from peasant-farming and paying rent to *fazendeiros* (ranchers or plantation owners) to legally occupying 95% of their demarcated territory. In the 1990s, a leader named Xicão Xukuru emerged to denounce the denial of rights to their ancestral land and mobilize the organization of the Xukuru people to reclaim their legal territory from the *fazendeiros*. Xicão was consequently assassinated in 1998. In light of his legacy, the Xukuru began to develop projects incorporating sustainable techniques and continued to learn and reintegrate their traditional rituals to restore their cultural heritage and indigenous identity in the community.

The organization of indigenous Xukuru and non-indigenous Xukuru advocates spearheading these projects (the “Jupago” team) for the past decade will be discussed in Chapter 3. This chapter examines the goals of the organization in an effort to analyze how and why it promotes a new subjectivity for the Xukuru through a process called “legalizing identity”. My analysis seeks to underscore the “posttraditionality” in this process and looks for a relationship between social and political power and a well-defined cultural identity. This chapter will also review the “actions” that Jupago promotes for 2010: I argue that the physical reclamation of their land by way of organic farming and other projects in sustainability are an emblem of their indigeneity and land ownership.

## CHAPTER ONE

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### Toward a Conceptualization of Indigenous Brazilians

“It was a daring move, one of the earliest European colonial adventures, made in a wild forested country that contained no obvious treasures or advanced civilisations. Brazil had no known gold or silver, and no cities and temples to be looted. Its only wealth was limitless land, and innumerable natives who might be made to farm it.”

-John Hemming, *Red Gold: The Conquest of Brazilian Indians*

## **Colonization and Native Brazilians**

When Portugal “discovered” Brazil in 1500, the territory was already comprised of a native population in the millions, divided among thousands of tribes and language groups. The first generation of Portuguese colonists existed genially with the native community by bartering trade goods such as metal tools for brazilwood, but that relationship degenerated into slavery as the Portuguese decided to make permanent settlements in the new world.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, epidemics caused by imported diseases soon contributed to the rapid deterioration of the indigenous population, so the Portuguese began importing African slaves in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

King Sebastian I ordered that the Brazilian Indians should not be used for slavery, but slavery of the natives wasn't officially abolished for another two centuries. Even with official exemption from slavery, it can be argued that the native population fell victim to de facto slavery, as their ancestral lands had been obtained by self-proclaimed landowners and their marginalized position in social stratification and sociopolitical influence was too meager to enable them regain control of them.

Incidentally, the native population of Brazil had Jesuit missionaries advocating for their protection among even the first fleets of Portuguese in the

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<sup>1</sup>Hemming, John (1978). *Red Gold: The Conquest of the Brazilian Indians, 1500-1760*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Chapter One.

16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup>. The Society of Jesus had just been founded in Spain in 1539 and it found a sympathetic home in Portugal, a Catholic country. As a militant monastic order, the Jesuits pledged to be internationally active; in this way, they found their mission compatible with the Portuguese trans-Atlantic mission. Just over a decade after the Society of Jesus was founded, it had established its first foreign province in Brazil.

Mass conversions to Christianity took place among the indigenous society. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with colonization of Brazil encroaching further inland toward the valuable land of the Amazon, settlers demanded the Indians' knowledge of the terrain and used them as slave labor; and the Jesuits' ability to protect them from slavery had crippled under the Kings of Portugal and Spain, who revoked political power from the Society in Brazil because they were seen as interfering with progress. They would ultimately banish them from Brazil in 1760.

### **Northeastern Natives**

In the *sertão*, the dry backland region of the Northeast, colonists and the native population of the Atlantic region have a long history of contact and miscegenation because the colonists landed there in 1500. This is compelling when studying contemporary indigenous identity politics based on this blurring of cultural boundaries. The region is important when analyzing protective legislation and its abuses among its indigenous population because, as Jan Hoffman French maintains in *Legalizing Identities*, “the very [Roman Catholic] Church that

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<sup>2</sup> Hemming, John (1978). *Red Gold: The Conquest of the Brazilian Indians, 1500-1760*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Chapter Five.

for almost 500 years strove to convert and assimilate Indians ... in the 1970s became the driving force behind the legalizing of [Indian] identities in the sertão.”

(17)

Little is known about the specific indigenous groups of the sertão region before the 18th century as the colonists and missionaries failed to identify the individual societies among the population, referring to them as *Tupi* (coastal) and *Tapuia* (further inland); according to Romance writer José de Alencar in his seminal novel *Iracema* (whose mise-en-scène is the 17<sup>th</sup> c.), “Tapuia means barbaric, enemy.” They inhabited what today, as defined by the IBGE (Brazilian Geography and Statistics Institute), is the territory that includes the states of Maranhão, Piauí, Ceará, Rio Grande do Norte, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Alagoas, Sergipe, and Bahia, and the Fernando de Noronha Island territory (Andrade 23-24) The northeastern region is divided into the *Zona da Mata*, or Rainforest Zone, located on the humid eastern littoral. This narrow coastal plain, used for the cultivation of sugarcane for centuries as well as coffee production in the late nineteenth century, has dwindled and little of the forest remains today. The transitional zone between the *Zona da Mata* and *sertão* is known as the *agreste*, a mostly hilly and semi-humid region used for farming.

In the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the northeast began to see a steady influx of colonists who expelled the Jesuit missionaries who had been there since the beginning of the century and occupied the land for cattle raising, building their *fazendas* along the rivers. A precious resource in the arid and often rainless

northeast, the riverbanks became a stage for conflict between the colonists and natives, and the “Guerra dos Bárbaros (War of the Barbarians)” ensued. In 1692, King Pedro II issued the first “Tratado de Paz (Treaty of Peace)” in the history of Brazil to quell these uprisings so that expansion of cattle breeding in the region could continue and most likely was accepted by the natives because of their dwindling numbers due to drought, slavery, and loss of villages. According to Pires in *Guerra dos Bárbaros*, it was important to secure the territory for the following reasons: the remote land would be a good location to cultivate sugarcane (the most lucrative industry for the dominant class) and experiment with new inventions, the expansiveness was beneficial for cattle raising, and the state saw it as a guarantee in security for the colony against foreign attacks (39-40).

