

A photograph of a man with a beard, wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt, tending to a large, intense fire in a brick oven. The fire is bright yellow and orange, with thick flames rising from a large, dark, cylindrical metal pot. The man is looking down at the fire with a focused expression. The background shows a brick wall and some wooden structures. The overall scene is set in a rustic, outdoor or semi-outdoor environment.

# *Potiguara Mendonça*

DIOCLÉCIO MENDONÇA  
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## **Introduction**

The family group Mendonça was constituted from Indigenous ancestors of Potiguara and Tapuia ethnicities. From the 16th century onwards some families of Potiguara people migrated from Brejo das Bananeiras/PB to Rio Grande do Norte. The largest migration flow registered occurred more than two centuries ago provoked by crisis situations — cholera outbreaks, droughts and colonial expansion, among other facts — (GUERRA, 2011). The Indigenous who came from Paraíba were received into the Potiguara community, since they both had established contact previously. The two ethnicities were united then through marriage and family ties. The Mendonça Territory has six villages located in two cities (João Câmara and Jardim de Angicos) of the Mato Grande region in Rio Grande do Norte. These are the villages: Amarelão, Serrote de São Bento, Assentamento Marajó, Assentamento Santa Terezinha, Açucena e Cachoeira–Nova Descoberta.

## **Territory Occupation History**

The city of João Câmara was founded at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century due the construction of the train line in Vila Baixa Verde. The Mendonça do Amarelão people had active engagement with the construction of the city by giving their workforce, since the lands they used in subsistence agriculture were being surrounded by the farmers who were migrating to the region, pushing the Indigenous people to seek other ways of livelihood. This fact also had influence on the social organization of the community. The Indigenous, who once had their own production schedule (based on nature signs such as rainy and drought seasons and the right moment of growing and harvesting plants) then had to work according to the contractor schedule, out of their communities, inside the city. The construction of João Câmara intensified the process of invasion and occupation of the territory historically occupied by the Mendonça people, and the Indigenous men started leaving the community for long periods to go working mostly on cotton and livestock farms in exchange for food or lousy payments. There were several conflicts between the farmers and the Indigenous during this process. According to some reports of Indigenous from the community, they would be threatened by death if trying to enter farming lands.

After building the city of João Câmara, the Mendonça people lost almost all their territory, which was reduced to the area where they are now located, the Amarelão community. Then the Mendonça families started occupying other lands, inside and outside Indigenous territories.

### **Amarelão**

The name of “Amarelão” comes from an ancient ritual practiced by the ancestors who worshiped the sun. They would go up the sierra at dawn and wait the sun rise up, then, they would make all the way back to the community singing and playing their “maracas” (a musical instrument made of the *cabaça* fruit) and calling the sun as the “big yellow” [*Amarelão*]. Their greatest connection to the ancestors is related to the name Mendonça, which was the name of one of the leaders of the community by the time of the migratory process and which is also used by the family members to assign their difference from the society. They are not known as “Indigenous” but as “the Mendonça of Amarelão”. The Indigenous community Amarelão, of Potiguara ethnicity, from the Mendonça family lineage, is located in the Mendonça Indigenous Territory. They have always recognized themselves through the Mendonça ethnic identity. Their fight for their rights as ethnically distinct people brought them closer to the Potiguara ethnicity, to which they belong, as part of a process of a cultural historical review.

### **Serrote de São Bento**

The Serrote de São Bento Indigenous community, located 9.3 miles away from João Câmara, is part of the Potiguara ethnicity. This group emerged from two families, the Batistas and the Paz, whereas the Paz family descends from the Batista, as it is said by the elder Manoel Batista, son of Joana Batista, one of the eldest members of the community:

Mother Salina, Chico Batista, uncle Joaquim Batista, Pedro Batista, my uncle Mané Paz, my aunt Maria and Luzia Tomas, who was the mother of Chico Paz. The Paz and the Batistas were just two families living here. Back then it was just my uncle Mané Paz with his family and his uncle. (oral information)<sup>1</sup>

After that, around the half of the 19h century, the Conrado family and the Vital family came from the Araruna Sierra, a semi-arid region in Paraíba State. The Conrado family moved into a place called Oiticica and the Vital family moved into Tubibau, these two locations chosen by the families for living belonged at that period to Baixa Verde

city (now called João Câmara), and corresponds today to Jandaíra city in RN.

There are two different versions told by the elders about the origin of the name Serrote de São Bento. The first one tells that this name was given because one of the first residents of the community was called Faustino Bento. According to professor Francisca Batista de Melo, who is 59 years old, Mr. Faustino lived nearby Pedra do Sino and everyone would refer to his home location as Serrote de São Bento, later on beginning to call the community itself as Serrote de São Bento. However, the second version says that:

There was a family living by the hill [*serrote*] who liked hunting very much. One day, one of the family members had gone out hunting and saw many *mocós* [a rodent animal], then he got closer to the creatures and shot, hitting the hunted one. Since they were at a hill, the hunt fell, and pursuing it all the way down the hunter was surprised by an asleep snake. When he saw the snake he got pretty nervous and quickly got out of there, praying São Bento to save him. São Bento answered his prayers and saved him. The origin of the name of Serrote de São Bento comes from this story. (oral information)<sup>2</sup>

