

QUILOMBOLAS' COMMUNITIES AND THE CREATION OF MEANING FOR THE BRAZILIAN GOVERNMENTAL POLICIES: HOW CULTURE AND CULTURAL EVENTS CAN GUIDE AND DETERMINE SOME OF THE OUTPUTS OF THESE POLICIES.

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ABSTRACT: The main objective in this paper, the first of a series dedicated to understand the position of the quilombos and quilombolas and the dramatic changes that they are suffering in the last decades, will be to present how the quilombolas can offer an example of the failures of the attempts to define those groups even with the uses of the rhetoric of the identity. In spite of those definitional attempts those groups are inserted, maybe in an extraneous way, in the governmentality policies and in this way they should develop strategies to lead with those changes. One of those strategies is related with the cultural events that are a central part in their possibilities of continuation and in their ways to give meanings and adapt the new state policies that appeared in the last few years in Brazil.

KEYWORDS: Quilombos, Brazil, Human rights

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In this paper we are not only going to follow a brief presentation of our subjects (the “reminiscent of quilombos” in the governmental and legal language or simply the quilombolas – the ones that inhabited the quilombos) and the history that they bring wrote in their bodies and minds and in their sense of community in the last, roughly, two hundred years¹ but we are going to see a community that is changing fast and that has a series of challengers that are transforming some of the most characteristics aspects that underpin their sense of community during this history. In order to highlight this transformations I want to start exactly with those changes in order to avoid the risks of understand those communities as a stable and crystallized structure.

So, in this introduction, I should try to show, as clear as possible, how, exactly now, those communities are in the middle of an important change of poles in the relationship with the Brazilian state. For the most part of their history those communities was understood by their members as place of resistance, resistance that in a certain way was the reason of its origin and a leading energy in the cohesion of those communities during its long history. Resistance that are still being taken and understood by the most part of the literature about the subject, specially the one linked with NGOs and social movements, as a reason for the proper existence of those groups without the perception of a change, in recent years (the last two or three decades), in this relationship. A change that inverted the position of those communities from a pole of resistance to a place where the governmentality is applied and lived as everywhere else.

In fact, how this relation between “quilombos” and state is being developed in the recent decades and how consequently it should be understood figures, in a broad way, as a chapter of the implementation of the policies related with human rights in Brazil. I affirm this in the sense that this relationship between quilombos and the Brazilian state exemplify what we could understand as a kind of dialectic that highlight the relation between a community with certain identity (mostly based in

¹ Although I'm becoming increasingly skeptical if there are any possibility of this long narrative. I think that the legal transformation that will occupied me for a while in this paper really creates a gap between two diverse historical moments both in the communitarian level of the quilombo and in the more global and recent and particularly associated with this transformation that we can characterize as a national quilombola entity and identity comparable with those of the indigenous populations (for example the idea of a self recognition by a self-certification given by in a national level organization (such as the Fundação Cultural Palmares) that recognizes the community as a whole although a whole present in a non contiguous territory.

notions of ancestry and progeny of a certain number of related or colligated people whose ancestry is related with the ones that was once slaves and escaped or by other ways occupied certain territory) with the central powers and with the Brazilian state in general (especially with the law and some kinds of government employees).

This is a relation that worked, during the whole existence of this political unity recognized as the Brazilian state, between the poles of the marginality in one side and of the inclusion of this communities in the other side. Stated in other words, the quilombo was, during a long part of this history, a place to send the army or the police and not a place to where the welfare state should be extended or in another way to say a place to forget and not a place to visit. A “cafundó”.

So, understood in this marginality/inclusion continuum, the present historic moment fits too as a chapter in the important, especially in the third world, but maybe in the near future in the so called first world too, aspect of the human rights in what they are connected with the eradication or supplant of the poverty and the starvation through policies of redistribution of resources, conditional cash transfers and fight against inequality and extreme misery (following in the last case the UN proposals of the millennium development goals and other similar proposals).

