## II. ANALYSIS

### *1. The quilombo in Brazil's history and culture*

From a traditional historiographic perspective, the quilombo represented a prototype associated with runaway slaves who survived in an isolated and deserted place. This is a traditional concept that gets shaped by the opposition "escape-resistance" of slaves and becomes an isolation space for black people.

This perspective fails to account for the exchange and diversity of relationships between the black communities and the slave society. It is a narrow view reflecting the "invisibility" of official history, whose ideology ignores the effects of enslavement and African culture on the Brazilian society[1].

In this way, the view of the dominant class which regards the quilombo community as a criminal act, isolated both physically and economically from the rest of society, becomes incorporated.

From an anthropological perspective, however, the concept is more comprehensive and includes the occupation of lands by black communities, thus going beyond the "escape-resistance" concept. Several studies have coined the concept of "Black lands" as a complex social network, permeated by many-sided aspects involving, in certain regions of Brazil, multiple social movements and economic practices with different interests.

Different works on Brazilian peasant population have shown the importance of the relationship between land and kinship[2]. Both are key concepts to understand the reproduction itself of the group in question. Kinship is not just a principle of classification and organization, but also a code, a language that makes human beings – as individuals – to be part of a greater subject, which is in-group belonging[3]. The access to land is ensured by hereditary means, therefore kinship appears as an expression of ownership relationships[4]. Thus, kinship and land together represent an identity that is both based on and strengthened through land defence. The Quilombola identity starts to act as a tool for material and symbolic survival and black people in Brazil develop a shared cultural and ethnic identity, based on the land.

By analyzing different ethnographic sources it is possible to destroy the myth that quilombos were enclaves of African culture in the Americas[5].

The term quilombo would stem from a similar word in the South-Central African region that referred to a group of young beginner Mbundu warriors, later adopted by Jaga invaders from several ethnic groups that were uprooted from their communities. This institution would have been reinvented, rather than reproduced on this side of the Atlantic, also pointing to the loss of roots[6].

The most important confederation of quilombos took place in Palmarés, state of Pernambuco, which gained political significance and in the 17th century managed to resist attacks from world powers such as the Dutch and the Portuguese.

#### *1.1 The revolt ("quilombagem")*

The term *quilombagem* refers to the ongoing rebel movement organized and led by slaves themselves all across the national territory during the enslavement period in Brazil. It is a social change movement and a significant weakening force of the slave system, which laid its

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[1] Schmitt, Alexandra, et al.
[2] Among which it is worth highlighting the work by Joan Pacheco de Oliveira, "A viagem de volta: etnicidade, política e reelaboraçao cultural no Nordeste indígena", Contra Capa Livtatia, 1999.
[3] Tamagno, Liliana, "Teorías sobre la identidad étnica y la etnicidad", Chap. III.
[4] Leach, 1968.
[5] Andrade, Lucia, et al.
[6] Reis, op.cit.

foundations at different levels (economic, social and military) and exerted a strong influence on the collapse of this type of labor and its replacement with free labor.

The *quilombagem* is an emancipatory movement which preceded the liberal abolitionist one; it has a more radical character without no elements of mediation or negotiation between its dynamic behavior and the interest of the aristocratic class. On the one hand, there are the rebel slaves; on the other hand, there are the masters and the repression apparatus for such rebelliousness.

Thus, the quilombo became the organizational core of *quilombagem*, although there were also other ways to express rebelliousness such as guerrilla warfare and other different forms of individual and collective protests. Quilombos were the location where all these socio-cultural changes took place.

Therefore, the situation of oppression and persecution black people were subjected to, led these groups to set up a new relationship between society and territory, thus forging changes at multiple levels of their existence in a constant process of social re-organization that implied the creation of a new socio-cultural unit through the establishment of a differentiating ethnic identity, the construction of specialized political mechanisms, the re-definition of social control over environmental resources and the re-elaboration of culture with regards to the past[7].

So, *quilombagem* is understood as a constellation of protest movements against slavery having the quilombo as the organizational core from which these movements either emerged or converged and engaged with other forms of rebelliousness.

On account of the above, *quilombagem* is a radical movement. It includes not only runaway blacks, but also persecuted natives, mulattos, people being persecuted by the police in general, bandits, military service evaders, women without occupation, poor whites and prostitutes.

The *quilombagem* became articulated at national level from the early beginning of enslavement, going through all the slave system and constantly disarticulating it, and it often embodied threatening aspects for the aristocratic class, such as in the case of the Republic of Palmares.

