



Monument to the
**AFRICAN
DIASPORA**
in Maranhão

MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SÃO LUÍS CITY HALL
and VALE CULTURAL INSTITUTE

present



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Nowadays, reflection on identity has never been so crucial. Who are we? Where did we come from? Where are we going?

The Monument to the African Diaspora in Maranhão sheds light on the importance of people from Africa for the culture and historical heritage of Maranhão and Brazil.

By contributing to reflection on a history of colonization and the displacement, violence and resistance that resulted from this process, we open up space to think about the future with new colors, faces and possibilities. Our contribution to the history of colonization and its displacements, the violence and resistance movements that resulted from this process, paves the way for thinking about the future with new colors, faces and possibilities.

Where there is culture, Vale is present.

Vale Cultural Institute



For four centuries, sub-Saharan Africa lost millions of people to human trafficking, sending them to America as slaves. The largest number of trafficked black Africans were brought to Brazil during Portuguese colonization, and slavery continued until the end of the Empire, even when it had already been banned. In terms of numbers, Maranhão was the fourth state to receive and subject human beings to slavery since the 17th century.

More than denouncing the greatest crime in human history, this monument pays homage to the black Africans in forced diaspora who contributed greatly to the construction of Maranhão without losing touch with their ancestry. Inspired by their origins and memories of Mother Africa, they resisted physical and symbolic violence, re-signifying their heritage and identities, creating significant territories that explain our cultural and religious diversity.

The Municipal Historical Heritage Foundation (FUMP) is dedicated to its institutional mission: to preserve and promote the cultural heritage of São Luís. Through the history and memory of the city's cultural identity, we have worked hard to create a monument in honor of the African diaspora in Maranhão.

It's important to emphasize the need for a monument like this in Maranhão, where 80% of the population is black. We have to be able to look at black history in a new way, highlighting their struggles and culture, valuing their religious, technological and literary aspects. The prejudiced view built up over the centuries has to be deconstructed so that we can see the important contribution they have made to our history and memory.

The monument to the African Diaspora is a great celebration of black culture and ancestry. It was conceived, designed and built collectively by black leaders, intellectuals, artists and writers. Led by FUMPH, had the support of the Deputy Mayor of São Luís and the Municipal Coordination for the Promotion of Racial Equality and the Vale Cultural Institute, through the Culture Incentive Law.

We are grateful to everyone involved. May this monument fulfill its didactic and public function of remembering and transmitting to present and future generations events that must not be forgotten, so that we can promote equality and ethnic-racial inclusion in our country.

Kátia Bogéa
President of the Municipal Historical Heritage Foundation



Coming and Going: reframing and building new identities from the African diaspora process in Maranhão

The Monument to the African Diaspora in Maranhão stands out as a powerful tool for reflection in Maranhão society, inciting a deep analysis and recognition of the legacy of black people throughout the painful four hundred years of slavery.

The contribution of black people, often silenced by efforts to whiten them, are undeniably fundamental to the cultural and historical wealth of the country. The monument project is guided by a writing process in which black authors were invited to address themes about the diaspora, based on their experiences.

The main purpose of this publication is not to theorize about the subjects in hand, but rather to awaken the reader's interest in further exploring the cultural heritage and historical context of the Brazilian black community. The current writing is a valuable tool for connection, highlighting the importance of identity, territory, subjectivity and lived experiences as elements celebrating ancestral knowledge that shaped the new black territories in Brazil, originating from Africa through the diaspora. The following titles are: "Baobá: Origens diaspóricas" (Baobá: Diasporic Origins); "Territorialidade: pertencimento ao lugar" (Territoriality: Belonging to a place); "Matrizes africanas: religiosidades" (African Matrices: Religiosities); "Intelectualidades Negras" (Black Intellectualities); "Tecnologias africanas: construção do Maranhão" (African Technologies: Building Maranhão); "Arte e cultura: expressões, memórias e heranças" (Art and Culture: Expressions, Memories and Legacies); "Culinária: afeto e empoderamento" (Cooking: Affection and Empowerment) and "Re-Existências: historicidade e militância". (Re-existences: Historicity and activism).

Curatorial Committee





(...) and the miserable man suffered because he was a slave, and slavery had not brutalized his soul; because the generous feelings that God had implanted in his heart remained intact and pure as his soul.

(Úrsula, Maria Firmina dos Reis)



Baobá: Diasporic Origins

Elisabete Nascimento

This is a letter to present and future generations — a testament of love for life, a legacy of the Africans kidnapped and shipped to the ports along the slave coast.