This changes happens in the sense that the perceived primary task of the government changed, and such a change was inserted in the formulation of the democratic constitution (the important art. 68 of the 10th part of the Brazilian 1988 Constitution is the one related with our subjects) but just now is being applied due to an increase of the economical underpins of the state itself that permits the extension of their rule, power and influential area (and we can understand in this way the federal decrees of 2003 that finally implement the constitutional article n°68).

In this way, it come to be understood that the government primary task is not only to keep the biological lives and the properties of the citizens or, inside the dialectical continuum, keep the life and properties of the owners of the slaves and destroy those communities that was founded in the rejection of the system itself during the slave economic system, keep the life and properties of those recognized as loyal to the state and diminish the value of the kind of association that the quilombos represents because, in front of a weak state, it could be understood as a challenger during the so called republican regime.

Besides those tasks, and sometimes in conflict with, that still figure in the official rhetoric and even in the flag of the country, the state has another task, guided

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by the lines established by the human rights as it appears in the foundation of the UN and complemented with the rhetoric and the positions of the post-ralwsian re-foundation of the liberalism: the task of the government is or should be to improve the quality of the life of the poorest ones (“a country should be evaluated by the treatment given to the poorest and weakest ones”) or should at least establish a minimum level from which the individuals become capable to look for their own ideals of life.

Is in face of this extra task of the government that the different policies, pre-existent of course in the previously moment but now transformed in a central flag of the proper legitimization of the state itself, that improves the quality of life of those “weakest ones” are designed leaving the state the task to try to absorb the conflicts that clearly exists between the different interests and groups of interests (for example, in our case, the civil engineer companies that value the areas occupied by the quilombos against the social movements that supports or even creates the claims of identity of those communities).

So, in presenting what my title promise, it becomes clear that our main hidden objective turns to be to trace and reconstruct a particular episode of the human rights development, the one related with the state inclusion through governmental policies directed to an more equal distribution of the wealth generated in the country in order to diminish or even end the extreme poverty and starvation, in an particular community in one of the corners of this world.

As we are going to see, there are a mediation achieved during cultural events that is not being take as serious as it should (with exceptions as the seminal papers French 2002 & 2006 for example) and that lead us to a particular conclusion that make us remember of an old truth: that in the parties (“fiestas”) and, in general, that during cultural events and social meetings we reconnect ourselves in a special way not only with our communities that forms important part of our own identity but that this kind of events permit us to symbolize and to give meanings to the challengers that are frequently posed by this sometimes extraneous institution called the state.

To put in other words there are no real planning if the state and the governmentality keeps those structures that we are calling communities and that others can call civil society, interest groups or so on out of the process. This happens because is inside this structures that the plan and the policies are adapted to the local context and this adaptation gives to this master plans and to those policies local and idiosyncratic meanings, meanings sometimes parallel with the initial intentions of the

ones that established it in the state level but sometimes completely diverse and even opposed to this intentions. So although the space of resistance is not any more the point of those groups this possibility, the possibility of regain this aspect, is still opened and plausible in the future. In this way the present investigation is a chapter in the recurrent attempt not to prove, this was already made so many times to be of any value to try again, but restate and maybe to present it clearer to the ones that formulates those policies the value of this old truth related with the communities and with these structures that occupies the field between the individuals and the state.

But there are another way to justify the interest in those particular cases. Although the interest in distant communities that in strange ways shared the same kind of questions and fate than us is a trivial and justifiable answer, I believe, that there are a more general tendency still recent in most part of the political units around the globe that can justify the interest in this subject a way better. In fact, this tendency still needs a lot more time to be taken not as a sparse episode but as a more global trend in Brazil for example, and that could have, I hope, a more general interest for this ambiguous and extraneous definition but one that unified so distant political communities and countries as the ones under the umbrella of third world: that one of the expansion of the governmentality in those countries.