## 2. Historic social situation and ethnographic features

In very general terms, it could be said that during the 17th century there were no strong slave revolts or questionings over enslavement. In turn, in the 18th century, along with the growth of sugar plantations and the increase in slave trade these became more common.

Already in the 19th century, the winds of abolition strengthened the positions of the strongest slave revolts. During that period, the city of Rio de Janeiro hosted the largest population of black slaves in the hemisphere.

### 2.1 Ethnic groups that arrived in Brazil

The attempt to clarify the origins of the African slaves that arrived in Brazil has been a complex task. This is due to the fact that in the minds of Portuguese colonialists, black people were not considered as human beings and, therefore, gave little importance to the activity of registering in a precise way the different cultures, languages and ethnic groups of captive Africans. On the contrary, they were all given the same generic name. However, from the early 20th century anthropology has managed to clarify many points with regards to Brazil's black population, although some points still remain to be worked out[8].

The historiographic tradition gathers, roughly, two major ethnic groups: the Banta (or Bantu) people from equatorial and tropical Africa, from the region of the Gulf of Guinea, Congo and Angola, the East-African highlands and southeast African coast; and the Sudan people, mainly from West Africa, the south of Egypt and the northern coast of the Gulf of Guinea. Usually, it is

[7] Joan Pacheco de Oliveiro, op. cit.
[8] Clóvis Moura.

argued that they were mostly Bantu people. Likewise, the cultural traditions of some groups of Sudan people, such as the Yorubas of Nigeria, the Huaca of northeast Nigeria, of Muslim influence, the Fula (of Ethiopia) and the Malê (or Mandinga, of warrior tradition) are highly prevailing among African legacies in the Brazilian culture, above all in the area of Bahia. Among Sudan people from the Guinea coast, the common presence of the language belonging to the Yoruba linguistic group, could be accounting for the predominance of elements from that culture in *candomblé*[9] and the black influence in the Brazilian language.

From a cultural point of view, the dominant influence of the Yoruba culture is also explained by its predominance in Africa itself, in the region of the Gulf of Guinea and all the way into the south. Their more advanced civilization came as a surprise to the first Europeans, by means of the brass ornaments they crafted in the kingdom of Benin. *"The religion, political organization and social customs of Yoruba people represented a model for a broad area. The Yoruba were mainly farmers but their iron, copper, gold and wooded crafts already enjoyed a well deserved reputation.Although there were not many animal species for hunting purposes, they took good advantage of fishing in rivers, lakes and the sea. They raised subsistence animals such as goats, sheep, pigs, ducks and chicken. The horse had been known for many centuries due to their contact with Arabs"*.

With respect to the Bantu people from Angola, their agriculture was less complex and was practised by women while men were engaged in livestock-raising. Unlike the Yoruba and other Sudan people, who wore cloth materials, black people living along the banks of the Zambeze and Benguela rivers wore tree bark clothes (such as they would do in the quilombo of Palmares); further to the southwest, they wore leather clothes and had hunting habits and iron weapons.

### *2.2 Creation and early times of Palmares. History and culture of the region.*

The most important confederation of quilombos took place in Palmares, which gained political significance and in the 17th century managed to resist attacks from world powers such as the Dutch and the Portuguese.

In this region of Pernambuco, the astonishing growth of the quilombo started to take place in 1630 when the wars against the Dutch had temporarily disarticulated the economy and sugar organizations, thus relaxing the masters' surveillance. In Bahia, massive slave runaways during struggles were common, thus allowing for the creation of important villages.

In Palmares[TN], black people were scattered throughout a difficult-to-access region, covered by a thick forest, which made it hard for white people to enter. Nature made survival easier on account of the abundance of fruit-bearing trees, animals and rivers with plenty of fish species, which also covered the needs for water in easy-to-access places. It was not difficult to create forest gaps and fertility and moisture for plantation purposes were in excess.

Being experts in agricultural tasks, black people kept plantations for their survival, even managing to achieve a small-scale surplus produce. Besides natural food, the forest provided them with the materials needed for building their huts - usually made of several palm trees - as well as for making their rustic furniture and utensils, and also with clay for pottery. In some villages, a rudimentary metallurgy was practised and stories mention a series of craft activities among them.

