Territory, Freedom and Living Conditions: two quilombos in Southern Brazil.

Território, Liberdade e Condições de vida: dois quilombos no Sul do Brasil.

Ronel MERVIL
Ph.D. candidate in the Family Agricultural Production System Programa at the Federal University of Pelotas (UFPel), Rio Grande do Sul (RS), Brazil
Flávio Sacco DOS ANJOS
Professor at the Federal University of Pelotas (UFPel), Rio Grande do Sul (RS), Brazil
Nádia VELLEDA CALDAS
Professor at the Federal University of Pelotas (UFPel), Rio Grande do Sul (RS), Brazil
Edwens DORISCA
Ph.D. candidate in the Family Agricultural Production System Programa at the Federal University of Pelotas (UFPel), Rio Grande do Sul (RS), Brazil

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Abstract: This study examines the socioeconomic conditions and survival strategies of the Quilombola communities of Cerrito Alegre (Pelotas-RS) and Maçambique (Canguçu-RS), historically marginalized groups that continue to face persistent inequalities more than 136 years after the abolition of slavery. The qualitative research, based on 57 questionnaires and 16 semi-structured interviews, reveals structural challenges such as material deprivation, poor infrastructure (bad roads, lack of clean water in Maçambique), limited access to healthcare and sanitation, and the absence of land titles. In addition to political exclusion, to ensure subsistence, these Quilombola communities have adopted pluriactivity (multiple livelihood strategies) to cope with economic constraints. However, despite these adversities, the communities maintain resistance strategies, preserving their collective memory and organizing themselves to ensure social reproduction. The findings reinforce the systemic nature of inequalities in Brazil while highlighting the resilience of Quilombola communities in the face of erasure.

Keywords: Quilombola community; territoriality; development; freedom; Pluriactivity; Cerrito Alegre (Pelotas-RS); Maçambique (Canguçu-RS).

Resumo: Este estudo analisa as condições socioeconômicas e as estratégias de sobrevivência das comunidades quilombolas de Cerrito Alegre (Pelotas-RS) e Maçambique (Canguçu-RS), grupos historicamente marginalizados que enfrentam desigualdades persistentes mais de 136 anos após a abolição da escravidão. A pesquisa, de natureza qualitativa, baseou-se em 57 questionários e 16 entrevistas semiestruturadas, revela desafios estruturais como: precariedade material, infraestrutura deficiente (estradas ruins, escassez de água potável em Maçambique) e acesso limitado a serviços de saúde e saneamento, e falta de titulação fundiária. Além da exclusão política, para garantir a subsistência nas comunidades, os quilombos adoptaram a pluriatividade para enfrentar as restrições econômicas. No entanto, apesar das adversidades, as comunidades mantêm estratégias de resistência, preservando sua memória coletiva e organizando-se para assegurar reprodução social. Os resultados reforçam o caráter sistêmico das desigualdades no Brasil, ao mesmo tempo que destacam a resiliência quilombola frente à invisibilização.

Palavras-chave: Communidade quilombola; territorialidade; desenvolvimento; liberdade; Pluriatividade; Cerrito Alegre (Pelotas-RS); Maçambique (Canguçu-RS).

1. Introduction

Brazil, the last Western country to abolish slavery in 1888, still carries deep marks of this past, manifested in structural racial inequalities. Data from IPEA (2023) and IBGE (2024) reveal that the Black population is the main victim of violence (77.1% of homicides), food insecurity, and mass incarceration. While 46.9% of households headed by white individuals have full access to food, among Black and mixed-race (pardo) individuals, this rate is only 10.7% and 41%, respectively (PNAD/IBGE, 2024). This scenario is explained by the concept of structural racism, which, according to Almeida (2019), naturalizes and perpetuates social exclusion in a systemic way.

In contrast to this historical marginalization, quilombola communities emerge as spaces of cultural and social resistance. Historically, according to Loner, Gil, and Magalhães (2017), quilombos functioned as "parallel societies" that welcomed those excluded from the slave system. In Rio Grande do Sul, the city of Pelotas, a center of the charque (jerked beef) cycle in the 19th century, witnessed escapes that gave rise to quilombos in the Serra dos Tapes region, such as Manuel Padeiro's in 1834.

