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## ***Food culture of a quilombola community in a municipality in Rio Grande do Sul***

### **Cultura alimentar de uma comunidade quilombola de um município do Rio Grande do Sul**

#### **Abstract**

**Introduction:** Quilombola communities are population centers with specific characteristics, with their own historical trajectory anchored in a certain territory, with a presumption of African ancestry and with resistance to the oppression suffered due to slavery. **Objective:** To understand the Food Culture of a quilombola community in a municipality in Rio Grande do Sul. **Methods:** This is a study with a mixed, exploratory and descriptive approach, with a cross-sectional design. Data were collected regarding the characterization of the sample, food culture and contributions of the quilombola community to healthy eating, through a questionnaire prepared for the research. **Results:** Twenty residents of a quilombo were interviewed, where the majority of women in the sample were 60% (n=12). The interviewees stated that the transmission of knowledge about traditional foods and recipes is passed on through generations, therefore, they nourish much more than the body. **Conclusion:** Based on the historical trajectory of black people, who carry a food culture that is present in our memories and even in the midst of so much adversity, influenced by racist thoughts, praising the riches of this population's food culture allows us to understand that black resistance also it crosses food issues and the act of eating expresses memory, affection and ancestry.

**Keywords:** Food consumption. Eating habits. Ethnic group. Ancestry.

#### **Resumo**

**Introdução:** Comunidades quilombolas são núcleos populacionais com características específicas, com trajetória história própria ancorada em determinado território, com presunção de ancestralidade africana e resistências à opressão sofrida em razão da escravidão. **Objetivo:** Compreender a cultura alimentar de uma comunidade quilombola de um município do Rio Grande do Sul. **Métodos:** Trata-se de um estudo com abordagem mista, exploratória e descritiva, com delineamento transversal. Foram coletados dados referentes à caracterização da amostra, cultura alimentar e contribuições da comunidade quilombola para alimentação saudável, por meio de um questionário elaborado para a pesquisa. **Resultados:** Foram entrevistados vinte moradores de um quilombo, onde na amostra o sexo feminino é majoritário com 60% (n=12). Os entrevistados

afirmaram que a transmissão de conhecimento sobre os alimentos e receitas tradicionais são repassados em geração; sendo assim, nutrem muito além do corpo. **Conclusão:** Com base na trajetória histórica do povo negro, que carrega uma cultura alimentar presente em nossas memórias e mesmo em meio a tantas adversidades, influenciada por pensamentos racistas, enaltecer as riquezas da cultura alimentar dessa população permite compreender que a resistência negra também atravessa as questões alimentares e o ato de se alimentar expressa memória, afeto e ancestralidade.

**Palavras-chave:** Consumo de alimentos. Hábitos alimentares. Grupo Étnico. Ancestralidade.

## INTRODUCTION

In its original meaning, "quilombo" originates from the kimbundo *kilombo*, meaning camp, settlement, union, army; it was used by the Portuguese to name the settlements built by runaway slaves.<sup>1</sup> The quilombos were much more than a resting place for slaves; they were the greatest form of struggle and resistance against the slave system and a space where blacks could develop their customs and reaffirm their identity.<sup>2</sup>

Food culture expresses the identity of peoples and social groups that over time have settled in the Americas. In Brazil, the different expressions of food cultures are linked to history, habits, needs, preferences, varieties of food and spices. The act of eating is not only biological, as it also has a social character, since food culture is identified through food. The sharing of food, also called commensality, has been a characteristic practice of *Homo sapiens* since the times of hunting and gathering, and man's eating behavior was not differentiated from biological behavior only by the invention of the kitchen, but also by the social function of meals.<sup>3</sup>

Quilombola communities have black ancestry, rescue of Afro-Brazilian culture and occupy the entire Brazilian national territory. Most quilombolas have lower income and a lower level of education than other Brazilians, constituting a stratum of the national population that tends to be marginalized, socially discriminated, more vulnerable to diseases and violence, and to have more precarious conditions of access to health.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, in view of the above, this work aims to understand the food culture of a quilombola community in a municipality in Rio Grande do Sul.

## METHODS

This is a mixed study (quantitative and qualitative), exploratory and descriptive with a cross-sectional design.

