

### 1. *Cultural interpenetration*

Despite being mainly made up of fugitive slaves, quilombos were also melting pots of army deserters, fugitives of justice, salespeople, adventurers, indigenous people displaced by the European advance, etc. African and their descendants prevailed, however, and they strengthened their identity and cultural bonds and, although belonging to different ethnic groups, tended to make their differences compatible, thus recreating cultures.

They were under constant attack from colonizers, who frequently made natives participate in the confrontations. That is why quilombos did not use to be established communities but changed places periodically, especially those which were located near the cities and lived on pillaging.

This mobility did not facilitate the establishment of customs, values and rituals of their own, or lasting institutions and leaderships.

In these communities, men and women developed efficient production and power structures and organized family relationships. However, the existing information is relatively accurate since it is found in studies carried out in very specific regions and times.

Although regarded by many as egalitarian societies, ranks and privileges were enjoyed by the elites closely related to leaders, which consolidated their power by means of the control exerted on people rather than on lands.

Quilombos' leaders named themselves "kings". Some of them were slaves who had belonged to ruling elites within their ethnic groups in Africa. The role of king (or queen) was often associated with religious roles stemming from the African *candomblé*.

According to analysis from different sources<sup>1</sup>, women played a major role in the protection of runaway slaves, in Negroes revolts and within the quilombo. This is the reason why they played the role of "queen".

The *libertos*<sup>2</sup> were the most distinguished elite group among black people; they often headed slave revolts and held strategic positions in the social structure from which they managed to conspire against the aristocratic class. They had skills in arts and crafts and since they moved among free people they had information about the government. They gave runaway slaves shelter in their homes where they also held conspiracy meetings, established links between rural and urban slaves and disseminated ideas for rebellion. Their independent figure represented the ideal of what a world without masters could be for slaves.

For most people living in the quilombos, a major problem was not to remain isolated. Even in protected places, they lived near rural properties, towns and cities, within the borders of enslavement, involving freed blacks, *libertos* and even white people who received information about the movement of troops. With these people, they supported each other, they worked together, they obtained weapons, ammunitions and food and could have bonds of affection and friendship.

It is true, though, that some cases of isolated quilombos have been registered, but most anthropological and historiographic sources register intense contact among the different quilombos and between quilombos and other social groups.

There is evidence both near Recife, Olinda, Salvador, São Paulo and Porto Alegre, of the frequent trade, kinship and friendship relationships during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, among runaway slaves, freed slaves, mestizo and white people.

These relationships tormented masters and colonial rulers. People inhabiting the quilombos often took cities by storm and attacked rural properties in order to obtain money and goods;

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<sup>1</sup> Reis, op. cit.

<sup>2</sup> Freed slaves, who had been granted such benefit by different means.

they also recruited slaves to enlarge groups or kidnapped slave women to achieve a male-female balance in the group. This is not implying that quilombos had a parasite economy since they also cultivated lands, hunted and extracted precious stones and gold (like in Minas Gerais) which were traded with mestizo and white tradespeople. Their crop fields became often destroyed by colonizers. There is also evidence of people living in quilombos who worked as temporary workers in *fazendas*. There are even records of slaves that were hired for agriculture within quilombos, that is to say, former slaves that hired slaves.

Runaway slaves were many times recaptured and had to return to the slave system from which they would be escaping again.

Either in isolation or association, engaged in predation or production, the aim of those living in quilombos was not to fight enslavement but to survive within its borders<sup>3</sup>. Both in the quilombos and at the core of the slave society, no process pointing to the need of establishing the African culture in the Americas could be spotted other than a process of adaptation, reformulation and exchange of values and institutions which gave rise to the Afro-Brazilian culture.

In religion, for example, the mix of Portuguese and African influence is remarkable. The archeological remains in some quilombos account for the mixture of Catholic saints with African wood figures.

Upon the establishment of a slave-based despotic government, which was capable of maintaining order against the expressions of *quilombagem*, its different cultures were regarded as primitive, exotic and were only to be considered once they fell under the control of the dominating apparatus.

In domain situations, all aspects of socio-cultural life are turned into resistance. In the case of religion, this is still more meaningful since it takes place at a symbolic level. Within religion, the ethnic community strengthens those links that contribute to its collective identity and expresses the contemporary situation of other societal aspects. In other words, that which is expressed through rituals are not individual wishes but collective wills to change the existing social conditions<sup>4</sup>.

