

Original Article

“We, *quilombola* women, know each other’s pain”: an investigation on sisterhood and occupation¹

“Nós, *mulheres quilombolas*, sabemos a dor uma da outra”: uma investigação sobre sororidade e ocupação

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Abstract

Introduction: In Brazil, the *quilombola* women have been essential for the survival of the quilombo communities. They are responsible for transmitting traditions, preserving natural resources, and caring for the home and the land. Thus, the historical markers of social and family organization guide the production and reproduction of their occupational roles in this context. **Objectives:** In this article, we reflect on the insurgence of *quilombola* women from the peculiarity of sisterhood, *dororidade*, and gender disparity in these women’s occupations. **Method:** This reflection resulted from a study conducted with nine women residing in a quilombo community located in the interior of the state of Bahia, Brazil, through interviews, *escrevivências* (live writing) and Photovoice. **Results:** The study evidenced that occupations performed by the participants are crossed by gender and conditioned by racism and sexism, in addition to the peculiar modes of the internal functioning of the group and the traditional ways of life in this community. **Conclusions:** Women assume most of the management of the *Pinguela* quilombo community through the sense of collectivity and union that allows them to combine a continuous network of solidarity and support. In Brazil, studies on the work of occupational therapists with *quilombola* women are scarce; therefore, we suggest that occupational therapists, in their professional practice, assume an ethical-political commitment and adopt

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critical perspectives from Afro-Latin-American feminism to develop collective practices as a form of intervention.

Keywords: Quilombolas, Quilombolas/Women, Feminism, Occupational Therapy, Activities of Daily Living, Writing.

Resumo

Introdução: No Brasil, as mulheres quilombolas foram e são essenciais para a sobrevivência dos quilombos. Elas são as responsáveis por transmitir as tradições, preservar os recursos naturais e cuidar do lar e da terra. Assim, os marcadores históricos de organização social e familiar orientam a produção e reprodução de seus papéis ocupacionais nesse contexto. **Objetivos:** Neste artigo, refletimos sobre a insurgência das mulheres quilombolas a partir da peculiaridade da sororidade, *dororidade* e disparidade de gênero nas ocupações de mulheres quilombolas. **Método:** Esta reflexão resultou de estudo conduzido com nove mulheres residentes em um quilombo localizado no interior do estado da Bahia, Brasil, através de entrevistas, escrituras e uso do método *Photovoice*. **Resultados:** O estudo evidenciou que as ocupações realizadas pelas participantes são atravessadas pelo gênero e condicionadas pelo racismo e sexismo, além dos modos peculiares de funcionamento interno do grupo e das formas tradicionais de vida no quilombo. **Conclusões:** As mulheres assumem a maior parte do gerenciamento do quilombo da Pinguela através do senso de coletividade e união, que permite que elas articulem uma contínua rede de solidariedade e apoio. No Brasil, os estudos sobre o trabalho de terapeutas ocupacionais com mulheres quilombolas são escassos; portanto, sugerimos que, em sua prática profissional, terapeutas ocupacionais assumam um compromisso ético-político e adotem perspectivas críticas articuladas a partir do feminismo afro-latino-americano para desenvolver práticas coletivas como forma de intervenção.

Palavras-chave: Quilombolas, Quilombolas/Mulheres, Feminismo, Terapia Ocupacional, Atividades Cotidianas, Escrita.

Introduction

The Earth is populated, but I am also land.

People are also land to populate.

(Povoada, 2021, song by Sued Nunes)

The enslaved black African population created forms of resistance against the oppressions imposed by slavery. Thus, with the desire to conquer freedom, black men, women, and children took refuge in quilombos (Gomes, 2015). This is a word of origin in the Bantu language that means camp, the sacred house where the initiation ritual took place (Nascimento, 2016). According to Nascimento (2018, p. 289-290), in Brazil, the understanding of the contemporary quilombo does not refer only to slavery: "quilombo means fraternal and free meeting, solidarity, coexistence, existential

communion. We repeat that quilombola society represents a stage in human and socio-political progress in terms of economic egalitarianism”.

Women assume most of the administration of Brazilian quilombos because, since the colonial period, they have developed various strategies for preserving Afro-Brazilian culture, protecting nature, as well as fighting in defense of rights, territory, and public policies (Dealdina, 2020). They also take a stand against racism, sexism, violence, violation of rights, and attempts to expropriate territory. Likewise, they are responsible for transmitting the social, political, religious, cultural, medicinal, and educational values of the quilombo between generations (Dias, 2020; Silva, 2020). Daily, quilombola women deal with specific oppressions such as:

The overload of work for sustenance, of working on the land and of caring for the home and the community; engagement in the struggle for territory and survival; the confrontation of gender and domestic violence and territorial conflicts. These are women who have always worked in the fields and in other activities to ensure their livelihood and that of their families. Women who take care of household chores and, however, even indirectly, do not stop being leaders and working for the protection of the community, acting for the defense and promotion of other women - actions that would characterize as feminists, a term, incidentally, strange for many communities (Sousa et al., 2020, p. 90).

Union, dialogue, and a sense of collectivity demand that quilombola women articulate a support network. In this way, while female leaders are at the forefront of agendas in favor of community rights, a group of women remains in the quilombo taking care of children and the elderly people, planting and the tasks to be performed (Sousa et al., 2020). However, these women's struggles are often seen as apolitical and, even in the quilombo, they are victims of violence, racism, and sexism (Dealdina, 2020).

