

Transcription of the Oral History of Clarice Pankararu

Clarice: My name is Clarice Josivanha da Silva, and I am a Pankararu leader here in São Paulo. I served as president of the SOS Pankararu Indigenous Community Association in Real Parque from 2018 to 2025. Here in Real Parque, people always ask us, “Oh, is this an Indigenous village?” No, it isn’t.

This is a community of about 9,000 residents, and we are only a small part of it. We are 180 families, around 700 people altogether. Not all of them are Indigenous, because there have been marriages with non-Indigenous people. So, out of those 700 people, about 100 to 150 are non-Indigenous, leaving around 600 Indigenous people.

The Pankararu people here all live in Real Parque.

Museum: Ever since you arrived here at the age of 16, was that already something people talked about? Did people already say, “We are Pankararu,” “We are this many families”? Or was that something that gradually emerged?

Clarice: The people who came here first kept it to themselves. People only found out there were Pankararu in Real Parque because one of our relatives passed away. A newspaper article was published, but people were afraid to say they were Pankararu, that they were Indigenous. I went through that process too. I never used to say I was Pankararu.

First, because I’m Black—I always say that. People expect Indigenous people to look like the ones they see in history books. This community has between 8,000 and 9,000 residents, representing many different cultures.

I think that because we have an association, and because we’ve

been growing stronger within the community ever since the time of Seu Bino, we've been able to say:

“We're here. We are Pankararu people. We're here, and we're going to keep our rituals alive here. We're going to have our Praiá dance here, whether we're in the village or not.”

Praiá—this figure I'm holding here—is the Praiá, the maracá, and the campião. For us, they are our enchanted beings, our spiritual protectors who care for us and for nature. These are the Praiá, whom people call the enchanted beings. Each one has its own name. And we can't make them here because all the materials come from the village.

Museum: What material are they made from?

Clarice: Croá. It's a plant—I don't know if you're familiar with agave. I don't know if there's a similar plant here. They're those pointed plants... I

don't really know how to explain them. They process the croá and make these pieces from its fiber. Many people call it straw, but it isn't straw; it's croá, which comes from a plant. It is only found in that region of Pernambuco. I don't know whether it grows around here, maybe in Minas Gerais. Some of the younger people were saying there is some in Minas, but I don't know. The two times I needed it, it had to come from the village.

Museum: And are there spiritual figures here as well? You mentioned that your cousin was a shaman. In this urban context, are those same figures present, or do they exist only in the village?

Clarice: No. When Seu Bino brought the Praiá here, he first asked permission from the leaders in the village. Here we don't have a shaman or a chief. We only have community leaders or the president of the association. We leave those traditional roles exclusively to the villages.