Do you know what this is about? Pay close attention. Also in Benin, Africa, families, kings, and queens were captured. Around the Tree of Life, they were forced into the ritual of forgetting. They left their forgotten memories under the leaves. The tree is magical, though. In an act of wisdom, religious figures brought favas from the Memory Tree.

When they arrived in Brazil, they planted the seeds of their diasporic origins, their ancestral technologies: the handling of iron, music, drums, herbs, remedies, navigation, cuisine, rebellion, craftsmanship, and bonds of insubordination... Thus, forgetting did not destroy memory, because Ori, a Yoruba word meaning head, is in the midst of Memory, of the diasporic Origins. The forced journey on the slave ships across the waters of the black Atlantic gave rise to the African Diaspora and the journey to overcome the challenges that were to come.

Our ancestors invented the Tambor de Crioula; the Bumba meu boi, Capoeira, opened paths for quilombolas, such as the intellectual Maria Firmina dos Reis, created Casas de Axé, with enchanted spirits, Caboclos and Voduns...



There's so much to tell that it would not fit here. The Monument to the African Diaspora in Maranhão is the wealth of this testament. The heritage was built through bonds of affection and quilombos. Abdias Nascimento whispers: The journey of the black hero in Maranhão and Brazil is a collective journey of Quilombismo.

Ancestry sends a message: your reading also plays a part in this journey. Read and decipher the enigmas of this heritage: the 8 ancestral technologies. It's necessary to interpret the divinatory game of the Ifá Oracle. If you don't understand, go back and retrieve. Something cannot be forgotten: your part in this legacy of love. Receive, reader, and multiply the wealth in this testament. The Monument to the African Diaspora in Maranhão is a legacy, a network of 8 trails, known as paths. They are called Odus in Yoruba. These trails branch out further and further, like my centuries-old roots. Yes, it's me, the Baobá, who's telling the tale.

Therefore, in Maranhão, a territory formed by the word 'mar' (sea), I was planted deep in the quilombola land. In front of the Lençóis Maranhenses, in the deep subterranean waters, I sprouted into a leafy Baobá. It was precisely in the place of greatest concentration of land ownership, in the former Hereditary Captaincy of Maranhão, that black people flourished, creating an immense quilombo. Ironic? Not quite. It was about talent and insubordination. This Monument is the legacy of Counter-colonization. I say it inspired by Nego Bispo.

Slavery underestimated black people, native peoples, our technologies, our bonds of love, but it didn't destroy our memory. Do you know why? Even if my trunk is shattered, each leaf can tell a story. Preservation is magic. Chlorophyll verses are memories written in black language, "pretuguese", whispers Lélia. These pages are the pressed leaves of my affectual Baobá body.



One of the states with the largest number of quilombos
 in the country,
 where there is a city originated from a rural quilombo,
 called Mirinzal, located in the Baixada Maranhense.
 Black territories are mainly located in the Baixada
 and on the Western Coast,
 Cradle of ancestral black culture.
 Its capital, São Luís, is no different,
 Urban territory of quilombolas
 and their descendants:
 Coroadinho, Bairro de Fátima
 and Quilombo Liberdade,
 an urban quilombo close to the city center.
 Brazil's largest urban quilombo,
 Where bonds of friendship grow strong
 between African descendants.
 In black territories, relationships between
 people and space spread through,
 resistance and survival are together in a
 single bond.





African Matrices: Religiosities

Sônia Nogueira

There was a time when African men and women arrived in Maranhão chained on ships. They were sold to work as slaves on the plantations and in the cities. They were humiliated on the plantations; they looked after the Casa Grande (the slave owner's residence), worked on the ships. They brought their religion along, and influenced by the new location and habits, started worshipping their gods in different ways. This is how candomblé came about, as well as pajelança, umbanda, tambor de mina, terecô, among others. Their gods were called Voduns, Orishas and represented the elements of nature, such as lightnings, thunders, the sea, rivers, forests, iron, leaves and animals. There are many Orishas, Caboclos, Juremas. Black people had kings and queens as their gods, as well as warriors, princesses, dolphins, iaras, etc.