Dona Rosa Batista da Costa, 88 years old, known as Dona Rosa or Rosa the Healer Woman, who was borned in the community and married her natural cousin, Mr. Manoel Pedro Barbosa da Costa, now deceased, remembers her ancestors history and tells that Serrote de São Bento have never been a community split from Amarelão. She affirms that they are all from the same family, the same lineage, and since the beginning their only frontier is geographic: the Cacimba Salgada. Which is also confirmed by Mr. Manoel Batista de Lima, who is 61 years old. When talking about his family tree he says that everyone who had ever lived around that territory belonged to one single family, which is why the marriages happened between cousins. He tells that the first school of Serrote de São Bento, which still exists, was called “the group”, and that many people of his age have studied there with the professor Dona Mariinha, and only later they went to study in Alice Soares school, in Amarelão. He also speaks about the difficulties from that period, the droughts, the epidemics and how they made it to survive. Mr. “Beel”, as he is also known, tells how they would prepare the soil, how each family would organize the area for cultivating, and how at some point the farmers arrived and started to take possession of the lands. Without soil to plant, the Indigenous had to sell their workforce to the farms of Jacinto, Santa Eliza, Baixa do Feijão and Zé Guedes (AVÁ ARANDÚ..., 2017).

### **Cachoeira/Nova Descoberta**

The Cachoeira community, as it is called by the Indigenous people who live there, was founded in the 50s and is located in Jardim de Angicos city, next to João Câmara. The community borders Santa Terezinha settlement. The city of Jardim de Angicos registered the community as “Nova Descoberta”. According to oral history, one Indigenous from Amarelão worked for a farmer of the region for many years, so when this farmer decided to close his plantation he gave a part of the land to this Indigenous man as a way of paying for all the services. This land was located next to the railroad line which connects Macau/RN to Natal/RN. After that, the Indigenous brought his family from Setor Familiar Bianos in the Amarelão community to live with him. They made their houses with taipa and are living there until now, with their grown children, grandchildren and their families. One important fact is that some years after receiving the land from the farmer, the Indigenous man found out that the land actually belonged to the State and was given in an act of intentional dishonesty. The entire community was built almost at the top of the railroad, which is disabled since the 90s.

### **Assentamento Marajó**

According to Almeida (2002), in March of 1990, the MST (Landless People Movement) set up its secretariat in Natal, in the Commerce Workers Union. Their relocation from the city of Assu to Natal was associated with the redirection of its fighting to the region of Mato Grande. In the Mato Grande region there is a prevailing of subsistence agriculture, based on archaic methods such as the use of hoes, scythes and hand-carts, in other words: basically manual labor. Livestock is largely practiced and the region is known for having the highest concentration of land in the state. Besides that, it presents a big population of people occupying abandoned lands, which is favorable to illegal practices of exchanging properties. The first settlement built by MST in the Mato Grande region was at the Marajó farm. The farm had 3859,786 acres and was located in the city of João Câmara as a property of Francisco Caraciale Bezerril. This farm had already been inspected in March of 1988 by the Regional Office of the Agrarian Reform and Development Ministry (MIRAD).

The Marajó farm, even before it was occupied by the MST, had already been targeted on some other occasions. One of them happened in 1988, when an organized group of the João Câmara Syndicate (STR) occupied the land. These previous fights have begun the farm expropriation and mark the intensification of the

poor population's fights for lands, culminating in a negotiation process with INCRA (National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform). Therefore, on July 29th, 1990, about 300 families under the MST guidance occupied the Marajó farm. However, this land occupation was different from the previous ones coordinated by the MST in Augusto Severo and Santana do Mato, because of the new tactics and strategies that were adopted. While in the previous occupations, the MST acted alone, in Marajó case the opposite occurred, since the movement sought alliances with other sectors of the popular movement, becoming more open to other organized segments (ALMEIDA, 2002).

Ten Indigenous families left the Amarelão community to be part of this fight since its beginning, seeking for land to produce. These families won the right of their lands and were settled in the Marajó Settlement, where they live with other non-Indigenous families until today.

#### **Assentamento Santa Terezinha**

In the early 1990s, the Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST) arised in the Mato Grande region, in RN, and the Mendonça people started fighting together with them in an attempt to recover their territories. They have joined MST also because of the non-attendance of the FUNAI (Indigenous National Foundation) in the state. In 1993, the Mendonça people strategically set up camp in João Rodrigues land — which was next to Serrote Grande (Serrote de São Bento) — to get access to the Saramandaia farm, a land claimed by them, where are located natural resources which historically belonged to the Mendonça territory and were taken over by the farmers of the region.

The Indigenous who have been directly committed to this process are: Raimundo Louro, Dona Dadinha, Dona Milosa, Orione, Canindé, Antonio Félix, Nazareno, Dona Francisca Damião, Oliveira, Tadeu, Pequinho, Heleno, Bolacha, Dadau, Chico Raimundo, Chico Caetano, Dona Basta and theirs families, among others. They have counted with the support of the MST and its associates, such as Livania, Edson (Som), Aldeci (who is also a Mendonça), Plínio, Edimilson, Hélio, Antônio Baixinho and Antônio Careca. And, above all, the religious leader who supported this resistance the most is Sister Terezinha Tesseles Galles, from the Congregatio Immaculate Heart of Mary. The name of the settlement is in her honor. The first reunions of the settlement members and allies happened in the lap of a centennial umbuzeiro tree which is today part of the settlers memory. According to Dona Dadinha (Matrindade Epifânio

Barbosa), the MST was a great ally in that decade:

The MST movement has taught us to put the children in front of their parents to restrain police aggression. Sister Terezinha suffered with many persecutions, she couldn't walk alone on the streets. She went to people's houses to pray, it was God who brought her here. Many people were attacked by the police, but by the end everything went well, and today Santa Terezinha Settlement has this name in her honor. (oral information)<sup>3</sup>

Santa Terezinha Settlement has a total area of 6424,74 acres (a part of which is a Protected Area under IBAMAS's responsibility) and is populated by 89 families settled (registered by INCRA) and another 200 families who are descendants of these first settlers. The organization of the houses is different from the patterns of an Agrarian Reform Settlement due to the habits that were incorporated from the Indigenous families. The Indigenous who lived in the Amarelão community have the habit of organizing their homes in family sectors receiving the name of the oldest person in the family and they have shared this with the rest of the settlement residents. The geographical border between Santa Terezinha and Amarelão is the railroad line built in order to transport salt from Macau/RN to Natal/RN which started the construction of João Câmara municipality and the invasions of the territory historically inhabited by the Mendonça people for more than three centuries (AVÁ ARANDÚ..., 2017).