Currently, the study focuses on two specific communities: Cerrito Alegre (Pelotas-RS) and Maçambique (Canguçu-RS). Although certified by the Palmares Foundation, they still do not have the definitive title to their lands, which generates legal and land insecurity. Additionally, they share structural challenges common to most quilombola communities in Rio Grande do Sul, according to the DDDPA-SEAPI (2023):

• Precarious infrastructure: 66.15% of communities have unpaved roads.
• Low education levels: 51.48% of residents have not completed elementary school.
• Difficulty accessing essential public policies.

Given this context, this article seeks to answer the following guiding questions:

- What are the social living conditions (housing, health, education, income) like in the quilombola communities of Cerrito Alegre and Maçambique?
- What are the main economic activities that ensure the subsistence of these communities?
- What is the level of member involvement in the management of natural and territorial resources?

General Objective:

- To understand the social living conditions of the inhabitants of the remaining communities of Cerrito Alegre and Maçambique, with an emphasis on the reproduction strategies adopted by individuals and their families.

Specific Objectives:

- To identify the main productive activities carried out within and outside the communities where the families reside;
- To investigate the mechanisms of internal organization and political participation;
- To compare the realities of the two communities, identifying similarities and particularities.

Following the objectives of this research, this article includes, after this introduction, a literature review, the methodology, the analysis of empirical results, and final considerations.

2. Literature Review

This section, dedicated to the literature review, aims to clarify the key concepts of the study, without, however, proposing an exhaustive analysis. Therefore, the essential terms, in particular, the territorial approach to development, the very notion of development, the quilombos and their communities, as well as the public policies aimed at them, will be addressed briefly and in a targeted manner.

2.1. The Territorial Approach to Development

The concept of territory, according to Garcia (2002), transcends the notion of physical space, encompassing the social, economic, political, and cultural relations that shape development. In Latin America, this approach emerged in the late 1990s, influencing public policies and the agendas of multilateral organizations such as FAO, the World Bank, ECLAC, IDB, IICA, and OECD.

In Brazil, the territorial perspective was consolidated with programs such as the Territories of Rural Identity and the National Program for Sustainable Development of Rural Territories (PRONAT), under the Secretariat of Territorial Development (SDT) (Grisa & Delgado, 2019). This approach seeks to overcome three historical flaws in Brazilian rural

policies (Sacco dos Anjos et al., 2014; Favareto, 2006): the sectoral bias (excessive focus on specific production chains); the fight against rural poverty without integration with other dimensions of development; and precarious municipalization ("prefeiturização"), which limits social participation.

The territorial vision emphasizes decentralization, participatory governance, and the articulation between agricultural and non-agricultural activities, recognizing the territory as a space for social coordination (Delgado & Leite, 2011). According to Abramovay (2006), territorial development is not reduced to economic growth, but involves multidimensional dynamics, such as migration, public transfers, and informal economies. The author highlights that "rural poverty can no longer be interpreted as a simple expression of insufficiency in agricultural income, but as a multidimensional phenomenon [...]. The vast majority of the rural poor have their income composed of various activities, among which agriculture often represents a minority part. Understanding poverty requires studying the different activities of rural household members, migration processes, the remittances sent by those who move to the city, the contribution of public transfers, and the ways of ensuring reproduction through informal finance (ABRAMOVAY, 2006, p. 52; emphasis added).

However, challenges persist, especially for traditional communities (quilombolas, indigenous peoples), where welfare policies often fail to promote autonomy and social innovation (Sacco dos Anjos & Caldas, 2007; Graziano da Silva, 2002). Cases such as the golden grass handicrafts of Jalapão (Tocantins) and the potters of Goiabeiras (Espírito Santo) illustrate how local knowledge can generate development, provided it is integrated into inclusive policies. Thus, according to Restrepo (2012),

> […] the territory we inhabit is the product of a patient and long process of formation that has taken many years and many lives, which bears the traces of our ancestors but also our own traces; that is why deciphering it can become an exciting adventure of self-discovery. (RESTREPO, 2012, p. 2)

Therefore, the territorial approach requires more robust theories of social interaction to confront structural inequalities, combining democratic participation, cultural valorization, and sustainability.

2.2. Development as a Question

The concept of development has been widely debated in the social, economic, and environmental sciences, taking on multiple interpretations and contradictions. Since the post-Second World War period, the notion of "underdevelopment," coined by Harry Truman in

1949, legitimized external interventions and internal policies that often aggravated inequalities and environmental degradation (Esteva, 2010; Sachs, 2010).