The Orishas were responsible for caring for the health of Africans and their descendants, as well as for keeping alive the flame of the struggle for freedom. However, the blacks couldn't openly worship them, white people wouldn't let them. Therefore, in an act of syncretism, they took images of catholic saints and worshiped them as Orishas. During the festivities, black people play drums, gourds with colored beads and agogô, with rhythm and joy. They sang songs to their orishas, who they believed came down to earth through them. In Maranhão, names like Casa das Minas, Casa de Nagô, Codó, Jorge Babalaô, Pai Euclides, Bitá do Barão, Nhá Agotimé make up the aspects of black religiosity.

At religious festivals, they dressed in beautiful clothes, scarves and hats, wearing necklaces of colored beads in shades of blue, red, yellow, green, white or black. This was how they showed which Orisha, Caboclo, indigenous spirit, or families of enchanted beings they were representing.



Centuries have passed and the orishas continue to inspire the people of Maranhão and Brazil in countless forms of resistance through natural remedies, songs, food, dances and the Itans, which are stories of the orishas passed down through generations. The orishas - Oxalá, the creator of all things; Xango, the orisha of justice; Ogum, the blacksmith; Oxóssi, the master of the forests and agriculture; Omulu, the orisha of illness and healing - have never abandoned the enslaved and their descendants in the struggle for freedom and against religious racism.

Female Orishas such as Oxum, the lady of fertility; Iemanjá, the lady of the waters, and Iansã, the warrior, protect us in battles. Together, they embody the strength of the sacred feminine and represent the power of black women in the Casas de axé. Exu is the Orisha of communication, the one who opens paths and brings news. In one of the stories, “he killed a bird yesterday with a stone he threw today “. This Yoruba saying teaches us that the Orishas are capable of time travel. Casting cowrie shells, Exu says: today, through the hands of an Abiã, always a learner, all the Orishas have a sacred place at the Monument to the Diaspora. Mojuba, my respects.





Intelectualidades Negras

Pietra D'Ofã

Everything you do or know about our intellectuality comes from our ancestry, from an orality that you don't know.

It comes from a land made by our bodies, through broken chains; people who were only freed from the houses of the *sinhás* (female slave owners), who were massacred by Duque de Caxias, who carried out the *Balaiada* (popular uprising that took place in Maranhão between 1838 and 1841)

Our knowledge doesn't come from France or Holland, nor does it come from Portugal, it doesn't belong to Europe!!!!

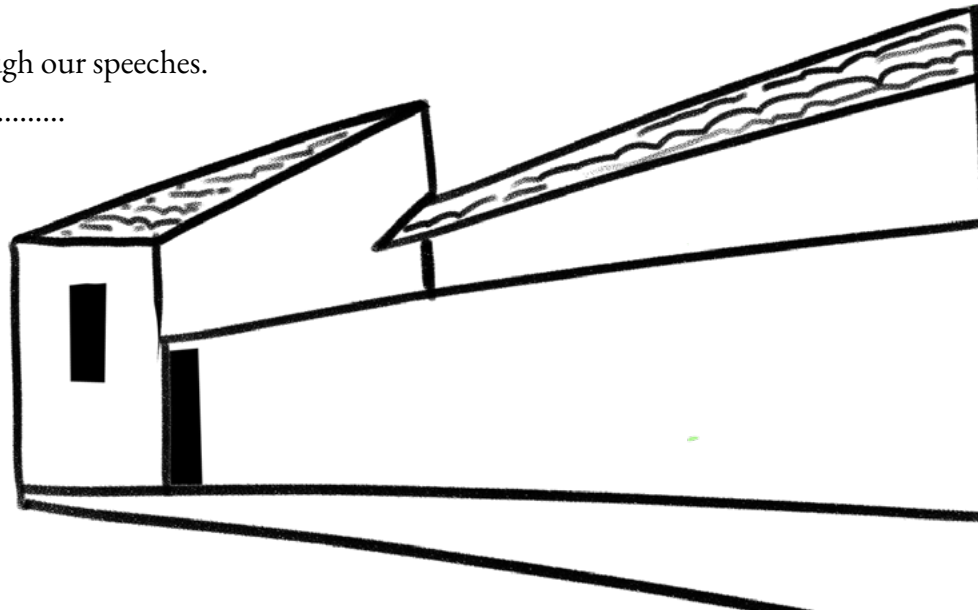
Everything you know comes from our Ancestry. I was marked by the stone of memory.

And my memories span the future, the present and the past.

Everything you know about my orality, my swing, my ancestry, my intellect, my history comes from our knowledge

I'm going to retell our story through our speeches.

Only we can talk about ourselves.....