The religion of African people was banned in order to prevent their group identity from strengthening. To avoid persecution, slaves combined African deities (orixás) with popular Catholic saints, thus creating cults such as *macumba* and *candomblé*, which also included aspects of indigenous religions and European spiritism.

This is how a peculiar religiosity was developed, amalgamating inter-ethnic differences and an Afro-Brazilian specific character, which granted them continuity by means of this religious expression, in spite of the transformation and identity expressions and also in spite of the elements that were taken from the dominant religion<sup>5</sup>.

The same happened with their languages. Since they lacked a linguistic unity, African people were forced to create a common one so that they could understand each other. Nobody or almost nobody regarded this incorporation as an enhancement factor, although even the word *chula* was created to refer to these terms.

Following the enslavement period, negro groups that became specifically organized in the dependent capitalist society that replaced it, also took advantage of the Afro-Brazilian cultural values as instruments of resistance.

This is not implying that they were kept unchanged, since they had suffered the influence of the dominant ideological apparatus within the ideological-cultural struggle that was being imposed at all levels. Samba schools, particularly in Rio de Janeiro, are an example of this, since they would lose their old character of spontaneous and specific symbolic protest in order to become

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<sup>3</sup> Reis, op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> Bartolomé, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Alicia Barabas, 1987, 1991, 1994.

institutionalized and subjected to financing groups which stripped them entirely or partially of their initial role.

Black people did not subject themselves to the cultures of colonizers, but rather inter-ethnic recreations of the African community itself took place. However, ethnic diversity ("Babel") made each group to struggle for maintaining their own rituals.

The high male sex ratio among slaves prevented the creation of slave families and the subordination of captive people to the network of aristocratic paternalism. Unlike what happened in the United States, if aristocratic paternalism and slave families had prevailed, the ethnic solidarity among slaves would have been much weaker<sup>6</sup>.

## **2. Impact of African culture in Brazil.**

The Brazilian culture was shaped not only by the Portuguese who contributed their language and religion to the country, but also by Amerindians, African black people and settlers who arrived from Europe, the Middle East and Asia. The influence of the African culture is very strong, above all, in the Northeast. The slaves imported by the Portuguese brought their religion, music and food traditions with them, all of which has had a strong influence on Brazilian identity. The *Capoeira*, an African martial art form, developed by slaves to fight against their oppressors, has gained great popularity in recent years, and all across Brazil semicircles of spectator-musicians can be seen singing an initial *chula* before the fight and providing the percussion during the fight.

In spite of the fact that the Brazilian religion is considered to be mostly Catholic, it is outstandingly remarkable for its diversity and syncretism.

At the present time, cults such as *macumba* and *candomblé* take place in Brazil along with other less orthodox rituals, some of them including animal sacrifices, black magic and hallucinogens. A significant part of *candomblé* continues to be secret and it was banned in Bahia until 1970. *Candomblé* is also a form of cultivating the African traditions (music, dance and language), within a system that aims at adoring and enjoying life in peace and harmony.

When they settled in Brazil in the 16th century, Portuguese people were faced with the different languages of indigenous peoples, which together with the different languages and dialects spoken by African slaves, changed the language that had been brought by the first settlers to a great extent. Together with Portuguese, the Tupi-Guarani language became a common language, understood by most of the population. Then, it was completely replaced by Portuguese, although some traces of both indigenous and African languages remained. The latter are used, above all, in Afro-Brazilian religious ceremonies (such as *Orixá*, *Exu*, *lansa*), in Afro-Brazilian cuisine (such as *vatapá*, *acarajé* and *abará*), and in general conversation (such as *samba*, *moleque* and *mocambo*).

## **3. Present-day situation**

The recognition of the rights of quilombos communities by Brazilian legislation has been relatively recent.

The first initiative in this sense was taken by the 1988 Federal Constitution, which assured this group of the Brazilian society the right of ownership over their lands (article 68 of the Act of Transitional Constitutional Provisions - ADCT).

From this legal framework, a set of laws and rules has been taking shape aiming at regulating the process of land titling of quilombos.

Nowadays, this set of laws and rules with regards to the rights of quilombos communities is both regulated by the federal and state-level legislation.

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<sup>6</sup> Reis, op. cit.