Despite the treaty, the war continued for the next few decades in response to the continuing occupation and oppression of the natives. Through the Royal Charter of 1696, inhabitants of São Paulo were granted administrative privileges over free Indians who were obligated to work and receive a paltry salary, but in turn the Resolution of January 11, 1701 – addressed to the governor of Pernambuco – permitted the buying and selling of natives only in public markets (sales in the hinterlands were to be performed in the presence of a judge). *Língua geral*, the form of Tupi language used by missionaries, was prohibited in 1727 and Portuguese was commanded to be taught in all towns and villages. By 1755, however, the Law of Liberty was promulgated; it was then redefined in

1757 as the Directorate, and while it demarcated native lands, it withdrew their Jesuit advocates and promoted agricultural production. And finally, the Royal Charter of 1798 abolished the Directorate, which “institutes a paternalistic master-servant relationship between whites and the Indians in their service; reinstates the notion of defensive wars; promotes the Indian to condition of orphan; allows free settlement of whites on Indian lands.”

After two and a half centuries of laws and treaties drawn over freedom versus slavery – which were always fraught with “loopholes for the persecution, captivity, dispossession, and relocations of Indians” (Gomes 59) – various royal charters in the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century declared “offensive wars against Botocudo, Coroado, and Guerén Indians, granting concessions to those who organize their own armed parties, and include the rights to enslave prisoners for periods ranging from ten to fifteen years.<sup>3</sup> According to Gomes, the “most determinant component in the imperial Indian policy” was the 1850 Law of the Lands which promoted large estates and landowners rather than small land ownership (72). Because the law declared that all property claims be registered in public land registrar offices, requiring access to lawyers and capital, Indians villages were de-legitimized. And in 1860, all land fell under the jurisdiction of the nascent Ministry of Agriculture which was notoriously run by slave and plantation owners.

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<sup>3</sup> Gomes, Mecio P. (2000). *The Indians and Brazil*. University Press of Florida.

## The Emergence of Indian Protection Agencies

The native population had dwindled to less than half a million by the time the republican regime emerged at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. And with the influx of European immigrants at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, violent conflict was once again fomented between the colonists and natives, and the hiring of *bugreiros* (professional Indian killers) emerged to pave way for the immigrants' progress in Brazil. Articles began to be published exposing the inhumane treatment and policy toward the native population, such as that of the German-born director of São Paulo's Paulista Natural Museum who argued that the path to modernity and progress would only be achieved after their extermination. In 1910, as a response to the indignation arising from the elite and educated class at the bad reputation Brazil was developing, the federal government created the *Serviço de Proteção aos Índios* agency (Indian Protection Service), known as SPI.

To make a case for their role as a “protective regime”, the SPI made an appeal to Congress to officially classify all Indians as “relatively capable or competent”. They were legally “classed in the same category as minors and married women” in the Civil Code of 1916. (Hemming 2003: 47) The agency's intentions and unflagging efforts to raise the awareness about the native population, dispel their perceived barbarism, and provide them with the economic and social means to evolve “toward a superior level of culture, and from there be fully integrated into the nation” (Gomes 78) were ideological, but its

effectiveness was lacking due to the deficiency of the Brazilian state and its administrators. Even worse were the charges of SPI employees “participating in acts of corruption, land sales, and inhuman practices” and the photos published in 1965 (a year after the military's coup d'état) of the Indian massacre led by SPI employees in Mato Grosso in 1963 (Gomes 82).

Consequently, the military abolished the SPI and created the *Fundação Nacional do Índio* (National Indian Foundation), or FUNAI, in 1967. Under the Indian Statute, enacted in 1973, Indians were decreed “to be a legal minor in age and only 'relatively capable' of his or her acts, thus needing to be under the guardianship of the state” (Gomes 84) Now they were to be represented by FUNAI, which was controlled by the Ministry of the Interior. Their purported goal was to demarcate indigenous land yet fully integrate the Indians as Brazilian citizens; but their underlying desire seems to have been the purchase and exploitation of native land – leaving the Indians “emancipated” under the Indian Emancipation Project, yet impoverished and landless. In her article in *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, Sara Johnson-Steffey accuses the policy of treating the Indians as “wards of the state who cannot fend for themselves”. She continues:

According to the statute, tribes must get permission from FUNAI for everything from constructing roads, to selling mahogany seeds gathered in the forest, to importing cattle onto their land. Funds from the sales of forest produce or development project reimbursements are kept in accounts controlled by FUNAI. In almost every aspect of the policy, indigenous people are treated as

if they are incapable of making choices to determine their own future.

The military regime backed off of this emancipation project following media and public censure. FUNAI's demarcation process subsequently went through various productive phases in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: under pressure from young indigenists between 1975-79 as the regime gave way to civilian government and when the indigenists returned in 1984-85, and when President Collor de Mello wanted a positive image and international prestige at the 1992 World Conference on the Environment and Development. FUNAI lost the autonomy and exclusive capacity to demarcate indigenous land in 1983, the task being transferred to “a board made up of representatives from several ministries – such as the agriculture, land reform, interior, and planning – as well as the National Security Council” (Gomes 87) who were then lobbied by anti-Indian agrarian, political and military interests.

Since the 1990s, Gomes argues, “FUNAI has been led by personnel who are highly experienced and qualified to work with Indians, [but] they have had their autonomy restricted and have been impotent in the face of governmental decisions emanating from national security guidelines and priorities ... FUNAI thus has been losing the political substance that the Statute of the Indian had conferred upon it ... At present the Indian agency is subordinated to the Ministry of Justice, but instead of gaining in administrative autonomy it is rather losing the

prerogatives it once had in the matter of defining Indian lands and how to demarcate them” (97).