Underdevelopment began, then, on January 20, 1949. On that day, 2 billion people became underdeveloped. In fact, from then on, they ceased to be what they were, in all their diversity, and were transformed into an inverted mirror of the reality of others: a mirror that belittles them and sends them to the back of the line, a mirror that defines their identity, which is actually that of a heterogeneous and diverse majority, simply in the terms of a homogenizing and narrow minority (ESTEVA, 2010, p. 2; emphasis added)

On the other hand, Amartya Sen's approach redefines development as the expansion of individuals' substantive freedoms, including access to health, education, and political participation, overcoming the reductionist view focused solely on economic growth or income. In Brazil, this critical perspective opposes models of "conservative modernization" that prioritize growth at any cost, such as large dams and predatory mining, which generate social and ecological costs ignored by traditional indicators like GDP. Thus, for SEN,

> Development consists of the elimination of deprivations of freedom that limit people's choices and opportunities to exercise their agency judiciously. The elimination of deprivations of substantive freedoms, it is argued here, is constitutive of development. However, for a fuller understanding of the relationship between development and freedom, we need to go beyond this basic recognition (SEN, 2000, p. 10; italics in original).

2.3. The Quilombola Question

The concept of quilombo transcends the historical and pejorative definition of a "refuge for fugitive slaves," coming to be understood as a space of cultural and political resistance, fundamental to the struggle of Afro-descendant communities for ethnic-identity recognition and access to natural resources such as land and biodiversity, ensuring their social reproduction (Leite, 2000; Gomes, 2005). Thus,

> In Brazilian popular tradition, there are many variations in the meaning of the word quilombo, sometimes associated with a place ("quilombo was a singular establishment"), sometimes with a people who live in that place ("the various ethnic groups that compose it"), or with popular manifestations ("street parties"), or with a place of practice condemned by society ("public place where a house of prostitutes is set up"), or with a conflict (a "great confusion"), or with a social relationship ("a union"), or even with an economic system ("border location, with relief and climatic conditions common in most cases") (quotation marks in original).

The legal definition of quilombo, originating in 1740 as a mere refuge for enslaved people, was re-signified throughout the 20th century by scholars and Black movements, culminating in the redefinition by the Brazilian Association of Anthropology (ABA, 1994), which recognizes these communities as contemporary rural Black groups, linked to ancestral

practices and collective identity. This conceptual advancement, combined with the 1988 Constitution (Art. 68) and the 2003 decree, institutionalized quilombola territorial rights, although these communities still face historical marginalization and inequalities in access to land and resources, reflecting an ongoing struggle for recognition and social justice.

2.4. Remaining Quilombo Communities (CRQs)

The Remaining Quilombo Communities (CRQs) are ethnic-racial groups recognized by the 1988 Constitution (Art. 68) and regulated by Decree 4.887/2003, characterized by their own historical trajectory, specific territoriality, and ties to Black resistance, with their recognition based on criteria of self-definition, ethnic cohesion, and ancestry (Cashmore, 2000). These communities present different typologies, ranging from small nuclei near farms to large settlements with an agricultural or mining base (Röhring-Assunção, 1996), and represent the contemporary struggle for land rights and cultural preservation in Brazil.

2.5 Types of Quilombos

Décio Freitas (1980) proposed a classification of quilombos into seven types based on their predominant economic activities, including agricultural, extractive mineral, commercial, mining, livestock, diverse services, and predatory, although he notes that agriculture, despite being present in many cases, was not necessarily the defining activity for all these groups. However, this historical typology does not fully reflect the contemporary reality of the Remaining Quilombo Communities (CRQs), which have been deeply impacted by processes such as urbanization, land pressure, real estate speculation, and socioeconomic transformations. Currently, CRQs face distinct challenges that combine the struggle for territorial regularization, cultural preservation, and adaptation to modern economies, manifesting their resistance not only in subsistence but mainly in guaranteeing territorial rights and asserting their identity before the State and society.

2.6 Empirical Context of this Research: Quilombola Communities of Cerrito Alegre and Maçambique

The quilombola communities Cerrito Alegre (Pelotas/RS) and Maçambique (Canguçu/RS), officially recognized by the Palmares Cultural Foundation in 2018 and 2010 respectively, represent important territories of Black resistance in southern Brazil, with origins dating back to the 19th century and descent from enslaved people from the region's charqueadas (jerked beef processing plants). Cerrito Alegre faces serious socioeconomic challenges such as hunger, precarious housing, and dependence on subsistence agriculture for

its 26 families, evidencing historical neglect by public authorities, while Maçambique, with 80 families, preserves ancestral rituals and cultural traditions, developing agroecology and handicraft initiatives supported by CAPA. Both communities coexist with unequal labor relations, such as agricultural partnerships that perpetuate economic dependence, with their histories marked by structural exclusion and cultural resistance as central elements of their territorial and identity dynamics.