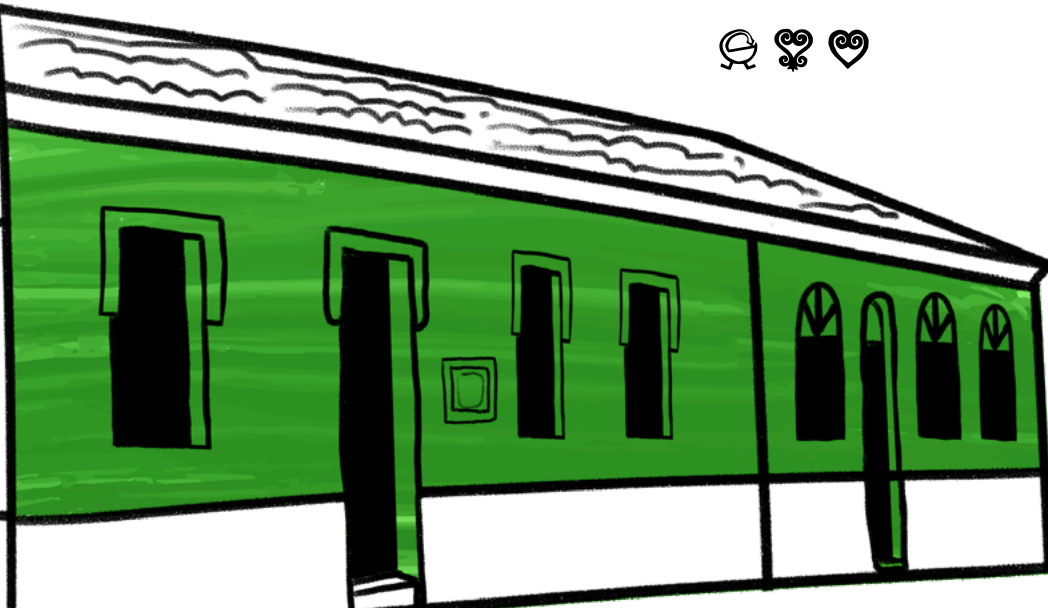
1859 I'm Ursula, Maria, Firmina, Carolina, Gabriela. I am a poet, teacher, chorus girl,
 A body that learned everything it knows under the trees and from other women.
 A black body that loves, dreams, makes and remakes itself.
 I'm full of poetry, which I leave around the city, sometimes in freedom, sometimes in a quilombo.
 I'm Luiz Gama, a black body born in 1830, dismantling a racist system...

1876 Other times, I'm Astolfo Marques, a body made of letters and stories, what do you know
 about me?
 I'm made of rivers, enchantments, melodies, improvised in an underprivileged community.

2023 I am the body of a poet, forged in literature, read me, see my writings. I am in every corner
 of this city, sometimes being bathed by the waters of Iemanjá, sometimes being a cabocla de pena
 to the sound of the matraca, others spinning while I dance samba.

2024 I'm a delicious poetry, like juçara with shrimp, I'm a poetry that smells like coffee.

2025 I'm Maria, Firmina, Stella, mother kabeca, grandmother, black mother...
 I am poetry of many in one, I go back and forth to the past and future through a poem.





African Technologies: Building Maranhão

Alberto Rodrigues

Oh, Ilha do Amor!
Full of charm and splendor.
Oh, my Maranhão,
You have African fingerprints all over you.

Everywhere we look we see
The contributions of Afro-diasporic technologies.

The beautiful mansions with tiled façades.
The churches, such as Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Pretos,
and its beautiful altars
Show, in every square meter, the rich details of ancestral
knowledge and millenary technologies

Throughout the historic center and beyond...
There are technological references from Africa:
The mills, the railroads, the Cental Engenho
in Pindaré Mirim.
They also reveal ancestral knowledge.



Art and Culture: Expressions, Memories and Legacies

Goreth Pereira

Our tambor de crioula,
cheers people up.
Listening to the sound of the drums
I won't stay still
The drumming invites me to dance.

The festivities of June get everyone
excited.
There's forró and good food, in
celebration of Saint John. I miss
my beloved sertão.

How beautiful is
to watch the women in the ballroom
spinning around,
throwing their skirts in line, dancing
the cacuriá.
Everyone applauding and singing.

The bumba meu boi
brings joy.
The master sings.
The accordion player announces,
on the harps and basses,
we will party until dawn.

This is how cultures meet:
Drinks and typical food,
brought by Saint John.
We celebrate with joy,
Everyone in holy peace.

