

# Gastronomy: Flavors and Knowledge of Quilombos in the State of Rio de Janeiro - Brazil

Maria Julia Maluf Novaes Franco, Adriana Novaes Rodrigues

<sup>1</sup>Department of High School, Colégio Albert Sabin, Ribeirão Preto, Brazil

<sup>2</sup>Department of Medicine - Patology, Universidade de São Paulo, Brasil

Received: 05 Sep 2021,

Received in revised form: 01 Oct 2021,

Accepted: 08 Oct 2021,

Available online: 15 Oct 2021

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**Keywords—** *Brazilian Cuisine. Gastronomy.  
Gastronomy Slavery. Quilombo.*

**Abstract—** *The history of Brazilian slavery goes beyond forced labor and suffering. The new historiography on the subject informs about the resistance, sprouted from the fruits of the Quilombos. The objective of this work was based on the search for an association between cuisine and history, of a State that has an important role in Brazil. Literature review method. Conclusion: The great importance of quilombola communities, which seek to maintain the traditions of regional and temporal cuisine, are fundamental.*

## INTRODUCTION

A dark period in world history was slavery, which goes beyond forced labor and suffering. In Latin America, especially in Brazil, this dreadful period left a deep mark, not very enriching, but also left a culturally important legacy with miscegenation and a cuisine.

During the period of slavery in Brazil (17th and 18th centuries), the blacks who managed to escape took refuge with others in the same situation, in well-hidden and fortified places in the middle of the woods. There, they developed a subsistence culture and the food grown by quilombo families was corn, cassava, beans, tobacco, sweet potatoes, and they also kept chicken farming (SCHWARCZ, 2015) and the recipes were those of cultural memory kept in the slave quarters in order to preserve its origins.

Before the abolition, reports point to the existence of a quilombo established in the region between the mediations of Morro do Arpoador, Praia dos Negros and Praia Rasa, on the border with the city of Cabo Frio. Some residents of Praia Rasa describe these spaces as places where enslaved blacks went: both those who managed to flee when the

slave ships landed, and those who escaped the surveillance of the overseers.

Cultural preservation is currently allied with gastronomy, which despite being a vast field of study within the universe of scientific research, values typical foods and even keeps alive the history of the quilombos, which are more determined by the region where they are from than by an ethnic unity. (Porfirio, 2021).

Eating habits are of great interest to those who want to know the place and time, as they provide essential information to understand the moment, what characterizes it and even the survival strategies of different groups and social categories. (SCARANO, 2002, p. 38)

This association: flavors and knowledge, solidifies the Brazilian gastronomic pillar. Therefore, this article is based on the search for the association between cuisine and history, of a State that plays an important role in Brazil.

### General objective

Search for the association between cuisine and the history of quilombos, in the State of Rio De Janeiro.

### Specific Objectives

Describe the introduction of some foods in the Brazilian cuisine menu.

## 2. CASA GRANDE and SENZALA (The Master and Slaves),

The food in traditional communities remaining from quilombos has its own characteristics, with little or no capital accumulation, most of the time using family subsistence farming and selling only the surplus. Its production is made from the use of natural, renewable resources present in the local ecosystem. (MATTOS, and ABREU, 2013).

In the State of Rio de Janeiro, manioc flour was the food that constituted the basis of slave feeding. It was complemented by corn, beans, rice, bananas, and oranges. In the countryside they could count on their gardens. The bacon and the lard were common complements in the slaves' diet. Fresh fish and green meat had a high price, with dried meat, bacon and dried fish being cheaper, as Mary Karasch informs (2000, p. 205).

Approximately 30 remnants of quilombos still remain in the State of Rio, like an ember that burns in a wood stove and maintains cultural traditions, already very mixed, but bravely resisting the social and psychosocial conditions imposed. This thought is reaffirmed when Cascudo in 2004 talks about feijoada, "the most gloriously national dish in Brazil", it is taken as an example of this *mestizaje*, carried out within "a Portuguese acculturation model" (CASCUDO, 2004).

Although flour, considered as a hydrocarbon food, with second-class protein and poor in vitamins and minerals, and forming gastric pathologies, even when ingested dry, it was picturesquely observed, in 1909, as a second-class food, distributed in slave quarters. (SOUSA, 1909)

When we observe the reports of Câmara Cascudo (UMUARAMA, 2010) the idea of miscegenation as a national identity, mapping the contributions of the "indigenous menu", the "African diet" and the "Portuguese menu" as sources of Brazilian cuisine, a native interpretation of what can be called the Brazilian popular "culinary system". (CASCUDO, 1977)

Starting from this mix of flavors, the contribution of the quilombos lands on a monumental journey of feelings and nostalgia, forgetting the pain of the time.

The free research methodology allowed us to have access to various information about its historical importance, in which it was elaborated.