3. Methodology

This research, descriptive and explanatory in nature (GIL, 1991), adopted a quali-quantitative approach to analyze the socioeconomic reality of the quilombola communities Cerrito Alegre (Pelotas-RS) and Maçambique (Canguçu-RS), using primary and secondary sources according to Marconi and Lakatos (2002). For data collection, 57 questionnaires were administered (17 in Cerrito Alegre and 40 in Maçambique) and 16 semi-structured interviews were conducted, covering family profile, agricultural production, infrastructure, housing, health, production systems, commercialization, and access to public policies, with a sample representing 60% of families in Cerrito Alegre and 50% in Maçambique. Quantitative data were processed using descriptive statistics (VERGARA, 2016), while interviews were transcribed using TurboScribe.ai (98.5% accuracy) and subjected to content analysis (BARDIN, 2011). The treatment of qualitative data followed the three stages proposed by Bardin: pre-analysis with material selection, exploration with coding and categorization, and inference for interpretation of results.

4. Analysis of Results

4.1. Social and economic conditions of the quilombola communities of Cerrito Alegre and Maçambique.

The research revealed that one of the central findings regarding the profile of families in the quilombola communities of Cerrito Alegre and Maçambique is the significant female predominance in family and community leadership, with women representing 72.5% of household heads in Maçambique and 58.8% in Cerrito Alegre (Table 1). This dynamic highlights the burden of the double shift for women, in which they balance domestic work, productive activities (agriculture and handicrafts), and political management, often in contexts of single-parent families or male absence.

Table 1. Distribution of the interviewed population according to the gender of the heads household.

Gender	Cerrito Alegre	Maçambique
Masculine	41,20%	27,50%
Femenine	51,80%	72,50%
Total	100%	100%

Source: Fieldwork (2024).

The study's findings reinforce the historical invisibilization of Black women, as discussed by Gomes (2015), who critiques the colonial narrative that omitted their role in quilombola resistance. Currently, however, their leadership is evident: in Maçambique, all presidents of the community association have been women, and female participation prevails in meetings and decision-making positions (E1_MA, 2024),

> Look, I have been here since 2003, I started then. In the first meetings it began to emerge and it was registered in 2007, when we started: registering, keeping records. And since then there has never been a male president. All the presidents who have passed through here have been women. And on the board, it's almost all women. On the Fiscal Council we even manage, you put a man in. We have men on the Fiscal Council, but it's all women. Presidents, treasurers, secretaries, always women. It has always been. And in this meeting too, there are always more women than men. So, women are very united here in our community. A very positive aspect (E1_MA, 2024).

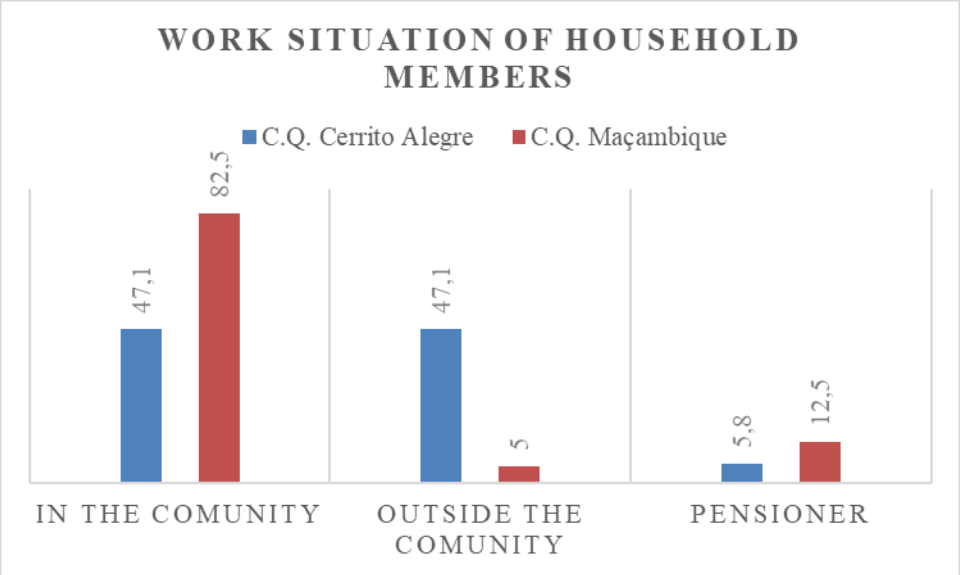
Regarding educational level, the research data reveals low educational rates in the quilombola communities of Cerrito Alegre and Maçambique, with 23.5% and 20% adult illiteracy rates, respectively, and the majority of residents having only incomplete elementary education (52.9% in Cerrito Alegre and 43.5% in Maçambique), rates that are 2.7 times higher than the national illiteracy average (IBGE, 2022). This structural educational exclusion is aggravated by the lack of schools adapted to the quilombola reality, which operate precariously with urban-industrial curricula disconnected from local culture and community knowledge (Silva, 2007; Caldart, 2012), as reinforced by the accounts of interviewees (E2_MA, 2024),