The population of this study was composed of a quilombo located in the south-central region of the state of Rio Grande do Sul-RS. The Quilombo Chácara da Cruz, located in the municipality of Tapes, is characterized by being an urban quilombo, whose community was recognized by the Palmares Cultural Foundation, a public institution focused on the promotion and preservation of cultural, historical, social and economic values resulting from the black influence in the formation of Brazilian society. However, despite not having the titling process by the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA), it is one of the few quilombos in Brazil that has had possession of its lands, since 1890. In the quilombo live 32 families, with two to five people in each house, who maintain kinship ties with each other and descend from the Kinho family. Among the inclusion criteria, the study participants were between 18 and 60 years old, belonged to the quilombo and signed the Informed Consent Form (ICF). The exclusion criteria were respondents under 18 years of age and those who did not sign the ICF or who dropped out of the survey.

The collection took place *in loco* in February 2023, by the academic researcher of the undergraduate course in Nutrition, under the supervision of the researcher in charge. Data were collected regarding the characterization of the sample, food culture and contributions of food knowledge that were passed on from generation to generation. For this, a questionnaire prepared by the author herself, developed exclusively for this research, presented in the format of notes and descriptions, was used.

In the questionnaire that deals with the characterization of the sample, data on gender, age group, marital status, income, work situation, skin color, and education were collected. In addition, some descriptive questions were asked that helped in the identification of the food culture and ancestral knowledge of the quilombola community. It is noteworthy that in the qualitative answers presented, important names for the black movement were included, thus preserving the confidentiality of the participants.

Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 26.0, and the categorical variables described were presented as absolute and relative frequencies.

In the analysis of the data of the material collected by the present research, in the qualitative research part, the methodology recommended by Laurence Bardin<sup>5</sup> was used for data analysis. The author recommends three consecutive steps to analyze the research data in a comprehensive, safe and effective way.

The first stage, called pre-analysis, will take place after the data itself has been collected. It is the phase in which the material to be analyzed is organized, with the objective of making it operational, as well as systematizing the ideas. In this stage, the beginning takes place with the floating reading, when contact with the collected data is established. Then, at this stage, the choice of documents and the demarcation of what will be analyzed are made; and finally, in this step, the text clippings are performed in the collected answers.<sup>5</sup>

In the next step, called material exploration, there is the definition of categories and the counting of the frequency of recurrences in the search results. It is a very important stage, which adds value to the material under study, when the analytical description guided by the hypotheses and theoretical material occurs. According to the aforementioned author, coding, classification and categorization are basic in this stage.<sup>5</sup>

In the third and final stage, the treatment of the results, inference and interpretation take place. Also in this stage, the condensation and highlighting of information for reflective and critical analysis occurs.<sup>5</sup>

The project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Feevale University, under opinion number 5.843.211, in accordance with the requirements of Resolution No. 466/2012 of the National Health Council (CNS) and its complementary provisions.<sup>6</sup> All participants signed the Informed Consent Form. Individual data will be kept confidential, as will the identification of individuals in the final results, and will be stored for at least five years.

## RESULTS

In this study, twenty residents of the quilombo were interviewed. The characterization of the sample is presented in Table 1, in which it is observed that the female gender is mostly 60.00% (n=12) of the sample analyzed, with the prevalent age group of 40 to 60 years. With regard to family income, 75.00% (n=15) have an income from zero to one minimum wage, considering Law No. 14,358, which came into force on January 1, 2022, the amount of R\$ 1,212.00. Regarding work, 45.00% (n=9) of the sample has some work occupation; With regard to schooling, two significant numbers are presented in the results: 50.00% (n=10) of incomplete elementary school and, on the other hand, 20.00% (n=4) with complete high school education.

