

Quilombola Women in Brazil

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Received: 20 Dec 2021,

Received in revised form: 13 Feb 2022,

Accepted: 21 Feb 2022,

Available online: 28 Feb 2022

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Keywords— Women; Race; Territory;
identity; quilombo.

Abstract— *Quilombola women today represent important figures to understand the process of social constitution of the country, especially considering the condition that women still find themselves in society and in the struggle for equality. In addition, their relationship with the territory is an important example to understand the economic dynamics of Brazil as a whole. Thus, it is intended here to discuss what territorial identity represents for these women and how they relate to society, as well the current dynamics of the quilombo and especially of the women who compose it around the society of the region. Bringing together different approaches to create an initial scenario to understand the dynamics around quilombola territories, using to a large extent the representation, vision and relationships that quilombola women have on their territories. For this, it will use data and the existing bibliography that deals with gender, quilombos and the colonizing context itself that created the social dynamics seen today. As well as.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The study of the *quilombola* situation in Brazil is still quite limited, which indirectly demonstrates the difficulties of being seen and heard not only socially, but also academically.

For a better understand of social relations around female figures in countries with a history of inequality, it is necessary to rethink the type of feminism in theoretical terms, which best applies and manages to understand these dynamics of peripheral women gender oppression is linked to racial and economic inequality. These economic and racial inequalities affect women even more perversely, as they are socially below white women and black men, thus making them even more vulnerable.

There are *quilombola* communities in at least 24 states in Brazil: Amazonas, Alagoas, Amapá, Bahia, Ceará, Espírito Santo, Goiás, Maranhão, Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul, Minas Gerais, Pará, Paraíba,

Pernambuco, Paraná, Piauí, Rio de Janeiro, Rio Grande do Norte, Rio Grande do Sul, Rondônia, Santa Catarina.

The *Palmares Quilombo* (by the end of the 16th century) was the first project of a successful self-title and agrarian reform in which everyone could live by sharing the little they had and the abundant productions that guaranteed the livelihood of the *quilombo*. After the long crossings, those who resisted, bodies violated by the punishments in the slave quarters, found peace of mind, healing of the soul, among their own people. A breath for those who didn't have the right to decide about their own body.

Kalunga, the largest *quilombola* territory in the country, covers three municipalities in Goiás: Cavalcante, Monte Alegre de Goiás and Teresina de Goiás, in the Chapada dos Veadeiros region.

Quilombo, in addition to being a search for autonomy, was a form of resistance and struggle against the slave system, was also a way of reacting to the cultural

disintegration to which slavery had been subjected. Many people sought to reach large established quilombos. Individual escapes became a common strategy in the 19th century, as slaves escaped constantly, they settled in large cities – such as Salvador – and pretended to be freedmen.

The historian and human rights activist Beatriz Nascimento (1985) developed an extensive work devoted to the understanding of the *quilombo's* concept, meaning and organization from Africa (specifically Angola) to Brazil and argued that the *quilombo* could be seen as a symbol of ethnic and political resistance that proclaims a way of living that had the possibility to correct distortions imposed by economic and political powers and unite people around other ideals, such as solidarity.

Because the *Quilombos* were communities formed by former slaves who had run away from the farms these places became centers of resistance for black slaves escaping from forced labor in Brazil, work done for farmers, who were certainly supported by the State (government) and the Church.

The formation of *quilombos* from the colonial period to the contemporary is linked to the violence derived from a racist ideology that dehumanizes the black woman and locates her as an infra-human category, which justifies and authorizes violence, which fixes identity policies and promotes the appropriation of their territories as a commodity (Fernandes & Santos, 2016).

After the legislation of the Federal Constitution of 1988, with art. 68 and its advances in 2003 with Presidential Decree 4.4887/2003, which formalizes the guarantee of the right to land and the recognition of *quilombola* communities through their self-attribution, the processes of recognition of *quilombola* communities throughout the country are leveraged. Reaching its peak in 2006 with the recognition of 400 communities. With the recognition processes, the struggles of communities for the sovereignty of their territories and the guarantee of access to their basic rights take over (Fernandes & Santos, 2016).

Quilombola communities are groups with their own cultural identity and were formed through a historical process that began in the times of slavery in Brazil. These communities maintain a strong connection with their history and trajectory, preserving customs and culture brought by their ancestors.

The political struggle of *quilombola* communities is presented in a field of ambiguities between the possibility of access to land and affirmation of their identity, and at the same time, the protection of their ways of life by the State, and the objectification of their lives by the market. that capitalizes on traditional ways of living in

the form of marketable products (Santos, Massola, Silva, & Svartman, 2016).

Decree 4,887/03 defines, in its article 2, *quilombola* communities or remnants of quilombo communities, ethnic-racial groups, according to self-attribution criteria, with their own historical trajectory, endowed with specific territorial relations, with presumption of black ancestry related to the resistance to the historical oppression suffered and that the characterization of the remnants of the quilombo communities will be attested through the self-definition of the community itself.