### ***Açucena***

The Açucena community was founded by some Mendonça members who migrated from the Serrote de São Bento community in 2005. Struggling with the lack of fertile soil to grow, the Indigenous Francisco Pedro (Chiquinho) heard about a Government Program for land acquisition. The information came from meetings in which Chiquinho participated at the Rural Workers Union of João Câmara. This program they were talking about was the National Land Credit Program (PNCF) and it requested at least 20 families gathered in association to take the credit. Chiquinho created an association with his 8 grown children and some non-Indigenous friends from outside the community and together they bought the Buraco Seco farm, which is located by the BR 304 road and borders the Serrote de São Bento community. The community then was called Açucena and these families are living there until now, they have already paid for the property and received their title deeds.

Table with population data for the Mendonça Territory

Community	Population	
	Families No.	People No.
Amarelão	340	1.100

Assentamento Santa Terezinha	200	840
Serrote de São Bento	104	360
Açucena	17	69
Assentamento Marajó	29	127
Cachoeira/Nova Descoberta	80	300
Total	734	2.796

Source: Authors

### **Mendonças do Amarelão who are living in Natal**

There is an Indigenous group of the Potiguara ethnicity members of the Mendonça family who are living in the North of Natal, located in several neighborhoods of the capital. Nowadays, the Mendonça Leadership Forum has recognized about 48 Indigenous families of our lineage residing in the neighborhoods of Nossa Senhora da Apresentação, Cidade Praia and Jardim Progresso.

### **Public policies, attendance policies and Indigenous movement articulations**

The Mendonça Territory has been in the Indigenous movement of RN since the beginning, in the early 2000s, together with the communities of Catu/Canguaretama, Caboclos and Banguê/Assu. Even before the Indigenous movement was strong and active in RN state, the Mendonça people were already fighting for the Indigenous rights and policies, influencing other leaderships to start local mobilizations. At that time, the main struggle of Indigenous territories was the access to water, followed by land access (e.g. the Santa Terezinha territory) and improvements in the education system. In the 90s, the community founded the Amarelão Community Association (ACA), whose purpose is to represent the Mendonça families living within the community in the pursuit of the implementation of public and attendance policies before the State and the civil society. After the First Public Audience, occurred on June 15th, 2005, in the Legislative Assembly of Rio Grande do Norte State, the implementation of public and attendance policies became more effective. This event is a historical and legal milestone for the Indigenous people and to the Mendonça people as well. At the end of the Audience and thereafter, the Indigenous peoples of the state integrated several reunions, conferences and even contributed to the elaboration of the State Plan for Racial Equality Policies, which registered the demands claimed by the Indigenous



leaderships. In the same year of the Audience, the foundation of a FUNAI station was also demanded in RN to meet the needs of the Indigenous families within the state. In addition to this, other requests were made, such as the governmental recognition of the unique health and school education needs of Indigenous populations and the demarcation of Indigenous territories. In 2013, the historian and anthropologist professor Jussara Galhardo Aguirres Guerra produced a study of identification of the Amarelão Indigenous Territory, requested by the FUNAI Department of Land Protection. Today, the community is still waiting for the demarcation of their lands, which have already been officially identified.



Photo 1 - Jussara Galhardo. Territorial qualification with Esther - anthropologist; Jussara Galhardo - anthropologist; Martinho - FUNAI, Tayse and Rafael, year 2013.



Photo 2 - Lenilton Lima. Territorial qualification with Esther - anthropologist; Jussara Galhardo- anthropologist; Martinho - FUNAI, Tayse and Rafael, year 2013.

It was a long struggle to get objective responses from the government about the

Indigenous needs, their ethnic recognition, their fundamental rights, their fight for the maintenance of their customs, habits, traditions and the civil respect of their right to life. In 2011, finally, the FUNAI Local Technical Coordination (CTL–FUNAI/ Natal) was created and began assisting the Indigenous communities of the state. In 2013, the Indigenous leaderships requested access to differential Indigenous health treatment from SESAI, which was only guaranteed several years later, more precisely in 2015, but yet it was ineffective to attend the population numbers of Indigenous families in the state.

Still in 2015, Indigenous leaders claimed the regularization of the Indigenous Schools within Mendonça territory from the Government, which gave no response until 2018, when it was superficially regularized through an announcement on the census of the Education Ministry (MEC). However, the education institutions mentioned on the official paper belong to the municipal education system of João Câmara municipality, which establishes the Indigenous school education through the Article 132/ 2015 of its organic law and according to the national guidelines.

In 2017, the first specific training for Indigenous teachers happened in Rio Grande do Norte and among the participants were many Indigenous teachers from the Mendonça lineage. The class was named Indigenous Knowledge at School, and it was a program offered by the now extinct SECADI (Secretariat for Continuing Education, Literacy, Diversity and Inclusion of the Education Ministry, nowadays reconfigured into the Secretariat of Specialized Educational Modalities/SEMESP). It had a workload of 200 hours and was executed by the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of RN, in Canguaretama campus. This action was made possible through several negotiation visits from the Indigenous leaderships to the Education Ministry back in Brasília.