Culture is important for all
regions.
It comes from our ancestors,
ancient populations,
We make culture alive
through its manifestations.





To preserve our culture,
To value our ancestors.
Coxinho do Pindaré,
someone impossible to forget.
Also Apolônia Pinto, theater
artist, was so great.

Maranhão is a state of
cultural wealth.
So many manifestations,
perhaps there's nowhere
like it.
Long live our ancestors, for
their brilliant culture.

The legacy of the African,
gave us identity,
in cultural history,
and visibility
to our local culture,
which became credible.





Cooking: Affection and Empowerment

Alberto Rodrigues

Much of what is produced today and the agricultural technology that exists in Brazil comes from ancestral African knowledge. Plowing the land, planting and harvesting is circular knowledge; it all started with the seeds hidden in the Nagô braids - these seeds were the guarantee that the kidnapped Africans would be able to continue practicing their agricultural knowledge in the new land.

There's an African proverb that says: "He who eats okra becomes immune to spells." It shows that food has always been sacred for African people. Cooking and preparing food has always been associated with magic, rituals and consecration. Food was not just for nourishing the body, but also the spirit. The knowledge of herbs, both medicinal and culinary, has been passed down from generation to generation, mainly by prayer women and healers. Their knowledge encompasses the maceration of herbs, the preparation of tonics and herbal baths; the rituals are performed with faith and affection, with the purpose of caring, treating and healing.