> The biggest problem in the community is not having a space for everyone who is in the community. Because then, if there was space, going back to the land itself, if each one had a piece of land, they would survive well. Because then you wouldn't need to leave here. Many here who are quilombolas from here, they go to the city, to Rio Grande do Sul, to find a job. And then there is no college nearby, there isn't. These schools here are not... They are not, how to say, quilombola schools. Because they have... We have... They have here, in fact, quilombola children, but you can't say it's a quilombola school. And they only try to do quilombola things when it gets to the time of... November 20th, which is the whole process that represents Black Consciousness. Then they grab and do a little marketing there just until... Just in that month of November, and then... It ends. (E2_MA, Maçambique)

Thus, rural education emerges as an alternative to the traditional model because it values rural ways of life and combats forced assimilation into the capitalist system (Caldart, 2012), but its implementation faces obstacles such as lack of access to universities and the absence of effective public policies. The research results highlight the urgency of a specific quilombola educational model, which reconciles the guarantee of constitutional rights (BRASIL, 1988) with the strengthening of ethnic identity and territorial ties of the communities.

Analyzing the labor conditions to which the quilombos of the communities under study are subjected, the result reveals significant differences in the occupational profiles of the studied communities: while 82.5% of members in Maçambique work exclusively within the community, in Cerrito Alegre this percentage is only 47.1% (Figure 1), a disparity attributed to the greater geographical isolation of Maçambique, located 70 km from the municipal center of Canguçu with limited access to transportation and infrastructure. Furthermore, the proportion of retirees and pensioners is more than double in Maçambique (12.5%) compared to Cerrito Alegre (5.8%), indicating possible differences in age structure or differential access to social security benefits between the two communities

Figure 1. Work situation of household residents



Source: Fieldwork (2024)

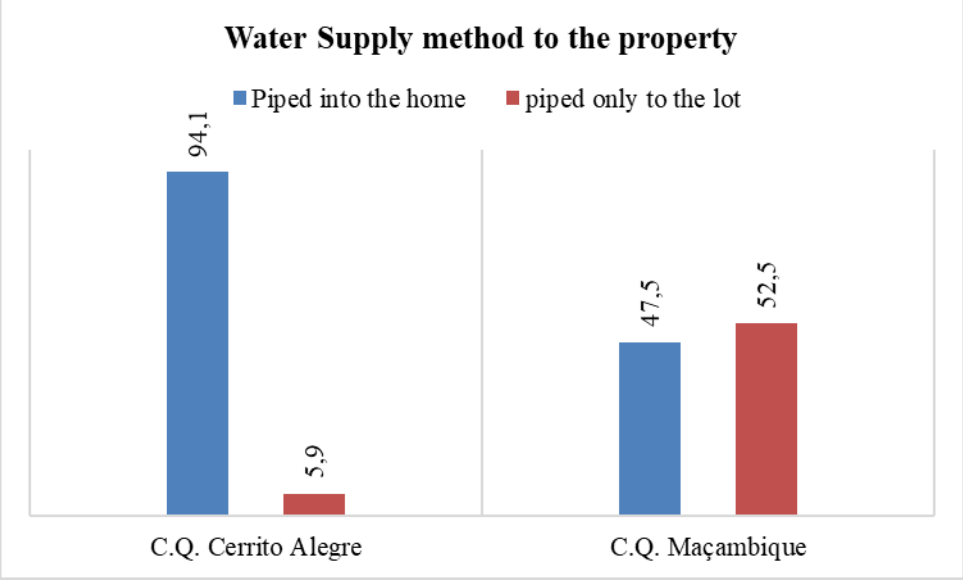
The analyzed data reveal distinct patterns of pluriactivity in the quilombola communities of Cerrito Alegre and Maçambique, reflecting their adaptations to specific socioeconomic and geographic contexts. In Cerrito Alegre, proximity to urban centers