**Table 1.** Characterization of the sample of interviewees from the Quilombo Chácara da Cruz, located in the municipality of Tapes, in the South Central Territory of Rio Grande do Sul. (n=20)

Variables	n(%)
<i>Sex</i>	
Male	8 (40)
Female	12 (60)
<i>Age</i>	
18 to 25 years old	1 (5)
26 to 39 years old	3 (15)
40 to 60 years old	16 (80)
<i>Self-declaration</i>	
Black	17 (85)
Brown	2 (10)
White	1 (5)
Yellow	0 (-)
Other	0 (-)
<i>Marital status</i>	
Single	9 (45)
Married or common-law marriage	7 (35)
Widower	3 (15)
Separated/divorced	1 (5)
<i>Family income</i>	
0 - up to 1 minimum wage	15 (75)
2 - 3 minimum wages	5 (25)
4 - 5 minimum wages	0 (-)
> 5 minimum wages	0 (-)
<i>Work</i>	
Formal	9 (45)
Roommate/pensioner	4 (20)

Source: authors (2023).

To understand how the transmission of knowledge about the traditional foods of the quilombo is passed on from generation to generation and has memory and affection, as well as preservation, the statements of the interviewees were transcribed. What was most manifested was being around the kitchen watching a family member cook and, through orality, the practices were passed on, according to the statements presented in Chart 1.

**Chart 1.** Transmission of knowledge about the traditional foods of the Quilombo.

*"I saw my mother do it in the kitchen. Because the conversation all took place around the kitchen".*

*Conceição Evaristo*

*"It came from the mother-in-law, it came from the family, predecessors in this case, and then my mother-in-law passed it on and we do it and we always do one thing or another to remember and continue passing it on. So much so that my little one loves to eat game and things like that, couscous, she loves it."*

*Gilberto Gil*

**Chart 1.** Transmission of knowledge about the traditional foods of the Quilombo.(Continues)

*"It was in observation, we talked and learned."*

*Machado de Assis*

*"I watched my mother do it when she cooked."*

*Tereza de Benguela*

*"Since I was a little girl it was transmitted. In the kitchen."*

*Sueli Carneiro*

*"It was passed on by our grandparents, in our childhood, learning to cook, observing."*

*Maria Firmina dos Reis*

*"My grandmother did a lot. I was always together, I looked a lot but the mother put me at work, the younger ones watched and the older ones helped in the kitchen."*

*Dandara dos Palmares*

*"I learned by watching grandma, having to do it, helping to cook."*

*Elza Soares*

*"They were passed on by the nuns of the shelter I lived in for a while. They were already going to the front of the stove teaching."*

*Lélia Gonzales*

*"I learned in the kitchen."*

*"I've already brought this from home. My mother did everything inside the house. At the age of 10 I was already working outside the home and learned many things outside, working."*

*Djamila Ribeiro*

*"I learned from my mother and grandmother. Cooking together. Watching them in the kitchen. All I know is that I learned from them and passed it on to my children. Today I am a great-grandmother."*

*Oliveira Silveira*

*"For the last 10 years I took care of my wife who had cancer and she would sit at the end of the table and tell me what I had to do in the kitchen. She chopped all the food, but I was the one who made the food."*

*Zumbi dos Palmares*

Source: authors (2023).

Regarding the act of eating and its representations, we can observe, in the answers presented in Chart 2, that in addition to eating to nourish oneself, the act represents family, union, life, resistance and ancestry.

**Chart 2.** What the act of eating represents for the interviewees of the Quilombo.

*"Emotion with the abundance we have today. I remember what we went through and seeing that lot of food and being able to choose, in the past there was no power to choose, it was what we had and gave."*

*Gilberto Gil*

*"Gather the family, eat good food, fill this table with people. Laughing, listening to music, watching TV, talking. Food is unity."*

*Machado de Assis*

*"Union. We are always united, all together always."*

*Maria Firmina dos Reis*

*"It's good. I feel happy."*

*Abdias Nascimento*

*"Life."*

*Luís Gama*

*"Union. We are always united, all together always."*

*Dandara dos Palmares*

*"Life. It is a reverence. Not only the act of feeding, but feeding others because cooking represents for me what was passed on to me, a form of love, affection, affection. Affectivity."*

*Conceição Evaristo*

*"Happiness. Here at home no one eats reheated food, we all eat together at the same time, we wait for those who work outside to get home from work for lunch and we all have lunch together."*

*Tereza de Benguela*

*"Union. Family."*

*Lélia Gonzales*

*"Happiness."*

*Djamila Ribeiro*

*"Ancestry, uniting what was left as a legacy. Family."*

*Elza Soares*

*"Joy. Happiness."*

*Zumbi dos Palmares*

Chart 2. What the act of eating represents for the interviewees of the Quilombo.