The second part of the class Indigenous Knowledge at School occurred in 2018, also with a workload of 200 hours, resulting in the production and dissemination of several educational materials gathering aspects of the local reality and contributing significantly to the processes of learning and teaching through an interdisciplinary way which combines the traditional and the academic knowledge. By the same time, the Indigenous leaderships, who are also teachers in their great majority, demanded from APOINME (Articulation of the Indigenous Peoples and Organizations of the Northeast, Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo) a joint articulation with FUNAI to orchestrate public audiences in the Legislative Chambers of the municipalities having schools within Indigenous territories, in order to discuss the existing legislations and report the

negligence of the state in what concerns to the provision of Indigenous school education and as well reinforce the request for regularizing the Indigenous schools (the ones existing inside Indigenous villages and communities) before the Education Ministry. To make happen the claimed regularization, a report of the Municipal Education Secretariat of each city informing which are the Indigenous schools and pointing the students as “Indigenous” in the system is needed.

From the 5th to the 6th of December of 2018, the First Workshop About Intercultural Education occurred, whose finality was to discuss the teaching courses in undergraduate degrees and the qualification of Indigenous teachers. This workshop was promoted by the Anthropology Department of UFRN and by the Secretariat of Distance Education at a Distance, Literacy and Inclusion (MEC/SECADI). The objective of the event was to open a dialogue with Indigenous peoples about their needs and demands for higher studies in the university and elaborate a project for a course specific to Indigenous teachers studying intercultural teaching, following the PROLIND directives (Support Program for Higher Education on Indigenous Teaching).

Panoramic view of the Francisco Silva do Nascimento Indigenous State School - Amarelão



Ruled by decree nº 28.536, the first Indigenous school belonging to the state education system of Rio Grande do Norte was created in November 2018. The Indigenous School Professor Francisco Silva do Nascimento, as it was called, is located in the Mendonça Territory and will offer primary and secondary education. It is important to mention that this school was requested in 2005 and by that time the Indigenous leaders had already made by hand the project of the school. In 2019, during

the 6th Assembly of Indigenous Peoples of Rio Grande do Norte (AIRN) OJITM was created (Organization of Indigenous Youth from the Mendonça Territory, with the finality to prepare the Indigenous youth to act in the Indigenous movement at local, state and national levels).

Nowadays, the Indigenous leaderships of the Mendonça Territory hold positions in: APOINME Microregional Coordination; APOINME Indigenous Women of RN Coordination; APOINME Indigenous Youth of RN Coordination; National Council of Indigenous Education; National Commission of Indigenous Culture; State Council of Food Security and Nutrition; School Education Manager Committee; Indigenous Movement of RN Coordination. At the local level, they also hold positions in the Municipal Councils.

On October 23rd, 2016, the Mendonça Leadership Forum (FLM) was created in an official reunion at the Amarelão Community Association. The forum is intended to support associations, councils, discussion spaces and to promote workshops to create new leaders who can do powerful mobilizations within the Indigenous movement.

This vision of occupying spaces and being representative has been stimulated for years in our communities. This encouragement is specially given by the elders, who know they themselves are not eternal and that it is important to strengthen the fighting spirit in the younger generation. We are proud to mention that most of our leaders are women and they occupy essential positions in our communities.

All the six communities within the Mendonça Territory have their own Indigenous Associations, with an established meeting schedule of the directorships and between the communities and the directors. In the directors reunions, the leaders define the main topics of the meetings with the community, plan actions, strategies, activities, and their articulation inside the Indigenous movement. In the reunions with the community the directors receive the families demands and reports, notify subjects that affect the community, give response to issues and inform the recent resolutions and performance of the leaders. According to the leadership, more than 90% of the people integrating the boards of directors are women. These associations are the main political representation of these communities and territories. They work also as interlocutors between the community and external agents: government institutions, non-governmental organizations and social movements.

The Amarelão Community Association (ACA) was founded on May 21st, 1994, by Sister Terezinha Tesseles Galles, from the Congregatio Immaculate Heart of Mary

of Rio Grande do Sul, and Indigenous leaderships of the Amarelão community. This foundation strengthened the fight of the Indigenous peoples of Rio Grande do Norte. ACA's mission is both to promote the socio-economic development of the community through projects with humanitarian, cultural and social principles in an emancipatory perspective and represent the community before private and public institutions.

Santa Terezinha Settlement has two community associations, one of which is connected to INCRA and the other, known as Community Association of the Mendonça Potiguara Indigenous People, is connected to the local Indigenous movement.

Serrote de São Bento community has one association founded in February 2016 whose finality is to represent the community and demand access to education, leisure, ethnodevelopment and other legal rights.

Marajó Settlement has two community associations, one of which is connected to INCRA and the other is connected to the local Indigenous movement and was founded in February 07th, 2018.

The Açucena community had a different experience creating their association, because the families gathered intending to request financing from North East Regional Bank in order to buy the land where they now live. This is not a Indigenous association, but they also contribute to the Indigenous mobilization. Known as Cachoeira Community Association, it was founded on November 05th, 2018.