## 2.1 Gastronomy in Quilombos

Cooking is the set of techniques created by man to transform possible edible objects into food, not necessarily food (MONTANARI, 2008). It can be derived from an adaptive need, and by this reason may not be the only indication of the beginning of the cultural man, as defended by Levi Strauss (2010). Several techniques were created to turn an inedible food into an edible one, such as *tucupi*.

In the past, the cultivation of cassava, wild cassava (to produce flour), corn, beans, potatoes, bananas, oranges, sugar cane and annatto, as well as animal husbandry small, were the main means of livelihood among the residents. The surplus production was sold nearby or exchanged for other products of collective need. Talking about the cuisine and gastronomy practiced over time is an agency about the present moment.

Cooking and gastronomy are arts of connection. Often, in the kitchen, around the table, significant stories emerge for those who share them. From the period prior to the abolition of slavery to the present day, quilombos are remembered through enslaved Africans, black quilombos, and quilombo remnants.

A classic example of this "devotion to the past" can be seen in the Quilombo de Maria Romana in the State of Rio de Janeiro, where knowledge about these practices has favored the construction of links between people and the group's historical trajectory. In times of transformation that maintain the continuity of rural practices, eating habits, despite incorporating changes inherent to cultural dynamics, work as anchors for the maintenance of customary values. Equally handcrafted, working with the land requires patience and dedication.

In a past lived with difficulties, the vegetables in the backyard need to be widely used for survival. Among them, the Bahiano stands out, a vegetable with a dark green coloration that, according to the customs and habits of the region, was prepared pure or accompanied. (SANTOS, 2008) Similarly to corn, papaya, available in the backyard of the *casa grande*, banana, *biju*, *tapioca* and *polvilho*, often made in a pestle, or at *Casa da Farinha*, whereas in the colonial period, manioc flour was used to feed slaves, servants on plantations and plantations, as well as serving as a travel supply for the Portuguese (travelers' *farnel*). (CASA DA FLOUR, 2019)

Tradition reinforces *feijoada* and other typical dishes from quilombola communities thicken the cultural melting pot. The Portuguese were responsible for bringing to Brazil the technique and the combination of stew and meat, which over time and the evolution of customs, had our beans added, becoming "The Brazilian *Feijoada*." It lives on in

the memory of those who tried it and has the specifics of Brazilian cuisine. In the world of gastronomy there are several hypotheses about the emergence of feijoada. One of them says that the feijoada we know had its origins in the 19th century and has already become a national symbol at the same time. Another hypothesis says that the dish was created in the slave quarters, by slaves, using leftovers from Portuguese noblemen. (DUTRA, 2005)

Black beans originate from South America and were called by the Guarani comanda, comaná or cumaná. Cassava flour is also a basic component of food for Africans and Europeans who came to Brazil. Bean and cassava swiddens were planted in various places, including in domestic spaces, around homes, mainly for the popular classes.

During slavery, many African plants were brought, such as the oil palm from Angola or okra, which were incorporated into gastronomic dishes, maintained by quilombola traditions. The basil (*Ocimum gratissimum* L.) with a marked flavor and aroma remains in unaltered use. The seasoning of the farm has basil, it tastes like history. Therefore, in the quilombos, the use of medicinal herbs such as fennel, lemon balm, mint, among others, were also used as a seasoning.

The Santa Rita do Bracuí quilombo, (Fig1), in Angra dos Reis, in the Costa Verde region, whose residents descend from the former slaves of the farm of the same name, which belonged to Commander José Joaquim de Souza Breves, maintains the tradition of use of flour and cornmeal, which had an importance in the daily lives of quilombos. They use angu, made in an artisan way, accompanied with a recipe for chicken with okra, it also took on the taste of the casa grande and do. Pumpkin blossom and sprouts are used in the omelet, in an enriching way, through calcium and iron.

Slaves played an important role in the dissemination of various plants, introducing different species in many regions of Brazil, with the aim of preserving traditional African medicine and gastronomy.

Thus, we can say that Cascudo, (1977), in his reflections on Brazilian cuisine or cuisine, fully demonstrates the consecration of the native product, which recalls the mixing of Brazilian culinary tradition, explained by our colonial historical experience.



Fig 1. Quilombo do Bracuí location. Source: INCRA (2000, 15)

## CONCLUSION

The appreciation of traditional cuisines is linked to the recognition of their identities and ways of life. Keeping history alive, showing the importance of the community and its culture, through cooking, becomes an identity marker, which quilombola groups use as markers of a claimed identity.

Gastronomy which historically marked Brazilian cuisine, is much more than a list of specific recipes crystallized in time, but a whole way of dealing with food.

Before this whole process of culinary restoration by the descendants of Quilombos, where the first free blacks came from, the kitchen is a unit of belonging, which follows different paths specific to its historical social context, with the addition and subtraction of foods and techniques. It can also be said that food at the table is a demarcation of identity, with an expressive importance of the land for the cuisine of past generations, as they are updated by new generations.

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