In 1991, Brazil's democratic government drafted an amendment to its Constitution; “Decree 22/91” guaranteed Brazilian Indians' permanent rights to land traditionally occupied by them (requiring that all these lands be demarcated by 1993), and Indians living in demarcated areas would have the right to live free from outside interference and according to their own customs and laws. But by 1993, “Decree 22” was being challenged as unconstitutional in Brazil's Supreme Court. It was being considered “flawed” because it did not give competing interests the “right to contest” -- a right guaranteed by the country's constitution<sup>4</sup>. President Cardoso, under pressure from powerful forest profiteers and members of his own government, replaced it with a new law which worked in favor of loggers, miners, ranchers and other business interests in Brazil who were opposed to demarcation. Signed in 1996, “Decree 1775” allowed state governments and businesses to contest the jurisdiction of the indigenous land.

More than 1,000 retroactive claims were made by corporations, landowners, and government entities such as the Brazilian Environment Protection Agency, most of these being dismissed in court. Once again, this legal system perpetuated the concept of indigenous peoples as incompetent – they were forced to “make claims to the FUNAI border reviewers stating why an area

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<sup>4</sup> O'Meara, Molly. “Brazil's Genocide Decree”. *World Watch*. Volume 9, n. 5 (Sept-Oct 1996).

of land is their native territory”, but they were not invited to participate in court proceedings.<sup>5</sup>

### **Non-Governmental Advocacy**

The Brazilian government's hands-off stance of indigenous relations has paved the way for alliances between the Indians and non-governmental organizations to develop relationships based on advocacy.

Roman Catholicism has been Brazil's main religion since the beginning of the 16th century. Even after Brazil's independence from Portugal, with its first constitution introducing freedom of religion in 1824, Catholicism was kept as the official religion. The subsequent imperial government even paid a salary to Catholic priests and influenced the appointment of bishops, and the Catholic Church would support the ensuing military regimes into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But in 1952, bishop Dom Helder Câmara founded the *Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil* (National Conference of Brazilian Bishops), or CNBB). Dom Helder had studied the teachings of the French Catholic and humanist philosopher Jacques Maritain, who had influenced a generation of Brazilian clergymen and intellectuals to shift to the left and became proponents of “liberation theology”, emphasizing political activism by Christians for justice against human rights, poverty, and oppression. The conference increased bishops' concern for social and economic problems, and in the 1970's some began to criticize the military regime's methods of anti-democratic rule.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Johnson-Steffey, Sara. “Still Waiting”. *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, Fall 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Serbin, Kenneth (1999). Faith, Power, and the Poor. *Christian Century*.

In 1972, this progressive contingent of bishops created the *Conselho Indigenista Missionário* (Missionary Indigenist Council), or CIMI, with an intention to apply liberation theology to native Brazilian groups who had been historically marginalized from society. Jan Hoffman French sees CIMI as “not just a political expression of the bishops’ interest in the subaltern classes ... it can also be seen as the implementation of a longer-standing theological commitment of the Catholic Church to a precapitalist, communal sensibility” (37). CIMI based its missionary work on an anthropological-like “dialogue with the indigenous cultures” and believed that “to learn about these cultures is important in order to be able to respect these cultures”. These missionaries lived with the tribes in order to understand their struggles and assess their needs, and from this total immersion learned the Indians’ fundamental plight: rights to their ancestral lands.<sup>7</sup>

CIMI, along with coalitions and indigenous-led groups such as Coordination of the Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazonia, the Brazilian Anthropology Association, the Pro-Yanomami Commission, the Center of Indigenist Work, and the Instituto Socioambiental (ISA) have tried to take advantage of the progressive Lula da Silva administration in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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<sup>7</sup> CIMI’s website: <http://www.cimi.org.br/?system=news&eid=336>

## **Conclusion**

An analysis of the history of the indigenous population from colonization to the present reveals the racist discourse behind both their social and legalized discrimination and marginalization through land policy and legislation. A comprehensive understanding of the turbulent relationship between Brazil's native population, its colonists, and its land appropriation provides a basis for analyzing contemporary indigenous ideologies and identity politics.

## CHAPTER TWO

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### **The Socio-Political Struggle of the Xukurú do Ororuba**

“The name of our tribe is Xukuru do Ororubá. The name reflects the respect Indians have for nature. Ororubá is a type of wood. Xukuru is a bird. Xukuru do Ororubá: the respect Indians have for nature. For us, the earth is our mother. If she is our mother – who gives us everything we need to live – then she must be cared for and preserved. The earth sustains all living beings... [it] is not an object for speculation.”

-Xicão Xukuru

CIMI officially defines their objective as the following:

Driven by our faith in the gospel of life, justice and solidarity and faced with the aggressions of the neo-liberal model, we decided to intensify our support and presence with indigenous peoples, communities and organizations and intervene in Brazilian society as their allies, strengthening the process of autonomy of these people in the construction of an alternative, multiethnic, popular and democratic project.<sup>8</sup>

There are hundreds of CIMI members, both religious and secular, working with the Indians who are divided into smaller teams and supported by regional offices. They are assisted by a National Secretariat located in Brasília, who helps with “methodological, political, legal, theological and anthropological matters”. There is also a directorship composed of the eleven coordinators of the regional offices and a President by CNBB.

Working in conjunction with the Catholic Church, CIMI aims to unify missionary work with the indigenous people by intervening in legal, executive, and judicial acts and by rousing social movements to show solidarity with indigenous issues. Today, CIMI's first priority, they state, “is to support the fight to recuperate, demarcate and guarantee the completeness of the indigenous territories because land is of the utmost significance to the Indians' existence”.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.cimi.org.br/?system=news&eid=336> retrieved from www.cimi.org.br

## Land Recovery by the Xukuru do Ororubá

Out of the approximately 250 indigenous groups that CIMI assists, this paper focuses on one in particular. The Xukuru do Ororubá, native to the low mountain region in Pernambuco's *agreste*, are significant in this case because, as historian John Hemming describes<sup>9</sup>, even though they are “heavily acculturated ... these people passionately wish to retain their Indianness” (597). For generations, the Xukuru existed as subsistence peasant-farmers, “paying rent to *fazendeiros* for land of which they themselves were the traditional owners.”