The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) estimates that 1,108,970 people live in indigenous areas and 1,133,106 live in quilombos in Brazil.

The people of the quilombo are a happy people, who like music and dance. Among the *quilombolas* there are a large number of singers and songwriters, who recount in their songs the life, struggle and hope of their people. The so-called traditional festivals are the result of many influences: black, indigenous and Catholic.

CONAQ (National Coordination of Quilombola Communities) estimates that in Brazil the *quilombolas* are approximately two million people, or 130 thousand families, present in all Brazilian states. A large part of this population still lives in rural areas and far from urban centers, as the birth of quilombos unfolds from the need for refuge for blacks who managed to escape enslavement, which lasted in the country for more than 300 years (from 1530 to 1888). Currently, these communities are spaces for the maintenance and resistance of black culture, of African ancestry and their survival is linked to the leadership of black women.

Quilombola communities are constituted as self-determined traditional territories based on the ethnic and racial origin of their residents, which is why they are supported by Convention 169 of the ILO (International Labor Organization).

The norm guarantees these groups the right to control the land and activities that ensure their survival and economic development, as a way of strengthening and maintaining their identities.

The country has approximately 2,500 certified communities, according to data from the Palmares Cultural Foundation/Ministry of Culture. Statistical data do not have the necessary disaggregation to identify who is a quilombola in the total numbers referring to Brazilian rural communities, which makes thousands of women and men invisible to specific public policies. The lack of access to

the rights to health, education, quality public transport, as well as the legal instability regarding the right to their own territory, reveal how institutional racism limits the dignified survival of this population.

Women are in a more problematic situation. While men migrate to the nearest cities in search of work, they remain. There, they guarantee sustenance, based on the management of natural resources, acting for the social organization and transmission of ancestral knowledge.

Quilombolas are exposed to various forms of violence, they are the main ones impacted by territorial conflicts, development projects and the suppression of rights, which significantly compromises the social and economic development of these women. Even in this adverse scenario, these communities resist, marked by female and black protagonism.

As part of the Black Women strategy Towards a 50-50 Planet by 2030, UN Women interviewed *quilombolas* Célia Cristina da Silva Pinto, National Coordinator of CONAQ (National Coordination of *Quilombola* Communities), and Maria Rosalina dos Santos, State Coordinator of *Quilombolas* of Piauí and also a member of the National Coordination.

They talk about the reality of *quilombolas*, acting as leaders in the communities and the debate in the Federal Supreme Court (STF) on the constitutionality of decree 4,887/2003.

The demands of the leaders interviewed are in line with the recommendations contained in the Plan of Action of the International Decade for People of African Descent 2015-2024, especially with regard to the protection of their territories, which is a prerequisite for achieving a Planet 50-50 in 2030.

And mirroring these women and so many other anonymous people in the country, that we, *quilombola* women, fight against the invisibility of our fight against racism, machismo and against all kinds of discrimination and violence in this unfair, racist and unequal society.

Quilombola women are the holders of traditional knowledge, prayers, natural medicine and typical foods. They were and are important in the social and productive organization and in resistance strategies.

Black *quilombola* people, we have been fighting for centuries against racism that hinders and often prevents the full development of our quilombos. For many years our struggle did not have the support of the Brazilian State, as this was the one who supported and legalized the monstrous exploitation of our bodies and our work, through the nefarious slavery. We fought and conquered

that freedom 131 years ago, but we still have a long way to go so that our people can live in peace and with dignity.

In a retrospective, the struggles of *quilombola* women intertwine the resistance struggles of *quilombos* in Brazil. Historically, we follow the steps that come from afar with Dandara dos Palmares, Tereza de Benguela, Maria Aranha, Zacimba Gaba and so many other important women for the continuity of the struggle today. And mirroring these women and so many other anonymous people in the country, that we, *quilombola* women, fight against the invisibility of our fight against racism, machismo and against all kinds of discrimination and violence in this unfair, racist and unequal society. Many *quilombola* women hold the positions of presidents of associations, federations and leadership in the *quilombo*.

Quilombola women had and still have an extremely important role in the struggles of resistance, maintenance and regularization of territories.

Whether in the quilombo or in the city, these women have been the guardians of the Afro-Brazilian cultural traditions, in addition to taking care of the house, the children, the elderly, the sick, the farm, the animals and the preservation of natural resources.

They were and continue to be fundamental in the *quilombos* struggle for their rights. Currently, many *quilombola* women face the fury of farmers, land grabbers, often paying with their lives to defend the people.

The participation of *quilombola* women in policy definition spaces has guaranteed the proposition of public policies that take into account the gender, racial and generational cut, since they play an active role in society, take their demands and denounce institutional racism, invisibility, domestic, sexual and psychological violence and the absence of the state in their communities.