facilitates diversification, with only 17.7% of families depending primarily on agriculture, while general services and Bolsa Família represent the main sources of income, with 35.3% each. In Maçambique, geographic isolation reinforces the agricultural emphasis, where agriculture (37.5%) and livestock (35%) dominate, complemented by Bolsa Família (17.5%). Both communities adopt pluriactivity, defined by Sacco dos Anjos (2003) as the combination of agricultural and non-agricultural activities to maximize family resources, but while Cerrito Alegre incorporates more urban services, Maçambique maintains a stronger rural base.

4.2. Infrastructure and Health Conditions in Quilombola Communities of Cerrito Alegre and Maçambique.

As highlighted by Freitas et al. (2011), infrastructure conditions such as untreated water, precarious sanitation, access to services: distance from health clinics, inadequate transportation, are social determinants of health. The field analysis shows that the quilombola communities of Cerrito Alegre and Maçambique face critical challenges due to historical neglect, depending exclusively on wells or cacimbas (hand-dug wells) without access to public networks. However, Figure 2 shows significant disparities in internal access to water: while in Cerrito Alegre 94.1% of families have running water inside their homes, in Maçambique only 47.5% have this infrastructure, forcing 52.5% of residents to fetch water from the property, which generates physical strain and reduces quality of life.

Figure 2. Distribution of interviewed families according to the form of water supply to the property.



Source: Fieldwork (2024)

The lack of water treatment in quilombola communities represents a sanitary risk that, according to Rodrigues et al. (2011), increases the incidence of diseases, compromises oral health due to the absence of fluoridation, and requires constant monitoring, evidencing the violation of basic rights provided for in the 1988 Constitution. Regarding sanitation, the communities face distinct deficiencies: Cerrito Alegre has universal waste collection (100%), while Maçambique, due to geographic isolation and institutional neglect, relies on unhealthy practices such as burning (90%) or burying (10%) waste. This disparity, combined with the charging of fees for services in some communities, reflects what Almeida (2019) criticizes as environmental racism, where exclusionary policies perpetuate historical inequalities, as also highlighted by the accounts of residents (E3_MA; E5_MA) below,

> It's bad. Very bad, it's precarious, because few have potable water. We don't have it, we don't have it, practically we don't. We quilombolas don't have it. There was even a project to dig some wells, but the wells were dug outside the area, an area that doesn't reach the community here. Mainly like the association, it was supposed to. This water was supposed to reach the association, but it didn't. So, the process came to open the well, but it didn't arrive. It ended, and the wells are dug, but they don't reach the houses of the quilombola people (E3_MA)

> And here, sanitation, for now we haven't been able to sort it out yet. Sewage, everything properly, we are already trying to take the first steps. We say that burning trash can harm health and the environment, but what other alternative do we have, right? But the community doesn't have much support. Lack of support. It's a bit isolated in terms of services, isn't it? A bit isolated. (E5_MA)

Although 100% of respondents in the quilombola communities of Cerrito Alegre and Maçambique claim to have formal access to public health services, this data masks structural challenges such as delays in care, lack of medication, distance from health units, and invisible barriers related to transportation and lack of awareness of rights. In this context, the Brazil Quilombola Program (PBQ), established by Decree No. 4.886/2004, seeks to operationalize the constitutional right to health through an approach based on social determinants (Buss & Pellegrini Filho, 2007), with priority areas such as prevention, attention to quilombola specificities, and confronting institutional racism. However, problems persist such as the fragility in implementing the program in isolated communities (such as Maçambique), political discontinuity, and the lack of community participation in decisions. Furthermore, as highlighted by Machado (2015), the precariousness of access roads in these communities aggravates isolation and directly impacts mobility, the economy, and access to basic services, especially in Maçambique, where the lack of paving and regular public transportation hinders student travel and the marketing of products, as reported by a resident:

> No, no! The Canguçu City Hall, you see, helped very little here in the community. Because we asked for the road to get here, we couldn't get it fixed. So, we asked to fix the roads, and because I have my niece who lives here, right? Right there. Her mother had to go out with a raincoat to take her to the corner because they didn't want to come in here because there was no road. The Mayor has been there for four years, and the roads are as they are, right? Very bad, very bad. (E5_MA, Maçambique community)