The trends related with the quilombolas are, as I said, in a kind of dialectical relation with the state, a relation that during the most part of the history was one of resistance and conflict because the state was the other in the narratives of the quilombolas (the other that limit the use of the land, the one that appeared only to enforce extraneous laws or the one that appeared to enforce unfair or dubious rights of property) but that now, in this precise historic moment, becomes, more and more, to be a relation of inclusion with all the dilemmas and changes that it implies. Being a episode of this general tendency of the state in the third world is my general justification to present this paper.

But why this particular example to illustrated this trend? This particular community was taken as an example due to a series of different reasons. One of then, and maybe the most important one, is a fact maybe accidental: the place in the law given to this particular communities in the start of the democratic era in Brazil (roughly the last 25 years). This fact is that in the moment of the establishment of the democratic constitution of 1988 an especial place was given to what was considered an particular and legitimate institution or social structure (the quilombos) and a series

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of rights was given to this particular institution as a form of reparation and defense of what was previously vilified and understood as an enemy and as a non-legitimate organization (because it was understood previously as a challenger for the proper existence of the state). So this legal act² give us a *mark* of this process that, in the absence of a better name, I called the dialectical relationship in an trend that sometimes is hard to found so clear marks.

I am certain that the same kind of transformation, consequent to the expansion of the power of the central government exists, with certain particularities of course, in other kind of communities that share what I called the “marginality” component with the quilombolas. Just to mention some of those in Brazil: the most famous one is the south Americans indigenious tribes but others that can be mentioned includes communities as diverse as the Europeans colonizers that inhabited mainly the south states of the country, the almost forgotten aliens that came from Bolivia, Paraguay and Peru to work in certain industries in Sao Paulo State³ and, why not if we get the things in a really broad sense, the urban populations that leaves in the so called “favelas” in every single big metropolis in Brazil.

But the quilombolas was inserted in a clear way in the governmental policies in the dawn of the democratic state and in what was saw as the parallel dawn of the human rights in my country. Because of this particularity and because I think it illustrated a more general process that, maybe wrongly, and certainly in a paradoxical way if we consider the narratives that came from the first world present historical moment, I took this communities as my subject here. To try to explain this we are going to take some short ways and disrespect the order of a series of important develops that although important are better reconstituted if we had other aims. If we, at the end, understood part of the trends and problems and transformations involved and if we understood that the mediation of cultural events are essential for it I will be more than happy to say that my task was achieved.

² Chagas 2001, Dallari 1994, Doria 1996 and Veiga 1996.

³ Recently included in governmental policies of naturalization, for example.

DEFINITION AND IDENTITY AS FAILED PROCEDURES TO UNDERSTAND WHAT A QUILOMBOLA IS (OR WAS)

So, after this brief introduction and justification, the next question that I want to try to answer is who or what are the quilombolas?

The official and the mythical foundation of these communities are traced in the resistance to slavery and to the slavery economical system that predominated in the Brazil during the 300 years as colony of Portugal and during the imperial stage as a proper political unity after the independence in 1822. This period and this mode of production officially ended, after a somewhat long decadence, in the 1880s decade (with the last laws and consequent prohibition of slavery – episode mythically reconstructed in some of those communities with annual “fiestas” in honor of the Princess Isabel who signed the last piece of legislation (1888) prohibiting the slave labor – and the fall of the empire in the next year. So these places are in *reality* and now, after a century, above all, *symbolically* understood as the places that the fugitive slaves or the ones “liberated” founded a community or village or even a defensive structure to resist to the attempts of being caught again after escape or a place that by the union of a number of people in similar situation helped in the challengers due to the difficulties of being liberated without any financial compensation to start a new life as common citizens.

During the republican period this communities are relegated to a kind of forgetfulness both by the elites and by the increasingly important urban population⁴. At the same time and in a somewhat paradoxical way, so care of Brazil, this forgetfulness happens in the moment that due to the increase of this urban populations (to give a background if in the beginning of the XX century the rural/urban proportion was somewhat like 85%/15% in the end of the same century we have the exactly inverse proportion) this places, associated in the mind of the middle Brazilian, with distant regions in the rural parts (in Portuguese “o cafuno” See: Vogt and Fry 1996), suffer one of the most extreme changes in their history: in fact with the expansion of the urban areas some of those communities are incorporated by the urban areas becoming part of the sprawls and suburbs of the Brazilian metropolis.