Read on the chart below a timeline of the foundation of each Association:

Data about the Associations of the Mendonça Territory

<b>Association</b>	<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Foundation Date</b>
Association Community Amarelão	ACA	Amarelão	21 de maio de 1994
Proactive Association of the Açucena community	-	Açucena	2005
Indigenous Community Association from Serrote de São Bento	ACS	Serrote de São Bento	February 05, 2015
Community Association of the Santa Terezinha Settlement - Mendonça Indigenous People Potiguara	AST	Settlement Santa Terezinha	September 9, 2016

Marajó Indigenous Association	AIM	Settlement Marajó	February 07, 2018
Cachoeira Community Association - Indigenous People Mendonça Potiguara	-	Cachoeira	November 05, 2018
<b>Office</b>	<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Associations that hold this position</b>	
Coordination (Higher position in associations)	CG	AC A; AC S; AS T; AI M;  Cachoeira Community Association - Indigenous People Mendonça Potiguara	
President (highest position in associations)		Proactive Association of the Açucena community	
Secretary	-	ACA; Proactive Association of the Açucena community ACS; AST;	

		AIM; Cachoeira Community Association - Indigenous People Mendonça Potiguara
Tesoureiro/a	-	ACA; ACS; Proactive Association of the Açucena community AST; AIM; Cachoeira Community Association - Indigenous People Mendonça Potiguara
Departamento de Etnodesenvolvimento e Cultura	DEC	ACA; ACS; AST; AIM; Cachoeira Community Association - Indigenous People Mendonça Potiguara
Departamento de Gênero e Geração	DGG	ACA; ACS; AST; AIM; Cachoeira Community Association - Indigenous People Mendonça Potiguara
Departamento de Educação e Lazer	DEL	ACA; ACS; AST; AIM; Cachoeira Community Association - Indigenous People Mendonça Potiguara



### **Production Activities**

Breeding small animals such as chickens, pigs and sheeps is an important way of earning a living in the Mendonça territory. Family agriculture is also an important part of their subsistence economy. They plant corn, beans, manioc, sweet potatoes and cotton. They plant fruit and medicine trees as well, such as cashew, mango, pine, and umbuzeiro trees, among others.

This family group has huge difficulties to access water, since the land where the community is located has extremely low rain levels. In regular winters, they get on average three months of precipitation but the rainfalls are very irregular in the rest of the year, which limits the planting time within the months from March to June. Since their Indigenous territory has not yet been demarcated, they struggle through water and land scarcity to plant in areas where they get access, for breeding animals and to satisfy their own regular needs for living. When they harvest, the Indigenous people store part of the seeds for farming in the next year.

The Indigenous also produce handicrafts such as necklaces, bracelets, earrings, dream filters and “maracás” made of gourds [cabaças], vines and seeds. These activities are developed as a way of maintaining, valuing and recognizing the local Indigenous culture. But the roasting of cashew nuts is the main economic activity in



the Mendonça Territory.

This activity started in the 80s, when the group was no longer working in cotton farms due to a production decrease caused by plagues in the plantations which occurred in the decades after its golden period. According to Mr. Francisco Epifânio, known as Chiquinho, who was one of the first Mendonça members to introduce the activities from the roasting of cashew nut in the Amarelão community, the families saw this activity as a solid alternative of income generating, making it their main source of income.

There are many different ways of getting cashew nuts, some families buy them from the producer, some families depend on a middleman. The middleman is a key figure through all the cashew nut negotiations in the community. He is responsible for buying the stock and passing it on to the families in a trust transaction, since most of the families don't have working capital. This is why most families don't have other options besides appealing to a middleman to acquire the nuts. The negotiation is simple: the family buys from the middleman with the condition of pay later not in money but in roasted cashew nuts, or "benefited cashew nuts", as it is called in the communities.



### **Selecting the nuts**

After acquiring the stock, the nuts are divided by size, currently into large, medium,

small and “cocha” or “borreia”. The “cocha” nuts are the ones which are empty inside, and therefore don’t have so much value. This step is usually realized in the family houses and is sometimes dispensed.