In Cerrito Alegre (Pelotas-RS), although the roads are paved, their narrow and winding configuration poses risks, such as runovers. An emblematic case was that of a young quilombola hit by a driver who claimed not to have seen him because he was Black (E1_CA), demonstrating persistent structural racism. In her account, an interviewee reports:

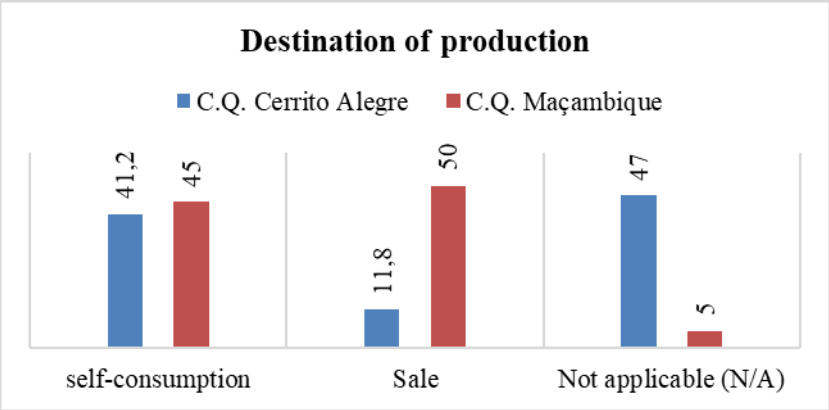
> The road here is very small, there is no space for people to walk. A year ago, a car hit my son at night. Threw him into the ditch. He worked at Sicredi in Arroio do Padre, and he [the driver] had the nerve to say that he didn't see him because he was Black. And he took him to the hospital, did everything that needed to be done for my son, and brought my son home. (E1_CA).

These accounts reinforce the need for public policies that guarantee accessibility and safety, in addition to combating racial discrimination.

4.3. Production and commercialization systems in Quilombola Communities under study.

Guaranteed by the 1988 Constitution and regulated by the Palmares Cultural Foundation and INCRA, the right to collective land allows quilombola communities in Southern Brazil to develop traditional agricultural systems based on sustainable practices, such as the use of creole seeds and polyculture, preserving ancestral knowledge. The research reveals significant differences between the studied communities: in Maçambique (Canguçu-RS), 90% maintain vegetable gardens, 100% have orchards, and 90% practice livestock farming, often in associative models (47.5%), while in Cerrito Alegre (Pelotas-RS) individual self-production predominates (100%), although both allocate part of their production to self-consumption (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Distribution of interviewed families according to the destination of production



Source: Fieldwork (2024)

Although livestock farming and polyculture agriculture are central to food security and the economy of quilombola communities, structural barriers persist in accessing programs such as PRONAF, because, as highlighted by Sacco dos Anjos et al. (2004), even in regions with significant quilombola populations, there is an absence of Afro-descendant beneficiaries, perpetuating historical inequalities where quilombolas end up as temporary employees of "white PRONAF farmers." The field research (2024) reveals productive differences between the communities: in Cerrito Alegre, livestock production (47.1% of families) is entirely destined for self-consumption, while in Maçambique, in addition to self-consumption (52.5%), 37.5% of production is commercialized, evidencing greater integration into the local market. According to Schaffer (2011), polyculture is the predominant strategy in both, but Maçambique presents greater crop diversity (beans, corn, peanuts, grapes, guava, strawberries) and more varied livestock (cattle, sheep), due to factors such as a more structured collective organization and access to technical assistance (Emater-RS, ATER). According to Rangel (2011), these practices reinforce quilombola subsistence and cultural reproduction, although challenges persist such as difficulty accessing formal markets and targeted public policies, limiting the productive potential of these communities.

4.4. Access to Public Policies in Quilombola Communities

Despite constitutional recognition (Art. 67 of the ADCT/1988) and the creation of policies such as the Brazil Quilombola Program (2007) and the ATER Quilombola (Law 12.188/2010), quilombola communities still face structural barriers in accessing basic rights. While both studied communities (Cerrito Alegre-Pelotas/RS and Maçambique-Canguçu/RS) have universal access to health agents, in the particular case of the community belonging to

the municipality of Canguçu-RS, there is a chronic lack of medication and equipment, requiring travel of up to 70 km for urban care (E3_MA).

