


Traditional Quilombola Communities and Education

Comunidades Quilombolas Tradicionais e Educação

Comunidades Tradicionales Quilombolas y Educación

Interview: Marta Quintiliano

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Abstract: Marta Quintiliano – Leader of the Vó Rita Quilombola Community in Trindade – Goiás. Anthropologist. PhD student and master in Social Anthropology, at the Federal University of Goiás (UFG), in the line of Ethnopolitical Research, Resistance and Epistemological Transformations” student of the social sciences course – qualification in Public Policies (UFG) and Social and Interdisciplinary Sciences in Quilombola School Education: Human Sciences (PUC). She is part of the collectives: Guinea - Collective of Indigenous and Quilombola Women, of the Union of Indigenous and Quilombola Students.

Keywords: Quilombola Education; Intercultural Education; Public Policies; Quilombola School Education.

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Resumo: Marta Quintiliano – Líder da Comunidade Quilombola Vó Rita em Trindade – Goiás. Antropóloga. Doutoranda e mestre em Antropologia Social, pela Universidade Federal de Goiás (UFG), na linha de Pesquisa Etnopolítica, Resistências e Transformações Epistemológicas” discente do curso ciências sociais – habilitação em Políticas Públicas (UFG) e Ciências Sociais e Interdisciplinar em Educação Escolar Quilombola: Ciências Humanas (PUC). Faz parte dos coletivos: Guiné - Coletivo de Mulheres Indígenas e Quilombolas, da União dos Estudantes Indígenas e Quilombolas.

Palavras-chave: Educação Quilombola; Educação Intercultural; Políticas Públicas; Educação Escolar Quilombola.

Resumen: Marta Quintiliano – Líder de la Comunidad Vó Rita Quilombola en Trindade – Goiás. Estudiante de doctorado y maestría en Antropología Social, en la Universidad Federal de Goiás (UFG), en la línea de Investigaciones Etnopolíticas, Resistencias y Transformaciones Epistemológicas”, estudiante del curso de ciencias sociales – habilitación en Políticas Públicas (UFG) y Ciencias Sociales e Interdisciplinarias en Educación Escolar Quilombola: Ciencias Humanas (PUC). Forma parte de los colectivos: Guinea - Colectivo de Mujeres Indígenas y Quilombolas, de la Unión de Estudiantes Indígenas y Quilombolas.

Palabras clave: Educación Quilombola; Educación Intercultural; Políticas Públicas; Educación Escolar Quilombola.

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Interview

1. Experience and Involvement with Education in Quilombola Communities

Marta: As a leader in my territory, I have been seeking many rights that we have not yet obtained. Among these, I follow the challenges and difficulties related to educational policies for quilombola communities in my State and in Brazil.

2. How would you describe the educational context in the quilombola communities in your region?

Marta: I am from the state of Goiás, from a community located in Trindade. It is close to Goiânia. It is a community that they classify as urban, but it is on the periphery; however, years ago it was a rural area and the city grew towards it. We are divided into three territories, and one of the territories has a quilombola school recognized as quilombola by the MEC.

However, there is a dispute in the municipality. The school principal is not quilombola. She is evangelical, and she has been arguing and motivating parents to oppose the changing of the school's name, because she says it alludes to and will turn it into a terreiro [Afro-Brazilian religious space]. There is all this discussion, so it's a serious problem, even with a school

within the territory, this disrespect. In one of these territories there is this problem, which is this interpretation that a quilombola school will become a school of Afro-Brazilian religions – "of macumba" [derogatory term for Afro-Brazilian religions].

In reality, what I understand is that she is afraid of losing her position as school principal, because it is a recognized quilombola school. Furthermore, it is advised that there be a quilombola coordinator. I think this is really a power struggle. So she uses her position and this issue, taking advantage of the fact that some quilombola students are evangelical. She uses this discourse. Well, in the other part of the family, of the territory, that makes up the community, there is no school.

Schools are far away, and there are no plans to build new ones. We have been fighting for quite some time, requesting a school within the territory to make literacy easier, even for adults. Ninety percent of the adults in the territory are illiterate. They barely know how to write their names, and the adolescents follow the same pattern. They end up leaving school to work and often do not finish or even complete the first stage of basic education. Therefore, having a school within the territory would make things easier in the sense that we will be affirming our identity, our knowledge, within the school.

School is the place for us to talk about our specificities and ancestrality. And we realize that, at least in the schools closest to here and in the quilombola communities that I know, we do not essentially have quilombola content. We don't. We have attempts. In Kalunga, for example, we know that there is an attempt, but it is not entirely effective there either. Perhaps in the Quilombo Jardim Cascata, they are closer to having a quilombola school, with curricula and appreciation of our traditional knowledge.

3. When you talk about a quilombola school, what parameters do you use to define that a school is not quilombola, for example?