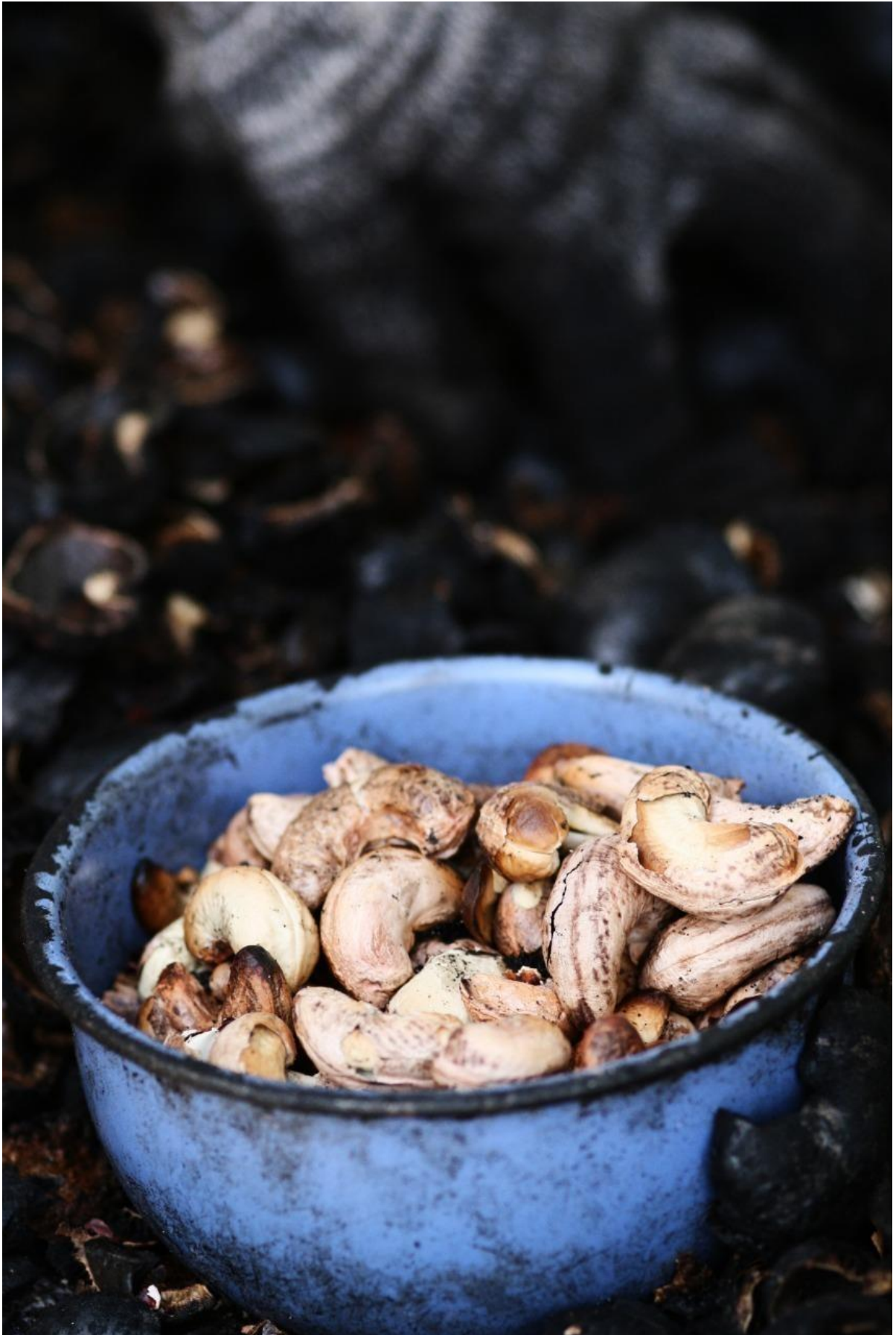
### **Roasting the cashew nut**

The third step is the roasting, which is done in a hand-made iron bowl drilled with small holes through which the LCC oil (cashew nut liquid) passes. The LCC oil is produced by heating up the nut and it is a flammable oil, so as it is heated it also starts to feed the fire, roasting the cashew nut. The roaster man uses a rot for stirring the nuts so they can roast equally. This rot is 1,6 m to 1,8m long. Formerly this tool was made with wood taken from the forest, nowadays the rot is made of one bar of stainless steel kept in contact with the fire and one piece of wood kept in the hands of the roaster. A flat-ended-bar is also used to increase the contact area with the bottom of the bowl. It is important to mention that the fire is not fueled by wood or any kind of fossil fuel but by the outer hard shell acquired by breaking the cashew nuts.



### **Breaking the outer shell**

This step consists in peeling the outer hard shell. The breaking of the shell is done on a concrete table with a tiny baton of wood or iron. This process occurs after the nut selection, which happens in a tent built to protect the roasters against sun and rain. Some of them are made of sawn wood and some are made of hardwood taken from the forest, most of them nowadays have electric lights for night working. Formerly in the communities of Santa Terezinha, Amarelão and Serrote de São Bento the tents were built in the family gardens, so that the women could manage the work of roasting the nuts with the housework and the children, but this caused a lot of trouble because the smoke released in the process was harmful to health. In 2014, the tents were reorganized in a shared area away from the houses where all the families built their tents side by side. Three shared areas have been built until the present moment.



### **Peeling the inner skin**

After selecting, roasting and breaking the cashew nut, the inner skin has also to be peeled. This step is currently done by the families back at their own houses.

The family profits are calculated by this method: the multiplication of the roasted nut weight by the price to be paid on each kilogram is subtracted from the multiplication of the nut weight by the price charged by the middleman per kilogram. For example: a family gets 50 kg of cashew nuts from the middleman at a price of R\$5.20/kg. Five kilos of nuts in natura produces one kilo of roasted nuts. Let's assume that the middleman will receive the roasted nuts at a price of R\$28.00/kg and the "cocha" nuts (the ones which are empty inside) at R\$1.50/kg. This equation would be:  $[(10 \times 28) - (50 \times 5,20)] + (5 \times 1,5) = 27,50$ . The profit of the family would be R\$20.00 in this case, equivalent to the subtraction of the two multiplications inside brackets. The prices are proportionate, so if there is an increase in the price of the nuts in natura there is also an increase in the price of the roasted ones.

One of the huge problems in this method is the quality of the stock. Since the calculations are based on the 5/1 proportion, if the quality of the nuts does not reach this proportion the families may not have any profit and even owe the middleman. The harvesting time, which goes from October to January, is one of the best moments for the families because the price paid per kilo of nuts falls and then the families who have some saved money can buy their own nuts straight from the producers, achieving more autonomy in the after sales. The roasting of the cashew nuts is the main source of income of the Mendonça communities and has been passed on from generation to generation, so we may say that it is a cultural practice of the Mendonça group (AVÁ ARANDÚ..., 2017).

## **Mendonça Tourist Trails, Traditional Festivals, Pilgrimages and Toré**

### **Traditional Festivals**

Until the 90s and the beginning of the 21st century, huge weddings which lasted up to three days with plenty of food and drink and music played by accordionists were very common. According to Ms. Luiza Ferreira de Melo, known as Luizinha, this celebration would usually last three days, beginning on Friday with the bachelor and bachelorette parties, both of which happened together. An accordion player was hired to play until midnight, and he would start playing again on Saturday morning until the

last dance of the engaged couple before leaving for church. After the wedding ceremony and before lunch, the newly married couple would dance one more time to bring luck. Right before Saturday at dusk there was a ritual called “to catch the sun by hand”. On Sunday afternoon everybody would dance celebrating the bride's move to her new home. They would start preparing everything for the celebration one week before, arranging the place with a fence made of coconut straw. In the breaks during the celebrations, the earthen floor needed to be wet. This was a way of dusting down the salon and was also a moment when the accordion player could rest. The foods served were turkey, chicken, pork, goat and beef. Mr. Francisco Pereira, known as Rolinha, retired farmer from the Mendonça lineage, told us also about the Easter Saturday and the Saint John's Day celebrations.