The conflict over the rights to their territory came to a head in the late 1980s, when the arid Xukuru land was being threatened by a large farming-livestock ranch that was being supported by a regional development agency. A 1989 letter signed by six Xukuru chiefs implores FUNAI for assistance:

Our community wants the authorities to take steps to disarm the fazendeiros, who say that they are prepared to confront us. We do not wish to take land from anyone, but we want FUNAI to demarcate our area, which is the oldest in Pernambuco but [legally] the most ill-defined. We are frightened. We no longer feel safe to walk alone but are obliged to go in groups, even for recreation ... We beg the authorities to care for us Indians, because we have no land for planting. We are true men only when we have broad beans, manioc beiju, and maize to eat. We are dying of hunger, and demand action from the authorities.

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<sup>9</sup> Hemming, John. (2003). *Die if You Must*. London: MacMillan.

As a result, FUNAI identified 104 square miles as the Xukuru reserve in March 1989 and demarcated in 1991; however, nothing was done to remove the 1,000 or so non-indigenous squatters (both *fazendeiros* and small farm owners) who had settled the land. FUNAI's lack of proactivity, CIMI's "increased valorization of a communal ethos in relation to land occupation" (French 38), and the Xukuru's desire to secure their heritage and reclaim their ancestral land led to their partnership in this cause. Moreover, the principal author of the FUNAI missive emerged as a dynamic and vocal leader during this conflict: *Cacique* (Chief) Francisco de Assis Araújo, known as Xicão.

The Xukuru occupied less than a sixth of their demarcated territory. After mediation between the squatters, Xukuru, and CIMI activists in the early 1990s failed, the Indians and their advocates began protests in the form of organized *retomadas* or *retornados* (retakings), turning their reoccupation initiative into "a wide and integrated movement".<sup>10</sup> In a step toward reclaiming not only their land but their indigenous ancestry, Xicão encouraged the occupation of sacred spaces first. When this failed to expel the squatters, in 1992 Xicão "led 500 Xukuru bearing bows and arrows and agricultural tools as a means of defense to occupy the largest invading *fazenda*" (Hemming 2003: 598). After six months, this *retomada* turned violent when the shaman's son was shot by the *fazendeiro*, and the lawyer who had defended the Xukuru was ambushed and shot by as many as five men.

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<sup>10</sup> "Socio-Political Organization of the Xukuru People". (2004). Harvard Kennedy School Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation.

*Retomadas* and retaliated violence continued – as did Xicão's political campaign as the elected President of the Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North-East to clear their demarcated land of non-indigenous farmers. However, his attempts were thwarted by Decree 1775 – the legislation allowing the contestation of indigenous land. According to Hemming, “[more] claims were launched within the reserve [than] against any other tribe in Brazil”, and “the Xukuru indigenous area was withdrawn at the last minute from a group of reserves about to be registered by Presidential signature.” Perhaps this is because Cardoso's Vice President Marco Maciel's “relatives were said to have interests in the Xukuru area.” (598-9).

Xicão was assassinated in 1998 by a henchman on behalf of a local landowner.

### **Attention to the Struggle**

Xicão's political activity attracted the attention from non-governmental organizations such as the Centro de Cultura Luiz Freire (CCLF). The CCLF began in Olinda in 1972 during the military dictatorship by a congregation of people who dedicated themselves to cultural activities and community development in the face of rigid authoritarian rule. They advocated for the re-democratization process through reinforcing populist organizations. Funded today by the Ford Foundation, Save the Children, the Kellogg Foundation, and Oxfam Novib among others, CCLF's objective is to promote human rights development in urban and rural communities, prioritizing indigenous

communities. Their mission is to involve citizens in democratization through educative and cultural processes. To achieve this goal, they created the first “television of the street” program in Latin America, TV VIVA.<sup>11</sup>

## **TV VIVA**

TV VIVA is the main project of CCLF's Communication Program whose purpose is to disseminate cultural information from the words and actions of populist organizations through video. Xicão was murdered during the filming of a documentary on the Xukuru's land struggle, yet the filmmakers had already captured his dedication and commitment to the occupation of their ancestral land. More importantly, they captured the construction of a discourse. Through his language, it is evident that he was aware of the significance of a well-defined ideological argument based on indigenous identity.

The documentary, released the year of his murder, underscores the urgency of the situation especially with the footage in which Xicão addresses the Xukuru:

“You know that there has been a threat on my life. But I didn't respond with violence. I filed a report with the federal police and with FUNAI in Recife, and they didn't resolve the situation. Without a doubt, there are politicians and powerful people involved. If I'm killed they [the authorities] will say nobody knows who the

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.tvviva.org.br/>

murderer was. If that's my fate, given by Mother Nature and God, then I'm ready. I won't back down. I also won't carry with me any hatred for anyone.”

The film shows the genesis of their indigenous mobilization, their need for organization:

“I've been working with the tribe's medicine man and elders to regain the cultural traditions left by our ancestors that were lost due to the influence of the white man. We began to organize around common needs. Our common needs and oppression caused us to organize. We know that to organize we need the leadership of the elders who were the first to be massacred and persecuted for their land. That persecution never ended. It occurred to us that we are united through our rituals... We realized this was a powerful way to become more united ... Toré [a sacred ritual dance] is our religion that has given us the gift to understand nature. It shows us the ways we can develop our struggle and helps us to unify. Through Toré we can unify our people and non-Indian people as well. When society recognizes and respects our identity, culture, and traditions, they begin to respect and support our fight for our right to the land.”

-Cacique Xicão

It also illustrates the how the struggle comes to be defined by the Xukuru:

“The earth is not something to buy and sell. We know that God didn't create the earth for people to buy and sell it... But landowners, farmers, loggers, and gold-miners see things differently. Deforest, make money, sell land, raise cattle, exploit the poor, let them die

of hunger. Our problems today are the result of land exploitation... We must reclaim our culture ... To Indians, the forest represents the saints and the spirits. If we don't fight for this land, if we depend on people who don't support our cause as Indians, in the future we will disappear. This mobilization around land, education, and health will enable us in the future when the elders have passed away. Our concern is not about the present, but about the future: our spiritual journey.”