⁴ There was an exception in these attempts of more global organizations in the 1930-40 with the “Frente Negra Brasileira” but it should be, I think, understood in the context of the social movements of the Vargas period than as of the same kind of the ones of nowadays. Without space or necessity to reconstruct this history I can recommend the follow paper: Kimberly 2003.

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So although some of those quilombos conserved during the last century a strong sense of unity and community this sense of community suffered the same challengers that other kinds of similar rural structures (such as the congos in Minas Gerais and the indigenous communities in São Paulo) suffered due to the urbanization and due to what was saw during this time in the academia as the “modernization process” of the country. Of course, all these transformations lead anyone that is concerned in an attempt to define those communities with more difficulties than certainties and one way to avoid that was, especially during the redemocratization period, with the rise of the cultural movements and the human rights concerns, to avoid any kind of definitional procedure and inquiry about what characterizes this groups and start to think in terms of the identity of those groups following the procedure adopted elsewhere in the world⁵.

But as I mentioned before, although the identity procedure was saw and is a kind of solution, the idea of identity, even if in process and mutable, lost their sovereign as “definitional” for those communities when the government marks their presence in this realm. In fact the so called article 68 confirmed by, in the fashion of the governmental way of act, by the enactment n° 4887 of the year 2003 bring a serious claim in pro of a legal and territorial definition to those communities that, in order to gain the property title of the territory, needs, now, to be defined by a certain number of technocrats and specialist from different fields (especially from anthropology related ones) that received, from the point of view of the operation of the bureaucratic apparatus, the responsibility, the legal one in fact, to trace the lines and legitimize the claims of unity with the past and integrity of the memories and narratives that related this spaces with events and circumstances that happened an hundred of years before (or even more as the case of the most famous of those groups – the one in Palmares – that was founded in the XVII century).

So it became perfectly legitimate to start to ask, against the wishes and political bias of the supporters of the identity way to characterize those groups, if the quilombola are or not an governmental invention in the sense of a legal creation extrinsic to the dynamics of those entities and social structures established above all in the interior of the governmentality within their classical realms of the legal apparatus and of the bureaucratic procedures and state policies?

⁵ Hall 2002, Hall 2003 and Bhabha 1998 are important references in the Brazilian literature about it.

We can ask this because although the materiality of the communities given by the occupation of the “cafundos”, by the long narratives that they used and still use and that are re-created in a number of communitarian events such the fiestas, the various processions in honor of different saints or especial persons (as the founders of the communities, the Princess that signed the final liberty act and so on) supports the claims and gave to those communities the necessary cohesion, although all these things that seems to materialize and give a sense of identity to those communities now the main question for the governmental power and for the rest of the Brazilian civil society becomes the one associated with the relation between these communities and the legal fact established by the 1988 Brazilian constitution about the reparation of the harms made on those communities in the context of the more general awareness of the racial problems in the country (the rejection of the ideal represented by Brazil of a racial democracy where the racism was solved and so on).

So there are no simple answers for who are the quilombos. The unreality of their narratives (due to the long past that they turn back, the absence of legal papers that legitimate their claims about the land they live), the transformation of the environment (especially the change from a rural order to a urban one with the increase of the exchanges with the others that are not a part of those communities) and the dynamics related with a country in eternal mutation forced us to avoid a conceptual or identity procedure of characterization of those communities in pro of a legal and geographical approach.