<p><i>"It represents family, because as I left home very early I didn't have that in childhood so I always wait for them here on the way back."</i></p> <p><i>Carolina María de Jesús</i></p> <p><i>"Union. The act of eating is knowing that everyone is well together, it is a divine gift. To sit everyone together, everyone puts down their cell phones and eats everyone together."</i></p> <p><i>"It represents family, because as I left home very early I didn't have that in childhood so I always wait for them here on the way back."</i></p> <p><i>Carolina María de Jesús</i></p> <p><i>"Union. The act of eating is knowing that everyone is well together, it is a divine gift. To sit everyone together, everyone puts down their cell phones and eats everyone together."</i></p> <p><i>Sueli Carneiro</i></p>
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Source: authors (2023).

In Chart 3, we analyze the facilities and barriers to food for the families of the Quilombo, in which it is perceived that the resident families, by maintaining kinship ties among themselves, support each other so that no one experiences any difficulty; each family contributes what it can, in addition to the receipts destined for the Quilombo, such as basic food baskets offered during the pandemic. Regarding the difficulties, the lack of planting and harvesting was mentioned throughout the interview, considering that the Quilombo is a peri-urban quilombo, which does not live on family farming and does not have animal resources.

Chart 3. Facilities and barriers to food for families living in the community

FACILITIES
<p><i>Here in Quilombo there are no people in need, I believe it is one of the only Quilombos in the south like this. Here it is like this, my father's mother did not go out reading and writing so she made sure her children studied and if we did not study it was because we did not want to, we had the conditions."</i></p> <p><i>Gilberto Gil</i></p> <p><i>"If there is a lack of food, we always help each other. When we point ourselves at home, there is always the help of someone."</i></p> <p><i>Dandara dos Palmares</i></p> <p><i>"That middle ground, because you have to spend, right. His father-in-law has a vegetable garden but it's not much because of the drought, everything gets in the way, it's from time to time that you'll be able to plant a little thing or two."</i></p> <p><i>Machado de Assis</i></p> <p><i>"Because things are close, we don't have vegetable gardens, we have space. Now just go get the bike, go there and come back, it's easier. Everything is close."</i></p> <p><i>Nelson Mandela</i></p> <p><i>"In the pandemic the ranch came, the aid came, which was a good help because the people have little work, but we don't stay if we work, but then the money was no longer the same. And the emergency aid. It was something that helped a lot."</i></p> <p><i>Maria Firmina dos Reis</i></p>