Finally, it documents the impression that Xicão made on the community who would continue to develop and strengthen their indigenous identity in the fight for their land recovery:

“We are all feeling pain. But we won't give up the fight. He was silenced. But the Xukuru will keep communicating and fighting for our land. He left us. Tragically, they took his life, but he's still among us giving us strength to fight. The fight won't end... Receive your son, Mother Nature. He won't be buried; he will be planted so that from him new warriors will be born so that our fight won't stop, my Mother Nature.”

-Dona Zunilda, Xicão's Widow

## **Xukuru Today: The Fight and Persecution Continues**

Xicão's son, Marcos Luidson de Araújo, was elected *cacique* in 2000 and organized the *Associação da Comunidade de Indígena Xukuru do Ororubá* (Association of the Xukuru do Ororubá Indigenous Community) whose mission is to

continue the fight for the reclamation of their ancestral land, their cultural patrimony, yet has fortified the ideological argument adding discourse about a better quality of life through education and health. In addition to the *Conselho de Lideranças* (Council of Leaders) and *Conselho de Professores* (Council of Professors) Xicão formed in 1997, Marcos created the *Conselho de Saúde* (Council of Health) in 2001.

The tradition of their persecution also continues. In 2003, two unarmed Xukuru youths were killed when trying to protect Marcos from an assassination attempt on Xukuru land. In immediate retaliation, certain families were expelled from the land who were suspected to be associated with the assassin. The Federal police and the Federal Prosecutor in Pernambuco identified the killer, but Marcos and 34 other Xukuru leaders were indicted on charges of destruction and inciting violence; others involved in the assault were exonerated for acting in defense of the assassin. Marcos and 30 leaders were convicted, spending 1 to 10 years in prison.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Sourced from CIMI's website. "Campaign Against the Criminalization of the Xukuru People." (June 4, 2009 entry)

While NGOs and human rights organizations lobby for the re-investigation of his case, Marcia Mikulak, Professor of Anthropology at University of North Dakota, currently conducts “social-action research with Marcos, other tribal leaders, and several non-governmental organizations to develop clear guidelines for identifying culturally important human rights abuses experienced by the Xukuru”<sup>13</sup>. In an interview with a *latifundiário* (*fazenda* proprietor) “Mr. X”, Mikulak uncovers deep-seated prejudice and identity issues at the heart of the contemporary socio-political struggle:

“He told me his family land holdings went all the way back to the great latifúndio period, and that the land they owned was extensive. His land, lost to the indigenous Xukuru through governmental land demarcation due to extensive activism through a process of *retornado* (retaking of land by indigenous peoples who camp on and refuse to leave lands they identify as traditional tribal territories), was productive and well cared for. Cattle were raised for beef and milk production, and when the Xukuru emerged in the early 1980s, declaring themselves to be an indigenous tribe, the problems began to mount up for him. He said that Xicão Xukuru, the assassinated Xukuru chief and father of Cacique Marcos Xukuru, was not an Indian. He had green eyes, like a snake, and he was dark skinned like most of the men from the sertão. According to Mr. X and his fellow

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.und.edu/spotlights/marciamikulak.html>

land owners (and politicians), it was Xicão Xukuru who fabricated the Xukuru tribe, and hired a well-known lawyer to legally create their indigenous status. Once the tribe was designated as real and living by the Brazilian government, then the processes of land demarcation could begin. Xicão Xukuru, according to Mr. X was a handsome man with a lot of charisma, but he was not an Indian. According to Mr. X, the Xukuru, like all indigenous peoples, are corrupt and live in groups that are constantly engaged in in-fighting amongst themselves. I was told to not trust any of them, and to be very careful, because it was dangerous business being in close contact with them. Here's why – according to Mr. X, the Xukuru were responsible for creating the riot that occurred in 2003 when the attempted assassination of Cacique Marcos occurred. In fact, the attempt on Marcos' life was not by a hired assassin, but by one of his own people, and the attempted murder was based on a long-standing dispute between relatives. Indeed, according to Mr. X, the Xukuru people are divided about their leader. According to Mr. X, the majority of the Xukuru do not have confidence in their Cacique. Again, according to Mr. X, Marcos has the protection of hired thugs (Military Police) who accompany him everywhere, and he flaunts his assumed power whenever he comes into town. Apparently, the Xukuru were instigated, by Marcos, to create the riot in the city of Pesqueira after the 'false' assassination attempt on his life, breaking windows, burning buildings, and trashing a large section of the city. According to Mr. X, it was Marcos who was responsible for this violence... and many claims for land re-demarcation by Indians are false, and the lands are left undeveloped

and unproductive when they have legal custody of their land. Hey, he said, the Xukuru didn't even know they were Indians until Xicão Xukuru told them they were!<sup>14</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Cultural identification is more complex than physical appearance or racial identification. Mr. X's skepticism about the Xukuru's indigenous heritage based on such factors as green eyes and dark skin both reflects the hegemonic idea of what a “real” Indian should look like and recalls the 'Indicators of Indian Identity' proposed by FUNAI in 1981 – a racist form of identity classification including characteristics like “undesirable biological, psychic and cultural characteristics... mongolian or sacral patch... form or profile of the nose” (Williams 137). Mr. X's accusation that the Xukuru are an ad hoc tribe whose indigenous identity is a means to an end is problematic in two ways: it denies the Xukuru the agency to demand human rights protection and the freedom of cultural identification, and it reinforces that racial stereotypes remain a formidable and egregious force in Brazilian socio-politics.

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<sup>14</sup> From her blog *Xukuru Human Rights* entry “View from the Latifundista”. October 6, 2009.

The continued pattern of oppression, persecution, and marginalization force the Xukuru to evaluate their cohesiveness as a community and organize accordingly into a unified entity. This organization is based on their self-identification with – and commitment to – the symbiotic relationship between the preservation of their culture and sustainability of their land. The following chapter will look at how the Xukuru develop and organize their social identity through a process anthropologist French calls “legalizing identity ... how cultural practices, legal provisions, and identity formation are interrelated” (French xiii).

