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# AMONG FORGET-ME-NOTS, STRAWBERRIES AND FLAMBOYANTS: THE SIGNED EMBROIDERY OF BARATEIRO

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

This article is an extract from research for a Master's degree in Design, conducted between 2005 and 2006, whose subject was textile craft involving embroidery typologies (full stitchand Richelieustitch).In Barateiro, a peripheral neighborhood of the city of Itapajé (countryside of the State of Ceará), there is arelatively organized community producing embroideries, especially for the bed, table, and bath segment, to be sold out of that place. This activity has an economic value and ratifies the group'sposition, formed by artisans in the middle of the XXI century.

Handcraft in the Brazilian Northeastern Region is a source of income, and in the countryside of Ceará, many typologies account for a productive occupation of alarge part of the population. In the city of Itapajé, embroideries are renowned for theirexcellent quality, attracting consumers in search of tray cloths, face cloths,table cloths, napkins, bed clothes,and an array of embroidered textiles, as a "local knowledge." But, when professional resellers started to buy the embroideries to sell them at fairs out of the city, they were mixed up with other cities 'embroideries and lost theiridentity.These buyers became intermediaries between the artisans and the consumers.

## 2 THE SIGNED EMBROIDERY OF BARATEIRO

To resume the economic valuation and rescue the cultural identity of theem-

broideries of Barateiro, the Education Department of Itapajé hired a team to work as design intervention. This intervention became known as Craft Revitalization Program of Itapajé – PRA-ITA and changed the embroidery standards used until thenin the city by implementing a system for the process that was divided into variousphases, from the awareness of the artisans to the formal knowledge of forms, colors, textures, graphic representations, and pricing.

Previously, Barateiro's needlewomen used forget-me-nots and strawberries in colorful or monochromatic compositions as a pattern in their full or Richeleu stitche mbroideries. PRA-ITA provided the artisans with resources to replace the forget-me-notsandstrawberries with another motif representing them.

After some attempts, the artisans chose the flamboyant flower to be thesymbol of resistance and permanence because it insists on sprouting in the semi-arid-

climate of Ceará, such as the artisans who continue producing embroideries despite the competition with industrialized products their craftwork faces.

Without the formal knowledge taughtin design courses, the artisans started to develop new products following the fashion design system and using market strategies, such as: stylization of forms; selection of colors; choice of raw materials to embed a part of themselves in their embroideries. They exploit the flamboyant flowerusing its profile to form mirrored drawings (localized application) and their front view (Richelieu embroideries). The colors of the flowers (red and yellow) have been used



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infull stitch embroideries, and the monochromatic versions, in Richelieu embroideries To be a needlewoman and do embroideries is a productive activity encompassing adiversity of aspects that mark something unique. To be a needlewoman means to do embroideries in a specific way only. What makes embroideries unique is how they are done: the "local knowledge." To be a needlewoman is also a possible alternative, more than this, it is desirable socially. To be "native" of Itapajé means to be long to a social system determined in time and space in which values, symbols, and stories of ordinary lives are inscribed. Embroideries donotexist by themselves; they are artifacts of a system. The "localknowledge" of the community of Barateiro (using the flamboyant flower as the new embroidery pattern with cultural identity) was the primary motive for such reflections to become this research. The embroideries' signature may be understood in the first place as an aspect that culturally and geographically determines Itapajé as a place. When the needlewomen appropriated the flamboyant flower as the main motif of their embroideries, they inserted their mark where they live the same way that place was marked by the embroideries representing the permanence of the craft reflexively through the new pattern developed.

The needlewomen produce embroideries but not any embroidery: they are embroideries from Barateiro. They are artisans that claim the role of representatives of a tradition, that build and update daily the ability to transform raw material (tissues,threads, needles, patterns, frame, and the imagination) into embroideries that are es-

thetically useful and bear significances regarding their "making."

#### **3 CONCLUSION**

For the artisans of Barateiro, it means reproducing this knowledge which, when transmitted, always combines the mark of their beliefs and values. The eldest teach their art to the youngest, who incorporate the tradition into their actions. PRA-ITA operated as authentication of a "collective signature" that marked the difference, especially regarding other embroidery types produced in Itapajé or other places.

Social processes usually reveal that modernization is not the opposite of traditionalism, and many times, they make traditionalism possible. In the case of the artisans of Barateiro, the changes generated a fight to preserve their identity as a socialgroup built up upon their productive practice and work. Although they are part of the transformation process, their craft requires permanence to a certain extent. Therefore, the design of their "doing" acquires new forms, intrinsically built. In the context of the Design, there is a permanent tension over the functions of the artifacts and their different instances, which during their use may relate a user (individual or extensive to society) to an object of use. In most capitalist societies, the value of the use that something provides and its value of exchange is not proportionate. Other discrepancies may be related, caused by the change in the use of artifacts that are distant from their daily use when seen from the perspective of their primary use.



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