Marta: A quilombola school is a school located within the territory. That's the first thing. And it has content focused on the Black quilombola identity of the residents who live in the territory. And that this content is Afrocentric, while also respecting the quilombola tradition, the knowledge that has resisted time, reinforces our ancestry, and the passing on of knowledge, such as popular festivals, blessings, cuisine, the resistance of those who came before, among so many other types of knowledge. And if a festival exists, it is necessary to respect this tradition of the people within the territory. To inform the children... reinforcing our identity, because in many places some traditions are no longer practiced. So, for me, the school would be a place to discuss this and for the elders to be able to speak and be recognized. From this work, we can return to practicing these customs that

we have stopped performing. Therefore, the school is very important. To have quilombola teachers, and to encourage the community to recognize its historical-territorial and political trajectory.

4. What are the main challenges faced by quilombola schools in terms of access, quality, and relevance of education?

Marta: Our biggest challenge, lately, is saying no. It's that we have other ways of being as Quilombola people. It's, for example, contradicting the public administration, which is usually composed of white people who produce discourses that we Black people are all the same. It is worth noting that we are Black Quilombola people originating from communities that are spread across 24 Brazilian states, in rural and urban peripheries, each with its own specificities. There are communities that are closer to the urban area, but are rural. There are communities within the city because the city has, in fact, reached their territories. So the challenges too... are many and complex. We have been here in Brazil, and specifically in Trindade, for many years, and we still have to fight with the government. Our biggest fight now is to change the name of the school, and we have the problem of the coordinator who does not want this change to a name that makes sense to us. So we are in this dispute, which involves the Public Prosecutor's Office. We filed a complaint and are waiting for a response, in addition to the construction of a new Quilombola school, among so many demands that appear from the moment that urbanization together with capitalism enters our ways of life and customs.

5. How have Quilombola practices been incorporated into the curriculum?

Marta: It doesn't exist. It's not being incorporated into the curriculum here because we don't even have permission to enter the school. If the elders can't enter the school, people who don't possess formal knowledge, due to a lack of academic training, end up being excluded. However, we know that we have the right to teach based on our knowledge. And if we can't contribute within the school, then it isn't being done, is it? Because a quilombola school presumes that these traditional knowledges are also present. That the elders and other people who produce knowledge, educating, also bring quilombola content. According to the Guidelines, they should comply with Law 10.639 with stories and our culture, but that doesn't happen, except on November 20th, Black Awareness Day. This even happens in schools that are quilombola schools because they are managed by people who are not quilombola and who also don't recognize the quilombola community as a promoter of knowledge.

6. Are you aware of any specific training programs for teachers to work in quilombola schools?

Marta: I know there are. There is training that I even applied to the selection process for, which is specific to quilombola education. And there is also the Quilombola Education Collective by the National Coordination for the Articulation of Black Countryside Quilombola Communities (CONAQ).

7. How is the management organized? What are the roles of leadership and managers in this process?

Marta: Well, our role was to have a dialogue with the school, but we were unable to achieve that. We were even discussing who arrived in the territory first and how the process unfolded. One of the first was Luzia - Luzia de Fátima Basílio, better known as Preta. She, along with other women, demarcated the spaces as follows: Here will be the Catholic church. Here will be the evangelical church. Here the health post. Here will be the school. But unfortunately, nowadays we cannot enter the school. So, as it stands today, there is no dialogue. We had a dialogue when there was a different principal. With the current one, there is no dialogue. We have no access to the school. As I mentioned, we filed a lawsuit with the Public Prosecutor's Office, together with the Public Defender's Office, to be able to have access and claim our rights to enter the school. And so, the Quilombola children, some of them no longer want to affirm their identity, because in a way they end up being ashamed and are still exposed by their peers.

8. What are the main obstacles faced in promoting quality education in Quilombola communities?

Marta: I believe the challenges are numerous. If we consider issues beyond Trindade, the challenges are structural because many of the schools lack infrastructure – actual infrastructure for classrooms, chairs, classrooms, teaching materials, and meals. I was speaking with the state management team the other day, and they mentioned they are renovating all schools within the quilombola territory. They added that they are considering and proposing actions for these communities. They cited a booklet, “Goiás without Racism”, which, in reality, doesn't effectively address the issue because it wasn't developed through dialogue with the communities. They imagine things and include them in the booklet, which isn't widely discussed. So, I said, “You need to discuss it with the community to know what to include and what to address in it”. Some things

are even prejudiced, and they put them in the booklet. According to the recent IBGE (2022)² survey that I was reading, we are the third state with a very high rate of illiteracy. So that explains a lot. There's no investment in education. **Specific, differentiated education. A right to education**, which they actually don't have. Often we end up not demanding it because, in fact, there are people who aren't even aware of it. And when you are aware, you go to demand it, and they say: - No, we're going to do it. We went to demand it once, and they said: - We are building schools. Renovating schools. But we know that there are communities that don't have classrooms, and the students just can't get there because of the difficulty. In our territory, the mothers work all day. So how is a child going to walk alone for 40, 50 minutes to school? It's impossible. There's no way. So the child ends up dropping out.

8.1. Did you study in or outside the community?

Marta: I studied outside. In our family territory, there was no school, and there still isn't. One of my demands is that we can build a school in the format that a Quilombola school should be, and that it be discussed with the community so that our knowledge is included both in the aesthetics and in the curriculum. If we have a community in the municipality in three different territories, and only one has a recognized school, unfortunately the curriculum, with specific subjects valuing the culture, is not taught; we have to denounce this so that the right is guaranteed and implemented.