## **Cashew Nut Festival**

The Cashew Nut Festival is a cultural activity promoted annually by the Indigenous Community of Amarelão, with the support of partners. It aims to give visibility and value to the work developed in the community by selling local products, showing our Indigenous culture, promoting cultural activities and exchanging experiences with other Indigenous communities and local farming families. The Festival was founded in the 90s by the first president of the Amarelão Community Association (ACA), Francisco do Nascimento Silva, known as Titinho. By then it was a leisure activity and a moment of joy to the community. In 2001 Francisco was murdered and the festival ended because there was no one to carry out the event. In 2012, the current coordination of ACA together with the community decided to revive the festival, fixing its annual frequency, always on the last Saturday of Augusto.

## **Mythology and beliefs of the communities**

The culture of Mendonça people is surrounded by mythology, adding meaning to food, hunting, health and other aspects of living. Here are some of them:

### **(1) The Werewolf of Amarelão**

This story is about a man who would turn into werewolf. On a moon night an old man was walking through the forest and saw the monster. The old man defended himself by stabbing the werewolf. After that, he waited for the blood to gush out, disenchanting the spell. So he found out who the werewolf was and was threatened by him not to tell anyone his real identity. The old man didn't get intimidated by the werewolf and said he would tell everybody about what he saw and then the spell was broken and the man did not turn into a werewolf ever again..

### **(2) The "pigtail" fight**

This story tells that in the Amarelão territory, at the Alto dos Eleotérios, over fifty years ago, the Mendonça families decided to celebrate Easter by roasting a pig over coals which would feed everyone. They were all excited when an unforeseen event happened: a fight began because of a jealous brother who ordered his sister to go home after seeing her with her boyfriend, otherwise he would cut off her ears. The

boyfriend got mad with the situation and defended the girl, starting a tremendous fight. Since the Mendonça families are very united and always stand up to their relatives, the celebration turned into a battlefield.

### (3) *Fulorzinha*

The *Fulorzinha* is a creature who frightens the dogs at night, she has long hair dragging on the ground. You need to offer fumo [a traditional kind of tobacco smoke] to her so she will let you hunt. (Text written in 2016 by the student Mirela Ferreira, from the M. Alice Soares School).<sup>4</sup>

### (4) The “dry hole” legend

There was a headwater stream used by everyone. It was located in a farm a few miles away from Amarelão. One day the owner of the land suddenly prohibited the people from going there and accessing the water. That’s when they killed a pig (or could they maybe have used the mortal remains of the pig from the pigtail fight?) and threw its remains on the headwater, drying it out. This is where the name “dry hole” comes from.

## ***Religiosidade***

### Religiosity

The Mendonça Religiosity is very strong. Right after the birth of a child, before going to a health center for vaccination, a female healer is sought to protect the child from spells and to treat other illnesses. Currently the families don’t go to a doctor or to a drugstore unless it is the last thing to do for the benefit of the ailing relative. Every year, the Mendonça people participate in many pilgrimages. In May the group makes two pilgrimages: one to visit Frei Damião lands, in the city of Recife/ PE, and the other to visit Santa Rita statue, in the city of Santa Cruz, in Rio Grande do Norte. Between the end of October and the beginning of November the Mendonça people also visit Padre Cícero statue, in the city of Juazeiro do Norte/ CE, ending the pilgrimages schedule with the pilgrimage of the Good Lord Jesus of the Navigators in the city of Touros, in Rio Grande do Norte, in the end of December. Most of the pilgrims are paying promises to the saints, but not everyone in the pilgrimage is devoting their faith, some are only going on a touristic trip. Considering the religiosity of the Mendonça people, we present below the Religious Calendar of the holy days which they pleasure to be present.



### Religious calendar of the Mendonça family group

Place/City	Month	holy / holy
Juazeiro do Norte/CE	October November	Father Cicero
Recife PE	May	Frei Damião
Santa Cruz/RN	May	Santa Rita
bulls/RN	December	Bom Jesus dos Navegantes
João Câmara / RN	January	San Sebastian
João Câmara / RN	November December	Feast of the Patron Saint of João Câmara

Source: Authors



### Toré

Toré is a traditional and cultural dance of the community through which the Mendonça people express their feelings, worship the ancestors, glorify mother nature and are thankful for everything they have and are achieving. Formerly we would dance on occasions such as sad moments or when someone from the community died. Nowadays, we dance Toré in festivities, fighting and claiming moments. Over the course of time the Toré practice was getting lost, so in the present there are some activities being made with the children and the youth to revive it. The clothing currently worn by Toré participants are made of cotton and painted with figures that are part of their daily life, such as the sun.

The communities make earrings, necklaces, bracelets, hair accessories, crochet clothing, archery miniatures and “toré” skirts, but the skirts are used specifically in these rituals and are not commercialized. Toré ritual represents through its dances and music an important way of ethnic affirmation, it may happen in public or private spaces depending on the occasion. The handicrafts used in Toré ritual are made by the Indigenous themselves. This process of making the accessories constitute an important relationship between the Indigenous and these items, which can be expressed in this music currently sung at the rituals: “Let’s see who will mop up all this labor we are getting done” (Ferreira & Bezerra, 2018, p. 90).