**Chart 3.** Facilities and barriers to food for families living in the community (Continues)

<p><i>"We won a basic food basket in the pandemic."</i>  <i>"Yes, because not always, but we receive help with basic food baskets."</i>  Zumbi dos Palmares</p> <p><i>"There isn't, if you don't go to the market, you don't have it."</i>  Milton Nascimento</p> <p><i>"It doesn't come easy. Because it's not easy, there are three rooms with two bedrooms, a kitchen and a bathroom all together and sometimes I welcome my brothers into my house. We receive basic food baskets from time to time, but rice and beans that are more expensive are difficult, even if it is half a basic food basket."</i>  Lélia Gonzales</p> <p><i>"I don't understand. Today everything is in the market, at the fair. In the past we had everything here within the quilombo, we planted and had animal husbandry, but more houses were built and this was lost, it was no longer possible to maintain itself. We kept the fried meat in lard, for example, to last longer.</i>  <i>The only thing we had that we didn't have here was rice, because flour was planted with corn and it was reared and made flour."</i>  Djamila Ribeiro</p> <p><i>"Here at home there is a small vegetable garden, but there is, when you want to pick a spice, just go there to get it and that's it."</i>  Oliveira Silveira</p> <p><i>"The ease of having everything close, of no longer having to plant, harvest, peel, has the facilities of only buying at the market and cooking. There are some foods that are in the garden, which you just have to freeze and use whenever you want."</i>  Luís Gama</p> <p><i>"Today's industrialized foods are more "by hand" closer foods, because before to make flour, or whatever food, wheat had to be harvested, it had to go through the entire process for construction until food arrived, sometimes it took a long time. Of course, when some rite is done for the Orixá, the whole process of planting and harvesting is done, we try to do all the old rite.... But even so, it's easier than before. If you don't have time to do the process, you buy the product."</i>  Elza Soares</p>
<p>DIFFICULTIES</p> <p><i>"In the past, the men of the quilombo could hunt, fish, plant in the quilombo, and in their territory, create their creations in the collective. Even though we own our land, a large local landowner has taken over our land. This place was where near the water of the forest, it was where we worshipped our sacred."</i>  Sueli Carneiro</p> <p><i>"Here at home we do not observe any difficulties. We work for this: a better diet, comfort at home."</i>  Carolina María de Jesús</p> <p><i>"We don't plant, there are no animal resources."</i>  Abdias Nascimento</p> <p><i>"The pandemic was very bad. Service was little, financially tighter and complicated things a lot."</i>  Tereza de Benguela</p> <p><i>"Everything has become very artificial, the magic of preparing food, our energy, that has, but now when I pass it on to my granddaughter... For my niece it will be much more difficult, I will have to make a whole context to teach her to have that respect for nature, to have that whole connection, I will have to find another method to get to this sense because today everything is very easy, very mechanized. And one of the things that Quilombola food is not. is mechanized."</i>  Conceição Evaristo</p>

Source: authors (2023).

Based on the cuisine, the residents of the quilombo exhibit a considerable number of foods and recipes, many of which are nationally practiced and others adapted, over time, in their homes. Regarding food, rice; bean; cattle liver; mondongo; cattle tongue; pork; corn flour; chayote; butiá; pineapple; lentil; sweet potato; manioc; okra; yam; honey; cabbage and pumpkin. In relation to traditional recipes, couscous was mentioned; hominy; beans with pig's feet; scrambled beans; sweet polenta; mafufo; hominy; kibbeh; farofa with egg; fish stew; vegetable soup; hominy with pork; feijoada; rice with chicken; milk rice; peach jams, liver jam jams; orange jam jams; ambrosia; dulce de leche; milk rapadura; guavas; pineapple sweets; and corn cake.

## DISCUSSION

During the study period, through the observation of the daily life, speeches and gestures of the quilombolas, it was possible to analyze a closer knowledge of the reality of the food culture of the remaining population of the quilombos, which presents several riches in its eating habits. In addition to the preparations and the way of serving traditional recipes, which are perpetuated and maintained in families from generation to generation, the way of preparation and cultivation to handle food is a way of giving gifts to the sacred. And even though even today there is an erasure and stereotypes of heavy, fatty and unhealthy food, traditional quilombola food continues to resist.

The act of eating is not only biological, but also has a social character, since food culture is identified through food.<sup>3</sup> When we share food around a table, in addition to feeding ourselves to nourish and relieve ourselves biologically, we are composing and recomposing our culture, which touches several senses, including memory. Eating and drinking together indicates a relationship of equality.<sup>7</sup>

It is often stated that Brazilian cuisine is the result of several identity demarcations, because of Portuguese, black and indigenous influence, which is why Brazil does not have a single food culture, but diverse food cultures - each region has typical dishes.<sup>8</sup> To this day, African dishes are present in our culture, they are savored in the daily life of Brazilians and in popular festivals.

Regarding traditional foods, a study very similar to this one, carried out by Bankoff in 2020,<sup>8</sup> cites the broths extracted from baked foods, mixed with cassava flour (the pirão) or corn flour (the angu), feijoada, milk rice, quindim, hominy, oxtail, liver steak, polenta, hominy, couscous, tapioca, pé de moleque, amalá - foods that were also mentioned by the quilombolas.