## CHAPTER THREE

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### **Organizing Indigeneity: Jupago and their “Actions”**

“In terms of our team, it is important to locate us within a broader scenario. The old Chiefs did not have the same conviction about the fight for the land that the *pajé* (medicine man) had. The Chief that would bring up this concept of a territorial mission – of guarding our motherland here in the mountains – appeared in the form of Cacique Xicão in 1984 or 1986 when he ate the fruit of this traumatic existence [disconnected from the Xukuru land] that many northeasterners had left behind. They left Pesqueira, they left Pernambuco to go to São Paulo in search of a means of survival. In this era, Xicão had a complex medical emergency; he had developed an ulcer, and the doctors told him he would die if they didn't operate. The illness was very advanced. But when the *pajé* performed a ritual on him, he discovered that the illness was not only physical, it was also spiritual. Nature has a forceful hand, but he is a strong warrior. In the midst of this mystical and religious universe and this complex illness, Cacique Xicão recovered and began to organize the fight for the land which was under totally non-indian proprietorship.”

-Ângelo Bueno: CIMI, member of Jupago, and  
Husband of Xicão's daughter

In her ethnographic study in the late 1990s of the Xocó indigenous community in the northeastern state of Sergipe, Jan Hoffman French examines how they “constructed” their ethnoracial identity in order to claim land rights after taking a cue from their darker-skinned neighbors, the Mocambo, who “won government recognition as a community descended from *quilombo* (fugitive slaves) ... as well as the title to [their] land” through racially-based political campaigns (xiv). She argues that “‘authenticity’ is not a definitional requisite of identity”, and “the notion that race and ethnicity [as] social constructions *enhanced* rather than *undermined* [their] claims of difference” (xv). She concludes:

The theory of legalizing identity reveals a creative process that evokes attachment to place, while at the same time shows how the play of cultural reconfiguration combines with the work of learning what to do with the rights granted and then won.

(185)

My research with the Xukuru similarly examines their creative process in interpreting cultural patrimony and using cultural reconfiguration as a political tool. Yet, rather than “learning what to do with the rights granted and then won”, the Xukuru must learn what to do when those rights are granted and then ignored.

## “Posttraditional” Indians

The Xukuru consist of approximately 10,360 people (2,167 families), spread out through 24 *aldeias* (villages) and 32-40 communities, who are situated on 27,555 hectares [68,061 acres] in the mountains above Pesqueira, Pernambuco- a town of 60,000. One hundred fifty miles inland from Recife, the territory lies in the *agreste* region known for its farming and cattle-ranching despite ample rainfall (*agreste* can be translated as “rural”, “rustic”, “uncultivated”, “rough”).

According to Ângelo Bueno, a CIMI missionary who has lived with the Xukuru since the mid-1990s and is the husband of one of Xicão's daughters, many Xukuru are drawn to “the myth of the *vaqueiro* (cowboy).” Because their territory has been occupied by *fazendeiros* since the colonization of Brazil, the Xukuru “have been observing the *vaqueiro* profession, and they dream of their horses, cattle, their animals”. In 2002, after two decades of fighting to regain their constitutionally demarcated land from *fazendeiros*, the Xukuru finally occupied 95% of their territory. Therefore, their “new challenge,” he says, “is to occupy it in what way, with what attitude?”

“It is important to democratize the opportunities for all Xukuru residing in this territory, because many are caught up in the idea of cattle-ranching,” Ângelo

maintains. He also explains that the Xukuru today have a discourse about ancestry and ecology because Cacique Xicão introduced the idea that “the subsistence and nourishment of the people, and their right to the land, relies on the protection given to Mother Nature.” Their contemporary ecological orientation is based on their belief that “the forest is the hair of the earth, the rocks are the bones of the earth, water is the blood of the earth.” And in order to “reconcile this ecological discourse with the quotidian, economics,” a team was created in 2005 to work with the cacique, the leaders, the councils, and the Xukuru people to help unify all parties on how to utilize their land and “to reconcile the necessities of today with contemporary desires.”

This team created in 2005, originally called *Projeto de Capacitação e Assessoria Técnica* – PCAT (Technical Consultation Project) but has now been shortened to *Jupago* (the wooden stick used by ancient indigenous warriors and in the toré ritual dance) – exhibits what anthropologist Jonathan Warren calls “posttraditionality”:

Posttraditionality is not simply a question of living in the ruins of tradition, for such an individual might be nontraditional or antitraditional. There is instead another component to posttraditionalism: the meanings that one ascribes to these ruins. To

be a posttraditional Indian is to regard these fragments and shadows of tradition as relevant or important, to embrace, privilege, and value them. It is to define one's indigenous ancestral roots as essential to one's identity, to make them the anchor of one's dreams and future, and to work toward their recovery... Postraditional [is] a way to describe the experience of the dramatic shattering of tradition and to refer to a longing, an orientation, that involves an active attempt to rediscover, recuperate, and reinvigorate that which has been disremembered. That is, posttraditional Indians look to tradition, or what is left of it, as a central point of reference. (21)

Posttraditionality is evident in Ângelo's explanation of their work and goals:

There is a large youth contingent here, and they are educated and seduced by the external, the urban. And many who live here don't want to assume an 'agricultural' identity; it's true some want to be teachers, doctors, engineers, filmmakers. But a farmer? They're seduced by the media: rural is ugly. They're fascinated by the hierarchy of the horse and cow; they're more valuable than agriculture. They don't have a vision of development beyond that universe. Our job used to be the reclamation of the land. Now it is to recover our ancestral knowledge. But in terms of our contemporary existence, because the Indian transformed into a vaqueiro – the idea now is that the vaqueiro will return to rediscover the Indian. But it doesn't work to rediscover the romanticized, folkloric Indian: over there, living in the forest,

secluded from civilization! The fact is, we're living in a contemporary world – digital, technological. But it's necessary to prioritize nature and your vicinity. We help the Xukuru to perceive that the issue here isn't just based on ethnicity; it's a matter of ecological principles and community. Not to fall into the modern world, the postmodern world, a competitive world that's destroying the ecosystem. This is the central goal of the Jupago team: to work with this.

