

Kavien's Justice Award 2025 Winner

The Kavien's Justice Award 2025 went to Milena de Roode Torres Georgiadis for her thesis '*When Culture Shields Land: Heritage Recognition as a Tool for the Territorial Protection of Quilombola Communities*'. Supervised by Bernardo Ribeiro de Almeida at Leiden University College, the research explores the role of cultural heritage for the protection of traditional communities' lands.

In Brazil, Quilombola communities face serious threats to their ancestral territories. They are traditional groups formed through the resistance of enslaved Africans and their descendants, and who today maintain distinct cultural traditions and deep collective ties to their ancestral lands. Nevertheless, despite having a constitutional right to their territories, persistent challenges in land titling leaves them vulnerable to dispossession and other external pressures - a reflection of a broader, global reality affecting many Indigenous and traditional groups.

Against this backdrop, the thesis inquires whether we should explore an alternative route to protection, one in which their distinct culture becomes a means of safeguarding their land. Worldwide, States employ a variety of legal and policy instruments for the protection of heritage, and yet little research has examined how these frameworks might be utilized to support land security. The study thus poses the following question: *how can cultural heritage law instruments enhance the protection of Quilombola territories in Brazil?*

The thesis employs a socio-legal methodology to analyze the land-related effects of two heritage legal instruments in Brazil: the *listing* (for tangible heritage) and the *register* (for intangible heritage). It finds that the listing offers direct territorial protection by criminalizing physical alterations to the territories and prohibiting forced displacements. On the other hand, the register provides a more indirect contribution by strengthening institutional support, increasing visibility for land struggles, and providing valuable data for legal mobilization. Both instruments were influenced by international human rights, particularly by the ILO Convention No. 169 and the cultural heritage regime under UNESCO, highlighting the interplay between domestic and global norms.

Ultimately, the thesis argues that cultural heritage laws, though traditionally aimed at preserving identity and memory, can function as strategic tools to enhance land security. In doing so, it invites us to consider the use of such frameworks in other countries with Indigenous and traditional communities, which depend on the protection of their ancestral territories for the maintenance of their ways of life and identity.