People have this vision that if it's a Quilombola school, other people won't be able to study there, but they can study there. The school is for everyone, it's just located within the territory. But other people can study there. They just think: If it's a school only for Black people, then no one else will be able to enter there. That's what people think.

9. What period does the school in the territory you mentioned cover?

Marta: Classes are taught in the morning and afternoon shifts. Seven years... up to elementary school. The community is requesting that high school be available in the territory so that the children can stay close to home and not have to go to the city center. Most parents find it dangerous for the children to have to cross the BR highway, walk long distances, or take buses alone. They end up being very worried, and many of them don't want to let their children go. So, we are fighting for the continuation, for high school.

² IBGE - 2022 Census, Quilombola segment: Literacy, characteristics of quilombola households and localities: the illiteracy rate among quilombolas aged 15 and over is 2.7 times higher than among the total resident population in Brazil According to the IBGE, 19% of the quilombola population is illiterate - that's 192,715 people in the group who cannot read or write. Available at: <https://educacao.uol.com.br/noticias/2024/07/19/taxa-de-analfabetismo-entre-quilombolas-censo-2022-ibge.htm?cmpid=copiaecola>. Accessed on: September 12, 2024.

10. How do you see the role of public policies and civil society in improving Quilombola School Education?

Marta: I think they would be better if there were people from civil society genuinely interested in fighting. However, we must remember that most people in the community are workers who leave their homes early to go to work and arrive late, and often with double shifts, and do not have time for more demands. And in the case of our community, most work outside the territory and arrive very late, ending up not actively participating in the discussions.

Regarding educational public policies, they do exist. We know they exist, but they don't reach the territories. They don't reach them. And in territories where quilombola communities are far from discussions, many are unaware of educational public policies. However, there are some cases where we learn that the school uses the benefits of public policy aimed at quilombola school education, such as the additional 30% funding for differentiated meals; however, this is not communicated to the local community, even though they publicize that the local administration is investing, when in reality it's a federal policy.

Depending on the location and the information available, some communities are unaware of their rights. I insist on the following questions: If quilombolas have the right to differentiated education, why isn't there investment? Why isn't information provided? We here become aware because I have access to the university and talk with other colleagues about policies for staying in Federal Universities. Just now we learned that there are also policies for early childhood. However, this information doesn't reach the territories. It doesn't reach them. It is very difficult to find out about anything, especially in communities that are far from major centers.

In my state, there are groups with community coordinators, but these groups are generally used to disseminate state-level information. Or they say things like: "Oh, there's a youth and adult education program here. Form a class and do it". How are we supposed to just form a class? Our territory is divided into three different locations, one of which is where my family resides. And we don't have a school in the territory; in fact, no public policy reaches here. And when it does arrive, it's very outdated. Where are the classes that the state is proposing supposed to take place? Under the trees? And at night? It's not feasible. We need a proper space; we're not going to do it in such an unstructured way. They think it has to be this way, they ask for photos to post on their website and say they are providing a differentiated education. So, for now, I have informed them that we do not accept this kind of thing...the way they want to impose quilombola education. We prefer that they build a proper space so that people, both children, young people, and adults, can study with dignity.

11. And what are your expectations and aspirations for the future of quilombola Education in Brazil?

Marta: I hope that it actually happens. But, for this to happen, I think the whole society has to "flip the switch." Because when we talk about the Quilombola demands, we notice slowness, racist remarks, and the denial of the existence of the Quilombo in urban-peripheral areas. So, specifically speaking about Trindade here, I would like us to have a school that actually works and that we have teachers concerned with education in the community. With Quilombola School Education, with our knowledge, because we are constantly questioned. Are you really Quilombola? They use this strategy to avoid guaranteeing our rights. So, how can we affirm our identity if they still deny our rights to affirm ourselves within the classroom, based on the curriculum content? Based on the interactions with the elders of the community. Local administrators do not give us the right to BE who we are in school. When a child, from a young age, hears about their people, their stories, they will grow up defending their territory. But when we get to school and they only teach us Eurocentric stories that say Quilombolas are intellectually inferior, the children also begin to deny their identity, even though we do affirmation work within the community. Upon arriving at a school that does not reinforce the Quilombola identity in a positive way, considering that a child spends more time at school than with their family. My expectation is that they can actually build effective policies that produce positive results, that align with the reality of each place, because our reality here is one thing and the reality of other places are other things. We have different realities. The Quilombola communities need to be heard, and we are not. It always comes from top to bottom. When I read the guidelines and think about how much could be included here to contribute to the history of the communities in the municipality, and how we've resisted in this territory, I feel that many actions still need to be taken.

And there's no reason why it hasn't been discussed, or if it has, it was only with a few people, which isn't enough to consider, right? Like I said, we are in several states. In practically all of Brazilian territory. And each territory has its own specificity. You can't do something in one place and assume it will work for everyone.

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