However, the Constitution would have to protect us, but he is our biggest violator, in a racist structure in its most perverse faces. However, we fight and resist, we are more than 6 thousand quilombos in Brazil in the states: Alagoas, Amapá, Amazonas, Bahia, Ceará, Espírito Santo, Goiás, Maranhão, Minas Gerais, Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul, Pernambuco, Piauí, Paraíba, Pará, Paraná, Rio Grande do Sul, Rondônia, Rio Grande do Norte, Rio de Janeiro, Sergipe, Santa Catarina, São Paulo and Tocantins.

In these sacred spaces that we worship our ancestry, our way of living, preserving the woods and forests, the rivers, seas, not contaminating the land that feeds us and keeps us on our feet, in the face of so many setbacks, withdrawals of rights and we watch without

believing tear up the Federal Constitution in broad daylight.

It should be noted that the organicity of quilombos today stands out for the proposal to add, in addition to the blacks who broke the process of enslavement, our ancestors who proudly follow their teachings, in an ancestral territory that teaches us collectivity, sharing, reflections so important nowadays, only those who have stepped barefoot in a sacred territory know the surrender and the life that pulsates in the heartbeat and in the pulsing blood.

1. Women and the quilombo

The struggles of *quilombola* women within their communities generally represent a major contribution to feminist movements. But in addition, they represent strong characteristics of strength to maintain the history of quilombos throughout the country.

In addition, they form a solid link with their history to maintain the (re)existence of being *quilombola* and black women in the country.

When *quilombola* communities organize themselves for the right to ancestral territories, they are not only fighting for the demarcation of lands, to which they have an absolute right, but, above all, they are asserting their rights to a way of life.

In the midst of the territory, they are part of, they develop not only as women, but also as *quilombola*, since it is in that environment that they develop their daily relationships. In this sense, understanding oneself as black and *quilombola* is very much like a political act, as it is understanding oneself to be part of a whole history of oppression. Being generally associated with a struggle against domination

In this context, the struggle for territory is the first factor in achieving equality. These women fight to be sovereign of their bodies and their territories, thinking the territory here is not only about a land, but also about the place where stories were built and are built. It is where the *quilombola* woman finds her protection, not only from what she considers herself, but also, because it is from their own territory, that these women can seek tools to alleviate violence and inequalities.

2- Quilombos nowadays

Women are the main figures who project and maintain the representation of the *quilombo* in their communities. This process is not just a reflection of the maternal role, in which the creation of new generations has an important role in the preservation of an identity and the territory is thought of as a self-reflection on Brazilian society.

Recognition is the first step towards achieving the full rights of *quilombola* communities. First, recognizing their identities and histories, so that their territories that maintain and reproduce such identities are recognized. In addition to being the place of subsistence of the community itself in the midst of its kinship and community relations, or its economic relations that depend on the territory to a large extent.

Thus, it is observed that these quilombos fight against dynamics of domination coming from an external economic context that takes possession of the still colonizing and excluding Brazilian society, which is in constant exchange with a foreign capitalist elite.

Black women today are the main figures in the moon for a more just, egalitarian and, above all, safer society, they are to a large extent the ones who relate to society, and even if they are not the majority in terms of decisions in the quilombos, it is perceived that within different communities they represent the majority. In addition to being increasingly organized politically.

Finally, *Quilombola* communities are currently one of the most vulnerable population groups in the country and fall into the category of traditional communities, since the essential feature of their characterization is the preservation of a culture different from the majority, maintaining a relationship with the land that, more than possession or property, it is an identity relationship. It is within the fragile structure of these communities that the *quilombola* woman has her life shaped and controlled by the nexus of gender, race, color, ethnicity and other lines of subordination and, in the face of a society marked by prejudice and the lack of opportunities, both in the countryside of work and in the social, political and historical field that *quilombola* women see themselves below the lowest strata of society.

In view of this recognition of the vulnerability of groups such as *quilombolas*, Afro-descendants and women, we find the need to go deeper in the study of their problems and try to find greater legal effectiveness of the institutes already constituted in our legislation.

II. CONCLUSION

Colonial racism forged in more than 350 years of slavery still dominates the state and permeates the minds and actions of that country's political and economic elites.

But whoever broke the shackles of slavery with the strength of his people will not stop fighting, even when conditions prove to be adverse. The struggle story of Acotirene, Dandara, Zumbi dos Palmares and Negra

Anastácia, among so many other fighters, is the strength and inspiration that leads us to our daily toil.

Another battle fought daily by *quilombola* communities takes place in the field of law. Understanding the intricacies of Brazilian legislation allows for taking firm positions in the defense of rights and in denouncing abuses and injustices.

To highlight the different forms of intersectional oppression such as violence against black women, food insecurity, the lack of appreciation of their ethnic-racial identity in schools, machismo still present in communities (the president of the Federation of *Quilombola* Communities is a man) and institutional racism, among others. Even in the face of these oppressions, *quilombola* women exercise their protagonism and fight for the claim of rights for their communities.

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