Jupago strives to not only ask these theoretical questions but find practical solutions with long-term results: to “administer discipline of the territory.”

Theoretically, “it is their right to recuperate the land and therefore their responsibility to restore it and rehabilitate it”; and in all practicality, Ângelo knows that “outsiders like [myself] won't go there to see the Xukuru tending to cattle and fazendeiros cutting down the forest ... they want to see Indians in a more traditional sense.”

Attention draws advocacy and assistance; so with disciplined and organized systems of expressing their cultural identity, the Xukuru seek to attract sympathetic parties with social and political mechanisms of protection from those that still threaten their land occupation and cultural sustainability. They strive to be “autonomous from the municipality that still disputes the ancestral land demarcations ... because it is the families of the executive and administrative

bodies of the municipal government in Pesqueira who were the proprietors of the indigenous land.”

### **Jupago's “Actions”**

Jupago consists of the three councils (Leaders, Professors and Health), Jupago also includes CIMI members such as Ângelo Bueno and Cacique Marcos who all operate on a volunteer basis. Jupago's role is to “contribute to the process of organization and fortification of the Xukuru in a way that will maximize the use and protection of their natural resources” because “traditional production in Brazil, and by man in general, destroys more than it produces.” They want to help administer the Xukuru producers to safely operate with respect to the land, meanwhile creating a sustainable community. They also strive to work with freelance experts in fields such as anthropology and law to create, as Ângelo explains, “solidarity with outsiders who will divulge information about the Xukuru to the world and who will help defend them against the criminalization of the Indian” in land disputes.

Their “actions” for 2010 were launched at the January 5th meeting of *Associação da Comunidade de Indígena Xukuru do Ororubá* and are organized into four areas: pedagogical, political, professional, and subjective.

## Pedagogical Actions

The pedagogical actions involve the research and dissemination of knowledge about the land and their culture especially to the Xukuru youth. They have enlisted the Council of Professors and local artisans to incorporate traditional culinary and craft instruction into the curriculum of the 42 elementary schools and one high school. A limited knowledge of the traditional language rested with the medicine man, Pajé Zequinha, who has passed the handful of key words and phrases on to the community. For example, “Good Morning” (“Udimem”), “Good Afternoon” (“Tartaramem”), “money” (“intaia”), “chief” (“pajuru”), “chief’s wife” (“sacarema”), “indian” (“xenute”), “to eat” (“ucri”), and “hunger” (“xuraqui”) are taught in elementary school.

Alongside the typical beans and spaghetti, they will add root vegetables such as *inhame*, *cará* and *batata doce* into school lunches. School gardens will be built in which they will propagate herbs and plants found on the land which can be used in a variety of ways. For example, when its oils are mixed with water the *nim* plant is a natural pesticide, repelling lice and mosquitoes on humans and animals, thus eliminating the need for chemical insect repellent. The *moringa* plant is a good source of calcium and is believed to be good for vision. Plants such as *durcema*,

*cabucofo*, and *glinicidea* are heat-resistant and good for animals to eat (providing lactose to milking cows), eliminating the need to buy animal feed in times of drought. *Umbucajá*, when grown in a line, creates a natural fence with its durable wood. And the sacred *jurema preta* plant is used for their ceremonial wine.

## **Political Actions**

Political actions come in the form of land politics. First, *Companhia Pernambucana Saneamento* – Compesa (Pernambuco Sanitation Company) furnishes the city of Pesqueira – at the foot of the Xukuru hills – with water from the Xukuru lake. Jupago would like to Compesa to pay a percentage of their revenue to the Xukuru to fund development of infrastructure on their land. The 185 km of road remains unpaved and often intransitable while both municipal and federal governments deny responsibility for its development. If Jupago guarantees royalties on their water, they plan to rent equipment and use their own manpower to pave their roads. They will also develop an irrigation system that will benefit both the farmers and a reforestation program. Another enterprise the Xukuru might earn royalties from is the *Transnordestino* train line. A long defunct Pernambuco-Piauí railway running along the Xukuru territory, the *Transnordestino* railroad is being

restored as a cargo line. Jupago hopes to encourage them to either invest in Xukuru development or offer compensation for use of the land.

The Xukuru are left on their own to conduct their political actions, as the Pernambuco FUNAI presence in Recife was eliminated in December of 2009 by the government during a restructuring of the organization (which had overseen eleven ethnic groups and over 40,000 Indians in Pernambuco)<sup>15</sup>. Indians from Pernambuco in need of FUNAI's services must contact the regional offices in Bahia or Alagoas.

### **Subjective Actions**

The principal subjective action is the development and construction of the *Xicão Xukuru Ponto de Cultura* (Cultural Center). The central question behind the center: “How can the design of a building reflect the culture of the Xukuru (spiritual beliefs, identity, and community) and reinforce their efforts to develop economic autonomy” while being integrated into a broader project of social, economic, and political development, and “teach and engage the community towards collective, sustainable, and affordable architectural solutions”. Olinda architecture firm *O Norte*'s design emphasizes the use of local and affordable materials, community participation, the use of natural resources and integration with the natural environment with the concept of flexible spaces. Jupago sees it

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<sup>15</sup> <http://merciogomes.blogspot.com/2010/01/funcionarios-da-funairecife-escrevem.html>

as a symbol of reconciliation between rural values and urban values – a community center with a sustainable sensibility which also serves as a calling card or promotional tool in a marketing sense.

For example, an amphitheater provides space for speeches, film-screenings, theater, and musical events, and its backdrop is a large community garden. Former horse stables have been converted into bunkhouses for visitors who come to share in cultural exchange. A new sewage system collects the neighborhood waste (currently without treatment) and directs it to a machine that cleans the water for irrigation and for fishing tanks (a method of “water cultivation”). A former pig corral with troughs is a communal kitchen that offers space for students and the community to clean and prepare produce for the organic farmer's market and cultural events. One room will provide audio-visual equipment and technology for the Xukuru to use to document their own subjectivities.