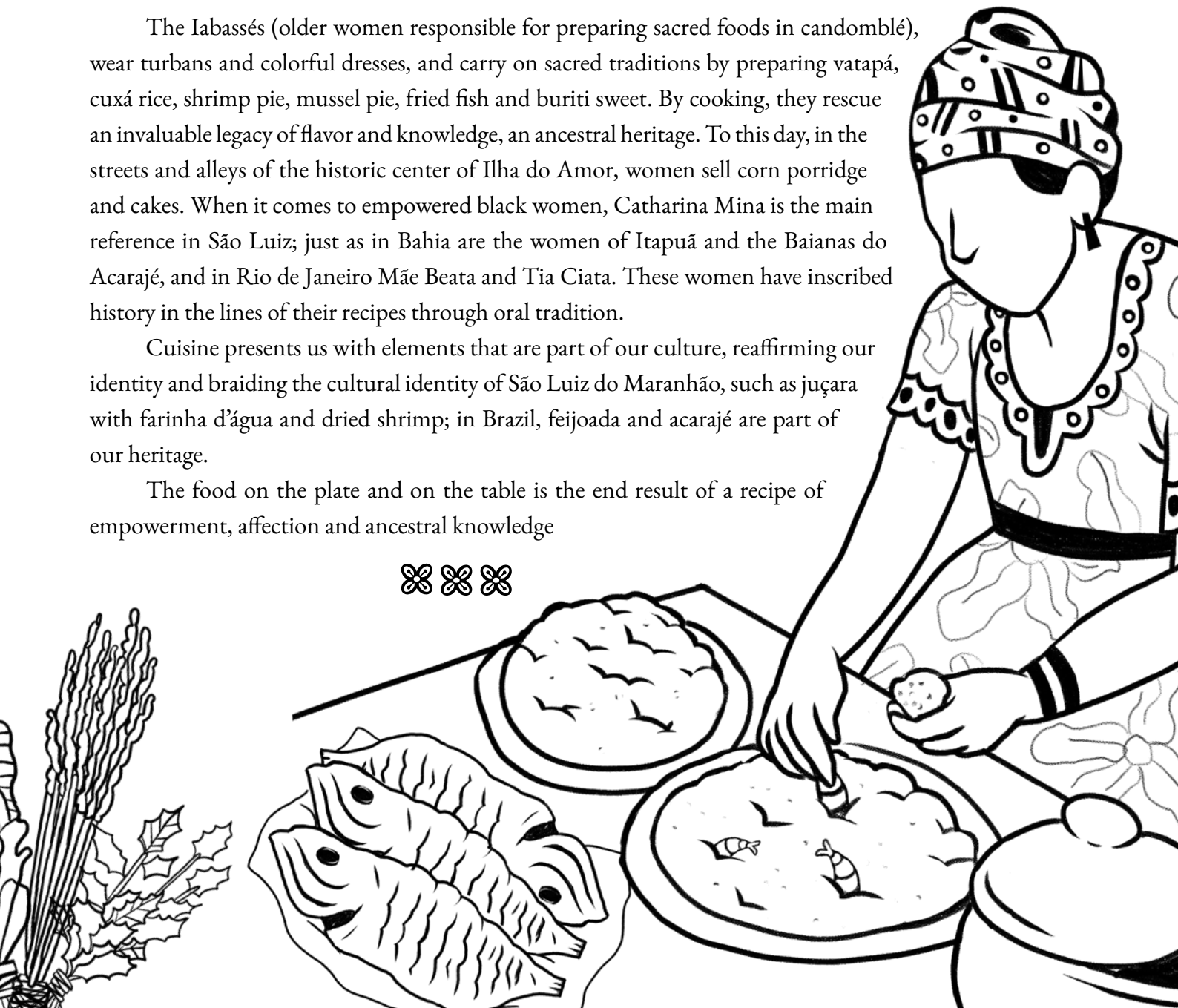




The Iabassés (older women responsible for preparing sacred foods in candomblé), wear turbans and colorful dresses, and carry on sacred traditions by preparing vatapá, cuxá rice, shrimp pie, mussel pie, fried fish and buriti sweet. By cooking, they rescue an invaluable legacy of flavor and knowledge, an ancestral heritage. To this day, in the streets and alleys of the historic center of Ilha do Amor, women sell corn porridge and cakes. When it comes to empowered black women, Catharina Mina is the main reference in São Luiz; just as in Bahia are the women of Itapuã and the Baianas do Acarajé, and in Rio de Janeiro Mãe Beata and Tia Ciata. These women have inscribed history in the lines of their recipes through oral tradition.

Cuisine presents us with elements that are part of our culture, reaffirming our identity and braiding the cultural identity of São Luiz do Maranhão, such as juçara with farinha d'água and dried shrimp; in Brazil, feijoada and acarajé are part of our heritage.

The food on the plate and on the table is the end result of a recipe of empowerment, affection and ancestral knowledge





Re-existences: Historicity and activism

Luanda Martins Campos

Hey! I'll tell you a story.

I'm from Maranhão, a land of struggle and resistance that drives our identity.

Here in Maranhão, we walk, sing, talk and make art to demand our rights. Our fight for education, health and land have always been part of our struggle as black people. Our ancestry accompanies us in every step of the way.

Dancing to the sound of the tambor de crioula and the roar of the ox, our stories spin and converge.

Pungada , a choreographic movement in which the dancers touch each other's bellies, reveres community life.

The roar of the ox is a cry of resistance, and the bumba-boi of Maranhão is a call for us to get organized. This is how we realize our struggle is collective and each gathering is sacred. This is how we organize our fights every day. Did you know we are the heirs of great fighters?



We are the heirs of Negro Cosme, Cosme Bento das Chagas, who in the 19th century led one of the largest popular rebellions in Brazil, the Balaiada, and who turned education into a weapon against slavery.

We are also guided by Axé! Our bodies move, dance and revere the power of the enchanted, the orishas, the yabás and the caboclos along the paths of justice, freedom and brotherhood.

This is how Maranhão rolls!

In every corner of this land, organized black people resist and (re)exist. Entities, organizations, generations that cross paths to teach and learn at the same time.

To understand the history of our struggle, you need to get to know the important organizations and people, like the Quilombola Movement of Maranhão, which represents quilombolas from the city and the countryside who resist for their territories.

Our bodies speak very loudly and they also dance and sing! Get to know Bloco Afro Akomabu, the Quilombo Urbano Hip Hop Movement, tambor de crioula groups, capoeira and reggae groups - all forms of protest and yearning for freedom.

Women are always at the forefront. The Mother Andresa Women's Group is a powerful group. Motherhood and community activism have brought us this far: Ana Silvia Cantanhede, Mãe Andresa, Mãe Dudu, Catarina Mina, Maria Aragão and so many others who helped us take our first steps in activism.

With activism, the fight becomes stronger, always revisiting the past for inspiration and looking forward to a future of justice.

The black movement has achieved many victories through collective effort and respect for those who came before us, such as Law 10639/2003, the Statute of Racial Equality and the Quotas Law. These are examples of how the black movement in Brazil has always fought and it continues to gain strength as new people join in.

Even you can join in and help propel our fight. Resisting and fighting are the verbs that keep the black movement alive in Brazil and in Maranhão. Here, your voice is also important and shows that even in small ways, we have the power to change.





AFRICAN DIASPORA

in Maranhão



Sponsorship:



Production:



Realization:



MINISTÉRIO DA
CULTURA