In this context, a study<sup>9</sup> points out that cooking is the science or art of preparing food through techniques, elements and artifacts that bring the knowledge acquired over time. Through food, the memory and identity of a community's culture are kept alive. It is important to preserve this know-how, the maintenance and continuous transmission of the knowledge acquired by the peoples, as this strengthens the identity, culture and practices of their tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

When the quilombola community receives a visit, the kitchen will be the first place to be presented, it is from this place that food knowledge and flavors are passed on, from generation to generation. In festive celebrations, the kitchen will always be full and around it are the elders, older people who have the mission of telling ancestral stories as a legacy, and the youngest. The quilombola kitchen is a space of sociability, and every corner of it is immersed in Afro-Brazilian values that exude a lot of joy, animation and solidarity.<sup>9</sup>

We can also highlight commensality, which is also linked to the transmission of knowledge and traditions passed from old generations to younger generations, and which takes place through festivities. These praise the culture of the community and, through the reproduction of recipes and the grouping of people for their

production, act to facilitate the patrimonial, cultural and historical preservation of the remaining quilombola communities.

The *Food Guide for the Brazilian Population*, published in 2014 by the Ministry of Health, states that to look comprehensively at food, it is necessary to take into account nutrients, foods, food combinations, culinary preparations, and the cultural and social dimensions of eating practices. These are an important part of a society's culture and, as such, are strongly related to people's identity and sense of social belonging, to the feeling of autonomy, to the pleasure provided by food and, consequently, to their state of well-being.<sup>10</sup>

Another important point for this discussion is to analyze the facilities and barriers to food for families living in the quilombola community. With this perspective, it is possible to perceive the importance of demystifying the quilombola population only as a population that lives from family farming in the middle of a rural area, since the community analyzed is located in an urban environment and there are several other quilombos spread throughout Brazil titled as urban quilombos. Urban quilombola communities find themselves inserted in the midst of the problems inherent to urban spaces loaded with the complexity and heterogeneity that permeate city life. The appropriation of their territories is generally linked to the reality of the periphery and/or marginalized and/or segregated spaces.<sup>11</sup> In this scenario, the development of public policies aimed at ensuring access to adequate and healthy food is essential, as long as it takes into account the place where individuals are inserted and the access opportunities available.

It is also necessary that the construction of healthier food environments be guided by the fight against all forms of discrimination and by ensuring greater access to income, education, housing and sanitation for minority populations. Food and nutritional security equipment stand out as feasible alternatives for improving the quality of food for the population exposed to food deserts, such as the insertion of community gardens and street markets.<sup>9-14</sup>

Some limitations of this study should be considered, as this is a cross-sectional study. Due to the long questionnaire applied, the participants were inattentive, as well as difficulties in interpreting the question due to the amount of information presented. Based on the results, it is suggested the development of new research, covering a larger audience and different regions, as well as other proposals for health care intervention and health education for the quilombola population..

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Through the present study and based on the historical trajectory of blacks in Brazil, it can be concluded that these people were responsible for building the country's wealth. Even in the midst of so many adversities, which take this population to the margins, praising the richness of the food culture of the remaining population of the quilombo allows readers to reflect and understand that black resistance also crosses food issues and that, after all, the act of eating expresses memory, affection and ancestry.

When we address the influence of the cuisine of historically inferior peoples, we are proposing the valorization of the consumption of native foods of a territory that presents knowledge and orality that are passed on from generation to generation. In view of this, it is necessary to rethink that European cuisine is not the only one to be evidently valued as a "hierarchy", disqualifying other cuisines. Rescuing the contributions of African food is to recompose the history of Brazilian food on the table, being a bridge to revisit the past and question the present, an opportunity to know a little more about how much Africa there is in all of us.

When analyzing public policies that promote adequate nutrition, health professionals follow the guidelines of the National Food and Nutrition Policy (PNAN) document, whose purpose is to guarantee food and nutritional security and the human right to adequate food for the Brazilian population. With the perspective of addressing the principles and recommendations of an adequate and healthy diet, the *Food Guide for the Brazilian Population* presents, in its axes, the appreciation of food culture, affirming and respecting the identity of a diverse Brazil.

There is still much to debate and advance on the subject of "quilombola health". Social and professional involvement is essential to change the reality presented, in addition to incentives for work like these to seek proximity to the population studied. It is essential that all health professions wake up to this challenge, and can join forces in an inter, multi and transdisciplinary work, for a sad motivation from our past, which were and still are excluded from the current development process

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### Contributors

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