Here are some transcriptions of toré songs:

(1) *Fulozinha*

I’m the *Fulozinha*, I live in the woods,

Fulô, Fulô, I’m the *Fulozinha*.

I’m the *Fulozinha*, I live in the woods,

Fulô, Fulô, I’m the *Fulozinha*.

I’m asking, I’m claiming

someone give me some smoke.

I’m asking, I’m claiming

someone to give me some smoke..

(2) *Arreia*

I was hanging out in the village, they send someone to call me (bis)

Caboclos from the village, *arreia arreia* (bis)

I was hanging out in the village, they send someone to call me (bis)

And all the caboclos from the village are gonna trample on the *arreia* (bis)

I was hanging out in the village, they send someone to call me (bis)

(3) If you can’t stand the ants

Step carefully, step carefully,

if you can’t stand the ants don’t go stirring up the anthill.

Step carefully, step carefully,

if you can’t stand the ants don’t go stirring up the anthill.

Step carefully, step carefully.

(4) Big Blue Bird

I'm the big blue bird, dragging its wings on the ground.

I'm the big blue bird.

Tough *Caboclas* with strong-chests,  
adorned with feathers and carrying their arrows,  
Salute! Salute!

Tough *Caboclas* with strong-chests,  
adorned with feathers and carrying their arrows,  
Salute! Salute.

(5) *Caboclinha*

*Caboclinha* da Jurema, I have danced your Toré  
to dodge the arrows of the Tapuias Canindé.

Canindé King, hey! Canindé King.

One *Jurema* leaf for the Canindé King.

Canindé King, hey! Canindé king.

One *Jurema* leaf for the Canindé King.



Amarelão Handicrafts at the International Handicrafts Fair, Natal - 2013

### **Mendonça Handicrafts**

The Amarelão community uses gourds [*cabaças*], vines, seeds and feathers to produce jewelry (necklaces, bracelets and earrings), dream-filters and *maracás*, among others handicrafts. These activities are developed as a way of maintaining, valuing and recognizing the local Indigenous culture. These products are commercialized through fairs, exhibitions and individual orders. The community has a

handicraft group, known as “MOTYRIM CAAÇU: united by art”, whose purpose is to strengthen and valorize this aspect of the Indigenous culture. It was founded in 2007 with financial funds of the Indigenous Culture Award promoted by the Culture Ministry. In 2008, the group ministered workshops in other Indigenous communities within Rio Grande do Norte state. Besides the products produced by the MOTYRUM group, the communities of Mendonça territory also work with crochet, knit, quilts, clothing, patchwork carpets and woodcrafts (currently representing parts of the human body to fulfill the promises to deities made with umburana wood, which is a native tree)

### **Mendonça’s Places of Memory**

The community has an informal tourist itinerary, which fits the interest of each visitor and doesn't have a defined program (until the present moment).



Photo: Lenilton Lima. Rock paintings

“Pedra das Letras” is a rock formation painted with prehistoric artwork. Known within Mendonça territory as “Pedra das Letras” or “Pedra das Mão de Sangue”.



Photo: Lenilton Lima. Photo of the “Tanques de Pedra”

Tanques de Pedra is a medium-sized cliff surrounded by a creek which only serves as a water source during rainy seasons. There is a cleft in the cliff which has been naturally formed and is approximately 3.5 to 4 meters long and more or less 1.2 meters deep. It also has a bricks and stone construction lined with cement made in one of the sides of the cleft to increase the volume of water, allowing it to be a great leisure and tourist spot on Sundays.



Photo: Lenilton Lima. Photo of the “Pedra do Sino”

Pedra do Sino is a small stone approximately 2.5 meters long and one meter tall, which at first glance seems a common stone among the others, but what defines it as unique is what it does. This stone emits a sound similar to the sound of a church bell and because of that some members of the Catholic Church of Mendonça territory saw it as a saint spot, so a cross was placed at the top of the cliff next to Pedra do Sino.

Pedra do Sino is also a location where a camp was settled in the first territorial recovery carried out by the Mendonça people, in the 90s. There the Mendonça people were threatened and attacked many times and even had their cabins burned down over and over.



The fourth and last place of memory is a gameleira tree located in the Amarelão community. According to the oral tradition of the Mendonça group, it was the first gathering place for buying and exchanging products between the communities, mostly foodstuffs such as those purchased from hunting, extractivism and agriculture.

There are some other places which are not so famous but are also important places of memory to the Mendonça people, such as: the Açude do Amarelão, the Linha Férrea (railroad line dividing the Amarelão community and the Santa Terezinha Settlement) and the Cacimba Salgada (dividing Amarelão community and Serrote de São Bento).

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Manoel Batista speaking in the interview conducted in 2017 by the Indigenous professors of Serrote de São Bento for writing the e-book “AVÁ ARANDÚ: nossas raízes e histórias”.

<sup>2</sup> Rosa Batista da Costa speaking in the interview conducted in 2017 in Serrote de São Bento by the Indigenous professors of Serrote de São Bento for writing the e-book “AVÁ ARANDÚ: nossas raízes e histórias”.

<sup>3</sup> Dona Dadinha speaking in the interview conducted in 2017 in Santa Terezinha Settlement by the Indigenous professors of Serrote de São Bento for writing the e-book “AVÁ ARANDÚ: nossas raízes e histórias”.

<sup>4</sup> Text written in 2016 by the student Mirela Ferreira, from the M. Alice Soares School.

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