So we have roughly a view of what a quilombola community is and the limits of the answer to this question. This because it seems clear that if a quilombola was what we defined as a quilombola and then a quilombola appeared, for a brief moment, to be what they claim they are both this claims should be abandoned in order of a more practical and effective, to use a Michel Foucault vocabulary, strategy⁶. All those previously attempts are diminished by the legal fact established in an extraneous way in the interior of the policies of the central power that recognizes firstly as a matter of fact the territoriality of those communities. The territoriality justifies the legal claim and the legal certificates, papers and so on supports the claims for the own existence of those communities and maybe even for the maintenance of some of the

⁶ Once and a while we listen about other plausible strategies of those groups in order to keep the previously resistance component such an association with ecologic NGO's or so on. I think that those possibilities are extremely naïve but for a criticism we can see Penna-Firme and Brondizio 2007.

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cultural events. This puzzling dilemma was understood by those groups and serves as a model, that should be adapted of course, to the next dilemma established when the state starts or deepened the national programs designed to eliminate the extreme poverty situation in this country with mainly the baptized "Bolsa Familia" – a conditional cash transfer that hyperbolizes with their dimension the previously similar programs such the ones developed in Mexico (called "Oportunidades" and previously "Progresas").

So the next step to an comprehension of the quilombos and their relation with the state needs to a kind of conceptual geography⁷ of those communities and how some of the main trends related with them are connected with the kind of association that it keeps with the surrounded environment and how for those communities the main form of vindication of rights and recognition come to be the series of cultural events that happens in the interior of the increasingly fewer open and public spaces that occupies a central space in the geography of those communities. The same social and cultural events that occupy a central place in the process that gives meanings to the other governmental policies such the ones of conditional cash transfers. So, in some sense, the policies of territorial recognition and extension of the welfare system, if we still can call those policies in this way, are tied with those cultural events and in this way the carimbó (common in the quilombolas of the Marajo island), the lundu (of Alagoas), the moçambique (especially in Minas Gerais and São Paulo) and different kinds of circle dances ("Danças de roda") are in a certain sense, when tied with some geographic territory, the only possible moment and place that those policies can achieve a complete actualization. To state clearly what gives reality to those communities happens by the mediation of the fiestas and as we saw the reality and materiality of those communities are now a matter of state policy: the state recognizing this cultural events as cultural values linked with a property and territorial space and title.

⁷ For a properly geography of those spaces we have the challenge to keep track of what is being defined as a quilombola. The maps related with NGO's mainly accepts, even when imitates the state given "self-recognition certificates" and so on, the identity attempts of characterization of those communities appearing with enormous numbers of those communities spread over a considerable part of the Brazilian territory. Although the explosion of the certification by the government led to a increase in the numbers of quilombolas from the point of view of the governmentality this number is between 5-10% of the one based in the identity characterization. For example, in Sao Paulo State there are only 26 recognized quilombos for an estimated number based in the Palmares Foundation numbers of 300.

A S(H)ORT CONCLUSION

In this paper we followed some of the challengers that the quilombos and other kinds of communities are facing in Brazil, we saw the difficult involved in any attempt to define those groups even by the identity criteria and we saw that it happens because the structure of the state dissolved any identity claim when it urged those communities, not in an explicit way but as the only possible way to trace the territoriality, to use the cultural events as a way to demonstrate their reality and how those events changed the policies that materialized the quilombos in front of the state.

Accepting these points, our conclusion can be only one: we need to clear evaluate the process by which those communities deals with the challengers bring by those inclusive policies in order to understand the centrality of the two tendencies that I pointed in the introductory remarks about the inversion of poles of the relation with the state and in what can be in the near future a tendency of the state toward an inclusion of those that was for a long time understood only as a place of resistance. If those communities are going to lose their sense of cohesion because of these inversion, if this inversion are going to be another reason for the more general disruption of those communities (due to the urbanization and other environmental changes that they are suffering in the last half century) or if, contrarily, those communities are going to strength their links and their sense of union all those questions are still open as possibilities. Clearly this inversion didn't yet erased the possibility of resistance that those groups for so long carry with them. The reenaction of the ceremonies keeps always open the possibility of rediscovery of this side that are, by the way, even in this moment where it is dormant, taken with proud. But the second tendency, at least for me, is going to transform this in a mere melancholy of the past. But one strongly enough to be remembered in the future.

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