> Health is okay, but it could also improve a lot, this issue of exams, medication that is never available, something like that, especially because the administrators there don't know our reality, the people up there in charge, secretaries and such, don't know our reality, which is difficult to access. For example, in our health unit there is a pharmacy, but it cannot have antibiotics, it's not available. For example, a child goes with a throat infection or something like that, they have to go to the city, 70 kilometers from here, so people choose to go straight to the city, to those enormous emergency room lines, the Health Center, things like that, small things, but which have a very big impact. So I think there is difficulty in everything (E3_MA).

However, in Cerrito Alegre, there are no records of dissatisfaction with the service, highlighting disparities in policy implementation.

On its part, technical assistance provided through Rural Extension (ATER) and Emater-RS is crucial for quilombola development, but its coverage is uneven. In Maçambique, 80% of producers receive assistance from Emater-RS, reflecting greater community and productive organization. This is completely different for the community of Cerrito Alegre (Pelotas-RS), where only 10% have access, with reports of institutional neglect (E2_CA).

> No, no, to this day they have never given us any help in anything, never, in fact, they forgot about us, right! They don't even care about our community, about anything. Yeah, it's a bit difficult here, right! Because we don't have, we have no way, we don't have, let's say, support, progress that gives us strength, helps us move forward, like that. Regarding assistance, but it's quite complex, the situation is quite pending. So, it's quite bureaucratic, you understand, right? It's a lot of paperwork, a lot of things, and we don't really like that (E2_CA)

Nevertheless, despite legal advances, as pointed out by Sacco dos Anjos (2004), the effectiveness of public policies in quilombola communities runs up against: lack of infrastructure (health, transportation); irregular technical assistance; and institutional racism.

4.4.1. The Place of Quilombos in the Public Arena

The institutional political space is decisive for the development of quilombola communities, as it is within it that agendas and public policies capable of responding to their historical demands are defined, depending, as highlighted by Muller (2020) and Nogueira (1998), on the coherence of measures, active citizen participation, and institutional flexibility. The central challenge, according to Campo and Souza (2015), is for these communities to transition from the condition of objects to full political subjects, influencing decisions that affect their development and overcoming centuries of exclusion. The analysis of empirical

data (Table 2) reveals differences in the perception of the effectiveness of demands: in Cerrito Alegre, 58.8% positively evaluate the reception of their demands compared to 23.5% negative, while in Maçambique, 52.5% express favorable opinions and 37.5% unfavorable. These results suggest the need for more in-depth temporal studies, as institutional responses vary according to local administrations, being aggravated in Canguçu by the extensive municipal territory and geographic isolation that reinforce the marginalization of these communities.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents according to opinion regarding the community's capacity to assert, or not, the community's demands.

Is the community capable of asserting its demands?	Cerrito Alegre	Maçambique
yes	58,80%	52,50%
No	23,50%	37,50%
Does not know how to answer	17,70%	10%
Total	100%	100%

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

Thus, despite advances, obstacles persist for quilombos to fully influence spaces of power, due to: dependence on municipal administrations, which may be more or less sensitive to quilombola demands; and the need for greater political articulation to ensure continuity in achievements, regardless of administrative changes. But one thing is certain, and as highlighted by the aforementioned authors, quilombos are not remnants of the past, but active political actors, whose struggle for rights must be understood as an essential part of Brazilian democratization.

5. Final Considerations

In accordance with the central objective of this work, this study analyzes the socioeconomic conditions and challenges of the quilombola communities of Cerrito Alegre (Pelotas-RS) and Maçambique (Canguçu-RS), in the Serra dos Tapes, revealing shared histories of structural exclusion marked by racism, lack of territorial titling, and infrastructural precariousness, although they present significant differences in productive organization and access to services. Among the similarities, notable are the absence of definitive land titling (despite recognition by the Palmares Cultural Foundation in 2018 and 2010), high illiteracy rates (43.5% in Maçambique have not completed elementary school), female leadership in community organization, and economic pluriactivity as a survival strategy. Regarding the differences, Cerrito Alegre has greater insertion into the external market (47.1% work

outside) and more consolidated infrastructure (94.1% with running water), while Maçambique maintains an economy centered on agriculture and livestock (72.5%) and faces critical deficiencies such as lack of running water (52.5%) and waste burning (90%), but stands out for its stronger community organization, exemplified by the election of quilombola councilwoman Maica Soares in 2024. These disparities reflect distinct local contexts, but both communities face common challenges such as the urgent need for territorial titling and effective public policies to overcome historical inequalities. The authors suggest investigating the political will of the State in resolving land conflicts and community mobilization strategies, because, as argued by Amartya Sen (2010), overcoming these challenges requires collective action and a commitment to equity.

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