Among agricultural products the following should be highlighted: corn, manioc, beans and sweet potato, many of which were found and destroyed by white people. Bananas and sugar cane were also cultivated for the processing of "rapadura" and the sugarcane liquor also known as "aguardente".

The villages that hosted the quilombo were called *mocambos*, clusters of primitive huts with roofs made of palm leaves, fenced-in by wooden palisades.

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[9] Religious and musical ritual from Southern Brazil.

[TN] Palmares is a mountainous area located in the Northeast of Brazil, covered with forests and palm trees.

Scattered within an area of nearly 60 leagues, they came to shelter almost 20,000 inhabitants around the year 1675.

Despite the lack of more direct information regarding the traffic route across the Atlantic at that time, it may be said that Palmares was predominantly a group coming from South-Central Africa, people belonging to the Kikongo, Kimbundu, Ovimbundo linguistic groups, and others from the Congo-Angola[10] region.

But in the quilombo there also were Brazilian mestizo and indigenous people. In Engana-Colomim the population was almost entirely indigenous, living and fighting side by side with the black in a racial fraternity born from the common conflict with the white. In religious rituals and cultural habits (on which there is scarce information) this interfered to the extent in which all acquired a syncretic character. In some regions there even were chapels with Catholic images saying Christian prayers, where even marriage ceremonies were performed.

Married life did not have fixed rules either. Monogamy as well as poligamy were practised, king Ganga-Zumba and his three wives being an example of the latter. The Portuguese made few notes on their patterns and ethical rules but it is known that, according to African traditions, *"theft and murder were equally punished with death"*. As for the black who refused to join the runaways, whenever these raided one of the neighboring *fazendas*, they were treated as slaves until their release was agreed. It is worth pointing out that when quilombos reached significant size, the neighboring *fazenda* owners ended up negotiating with the *quilombolas* in order to achieve peaceful coexistence.

The "cooperation" of the white people with the rebels from Palmares was very frequent. They were interested in their agricultural surplus produce, which they traded for weapons and utensils. This "cooperation" was often a truce, which symbolized the power held by the black in the region. Although they did not have directly political aims, seeking only freedom, the runaways gathered in Palmares represented a deeply subversive element against the colonial organization, which had to be constantly fought by slave masters and authorities.

### *2.3 Coffee and the decline of slavery*

In 1850 slave trafficking was finally abolished. The popularity of sugar, export commodity that had brought prosperity to the area of slave labor in the Northeast of the country, started to decline in the world market. The constant flight of slaves demanded permanent measures for their repression and capture, which increased the cost of production. Thus started the crisis of the slavery system.

Moreover, in the second half of the 19th century a new crop appears in the Southeast with surprising dynamism, demanding, at the same time, a greater amount of workforce: coffee. Not being allowed to import Africans any longer, coffee producers from Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Minas imported black slaves from other provinces already in decline, such as Pernambuco, Bahia and Ceará.

This necessity of interprovincial import breaks up the black population again. With their redistribution to the new prosperous areas, families were often fragmented since their members could be sold to different masters.

This new distribution of the black slave population was, thus, subordinated to the needs of masters.

In the coffee economy of mid-19th century, slaves were no longer considered cheap and easily replaceable merchandise in Brazil. On the contrary, they had to be protected since their disability would result in production losses. Also, given that they could no longer be imported, their market price rose.

[10] Reis, op.cit.

In this stage, the slave starts to be protected. The capital invested in him had to be protected. This is why the first protective laws come into force.

The crisis of the slave system was entering its last phase. From a strictly financial point of view, capitals of European countries more developed in the capitalist system were investing in key areas, such as transport, lighting, ports and banks, bringing about a contradiction between free and slave workforce which would progressively become more acute. It all ended up with the Paraguay War, to which the great majority of blacks were sent and where about 90,000 were killed. Many of those who volunteered, believing in the imperial promise that they would be released after the end of the war, were reenslaved afterwards.

This tactic of sending blacks to war served two causes. On the one hand, it whitened the Brazilian population; on the other, it justified the immigration policy promoted by significant sectors of local capitalism and by the government of D. Pedro II.

In this phase two demographic trends of the slave and free black population, can be noticed: a decrease in their numbers as a consequence of the war; and a concentration of this population in the provinces of Minas, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

The other provinces were undergoing economic stagnation, with a black population becoming part of the regional types of peasant exploitation, since masters did not have surplus resources to invest into the dynamics of this declining economy. Black people were thus incorporated to a destitute economy.