### **Economic Actions**

To recuperate and rehabilitate the land, the primary challenge they face is with the existing cattle and how to identify “another culture of managing animals”. In 2009, Jupago organized a collective of Xukuru to manage dairy cattle. The Association of Leaders consider this a “transitional time” in their community as they

move toward agriculture, self-sustainability and autonomy, so they want to find a middle-ground with Xukuru who continue to value the cow. There are 380 individual milk producers and 8,000 cows that collectively produce 628,000 liters per day.

Jupago received a refrigeration tank system from the *Programa Leite de Pernambuco*, a governmental program designed to increase the quality of milk provided to consumers. The milk is cleaned and processed daily, received by a milk truck, and sold to retailers in Pesqueira with profits divided among the producers.

As an alternative to raising dairy cattle, Jupago has begun to promote small-scale fish cultivation among the Xukuru who care to engage in new “footprint-conscious” economic ventures while providing sustenance for the community.

Jupago assists agricultural producers in gathering funding for their projects through Brazil’s *Programa Nacional de Fortalecimento da Agricultura Familiar*- PRONAF (National Program to Strengthen Domestic Agriculture), a federal finance program run administered by the *Ministério do Desenvolvimento Agrário* (Department of Agrarian Development)- *Secretaria da Agricultura Familiar* (Secretary of Domestic Agriculture). PRONAF offers micro-credit funds with low interest rates for investments made toward agro-industrial industry (equipment or infrastructure); Jupago has been able to secure loans from R\$2,500-6,000

(US\$1,500-3,500) for families involved in agricultural development. The primary crops cultivated are corn and beans, secondary crops are banana and yucca, and tertiary are vegetables such as peppers, lettuce, beets, arugula, and onion.

Other programs Jupago has taken advantage of to help the Xukuru develop sustainable agricultural projects are the Ministério's *Garantia Safra* (Harvest Warranty) – an adjunct of PRONAF -- and the *Terra Pronta* (Ready Earth) program offered through a partnership between the *Secretaria de Desenvolvimento Econômico, Agricultura e Meio Ambiente* (Secretary of Economic development, Agriculture, and Environment) and *Instituto Agrônomo de Pernambuco-IPA* (Agronomy Institute of Pernambuco). The individual farmer will be protected against drought if participating in *Garantia Safra*: they are paid R\$600 if they lose at least 50% of their crop due to natural calamity. The program also distributes native seeds to the farmers as well as equipment to create seed banks. Administered by the government-owned financial institution *Caixa* since 2003, this program is offered in northeastern Brazil where drought is common, and the fund is made up of contribution from the farmers (they pay a yearly fee), municipalities, states, and the Union. Meanwhile, *Terra Pronta* is a volunteer program developed by *Petrobras* (a

Brazilian multi-national energy company) that donates machinery such as tractors and plows to prepare the land for farming.

### **Farmers Market**

The Xukuru have participated in Pesqueira's semiweekly farmers market since 2006, and they are the only producers offering organic product. Twenty-five families have booths in an area under two banners that read "Feira Orgânica Xukuru do Ororubá" ("Xukuru Organic Market") and "Produtos Orgânicos Xukuru: Respeito à Mãe Terra e Responsabilidade Social" ("Organic Products from Xukuru: Respect for Mother Earth and Social Responsibility"). They sell out of all of their products: peppers, lettuce, broccoli, onion, beet, beans, passion fruit, as well as the northeastern treat "tapioca" made with manioc or yucca flour and cooked in a skillet with cheese.

An urban sensibility includes the awareness that commercialization and promotion are important elements of image-development. Therefore, Jupago encourages the Xukuru farmers to be innovative in their product presentation. One idea being discussed is to deliver their organic produce to areas in the Northeast in a roving Xukuru bus powered by biofuel.

## Conclusion

Jupago's "actions" are part of the creative process in the Xukuru's cultural reconfiguration and re-identification with their land called "legalizing identity". Their "actions" promote a new subjectivity as stewards of the land and intend to demystify the prevalent *vaqueiro* image while creating a contemporary Indian with rural and urban sensibilities. Jupago helps instill this new subjectivity with the message that, with rights to land, the Xukuru inherit the responsibility to protect it. As stewards of their ancestral land, the Xukuru are learning the value of sustainable agriculture and seeing the possibility of economic benefit from its protection and rehabilitation from the physical and social severity of the cattle-ranching industry.

The Xukuru demonstrate that the transition from being a fragmented community – disconnected from heritage and dependent upon a patron-client system – to an autonomous, self-sustainable society may be achieved through activism, community organization, a disciplined identity, and collective action.

## CONCLUSION

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This study has sought to provide a basis for understanding the work of one small indigenous advocacy group in Brazil through an analysis of historical and ethnographic data. The need for indigenous advocacy and the significance of their work must be examined within the broader cultural and ideological framework of Brazilian society and history. Analysis of the cultural reconfiguration of one indigenous community must take into account the unique historical and cultural formations out of which it develops.

Much like the ideology of “racial democracy” in Brazil – or the belief that it has escaped societal distinctions based on race and racial discrimination – a strong nationalist discourse of fraternity with the indigenous population masks a reality of their discrimination, exploitation, and marginalization. As a consequence, violence and human rights abuses against the indigenous population are overlooked by the Brazilian government. Despite legal reforms and federal programs designed to protect them, the indigenous community continues to be persecuted for its one valuable asset and central source of identity: land.

It is in the context of their new legal land rights, says Hoffman French, that indigenous communities may “[choose] to self-identify in a new way” and “[revise] worldviews and self-conceptions” but require “courage and perhaps desperation”. The cultural reconfiguration and identity reform undertaken by the

Xukuru do Ororubá in the face of continued pernicious marginalization underscore this sense of courage and desperation. Their transformation from cattle-ranchers to organic farmers indicates a connection to – and sense of stewardship of – their ancestral land. The actions they take to protect it serve to reify the boundaries of their identity and indigeneity.

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## VITA

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