Although Brazilian society has changed a little, female characteristics and the social, intellectual, and moral skills of quilombola women remain stigmatized. This stigma confirms how much racism dehumanizes and inferiorizes black women, as they are situated at the base of the social pyramid, unlike the white population, which is at the top of the pyramid (Carneiro, 2003).

According to Carneiro (2011, p. 2)

[...] black feminism, built in the context of multiracial, pluricultural, and racist societies — such as Latin American societies — has racism and its impact on gender relations as its main articulating axis, since it determines the gender hierarchy in our societies.

Thus, in the spaces of political, educational, and economic power, black women continue to be rejected. However, when these places are occupied by white women, this is due to the claims of the white feminist movement. However, in this feminism, the agendas of black women are devalued and neglected (Bambirra & Lisboa, 2019). It is therefore worth articulating readings of contemporary reality from Afro-Latin American feminism, which considers black, quilombola, Latina, and indigenous women as protagonists of their history, and which makes visible insurgent perspectives that

denounce racism, patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism, and sexism (Gerlach & Magalhães, 2020; Gonzalez, 1988a).

Racism, violence, and rights violations affect the occupational performance of non-white women. Therapists and occupational scientists have discussed the relationship between therapy and occupational science and the black population (Beagan & Etowa, 2009; Correia et al., 2018; Costa, 2012; Costa et al., 2020; Farias et al., 2018; Farias & Simaan, 2020; Johnson & Lavalley, 2021; Jones et al., 2020; Pereira et al., 2021; Pereira, 2022; Santos & Ricci, 2020). These authors emphasize that the demands of the black population must be prioritized, as well as the knowledge produced by non-white people must be valued. In addition, they point out that, in interventions, therapists and occupational scientists should adopt the referential of collective occupations in place of individualizing practices (Allegretti, 2020; Costa et al., 2020; Correia et al., 2018).

This article aims to reflect on the **insurgency of quilombola women**, based on the peculiarity of sorority, dorority, and gender disparity in the occupations of quilombola women. This discussion is part of a broader project (Pereira, 2022) developed with a quilombola community that investigated the impact of racism on the daily occupations of quilombola women.

In the first part, the conceptions, the methodological paths, and the participants of the original work are briefly presented. The second part describes the writing methodologies and the Photovoice method for the collective production of narratives. In the third part, we present the daily life of quilombola women and their resistance practices. In the fourth part, we try to deepen this discussion, debating the concepts of Afro-Latin American feminism and the insurgency of quilombola women. In the fifth part, the female occupation in the quilombo is worked from an investigation on sorority, dorority, and occupation. In the end, we reflect on the possible implications of professional practices articulated from ethical-political commitments based on critical perspectives aligned with Afro-Latin American feminism and on collective practices, as transforming forms of models and perspectives of intervention promoted by occupational therapists.

The Women of the Quilombo of Pinguela: Conception and Design of the Study

Who said I'm alone?

I have more than many in me.

I am one, but I am not alone.

(Povoada, 2021, song by Sued Nunes)

This article is the result of academic research, developed by the first author, Amanda Pereira, which aimed to understand how racism interferes with the construction of identity and the occupational engagement of black quilombola women. The author got to know the Pinguela quilombo through the Palmares Cultural Foundation website. This website mentioned that this quilombo is located in the municipality of Amélia

Rodrigues, in the interior of the state of Bahia. Thus, all women in the quilombo da Pinguela were invited to participate in a meeting to present the research to them. The study sample is composed of black quilombola women over 18 years old, living in the quilombo of Pinguela, who agreed to participate in the research. Women in the quilombo who do not consider themselves black and/or quilombolas and who refused to sign the Informed Consent Form were not included.

Nine black women living in the quilombo da Pinguela participated in the study. It is a qualitative approach to research, combined with visual methodology. The writings and photographs made it possible to know the history of these women, their worldviews, the inner workings of the group, and the history and culture of the quilombo. The thematic analysis of the material, inspired by Braun & Clarke (2006), resulted in the category: **The insurgency of quilombola women: sorority, dorority, and gender disparity in occupations.**

The research was initiated after approval by the Ethics Committee for Research with Human Beings, under opinion number. 4,556,191, according to ethical resolution 510/16 of the National Health Council. All participants signed the Informed Consent Term. The main ethical issue of this research refers to the anonymity of the participants, requested and agreed with them. All participants received pseudonyms, chosen by them.

Presentation of the Participants

I came from mother Africa,

I came from quilombo.

They've done so much to make me fall,

but I don't fall.

(Quilombo, 2021, song by Samba de Dandara)

In this section, we characterize the nine quilombola women who participated in the study (Table 1). They are between 22 and 56 years old and the predominant religion is Evangelical. Seven women are mothers and have 1 to 3 daughters and sons. Only two women are not mothers. Eight women declared themselves to be black, and one woman presented herself as brown.

Table 1. Characterization of the participants (pseudonyms).

Name	Age (years)	Marital Status	Number of children	Religion	Ethnic-racial self-declaration
Ana Paula	40	Married	2	Catholic	Brunette
Bianca	35	Married	3	Evangelical	Black
Claudia	50	Single	0	Catholic	Black
Elaine	37	Married	2	Evangelical	Black
Eunice	49	Married	3	Evangelical	Black
Fernanda	29	Married	1	Evangelical	Black

Table 1. Continued...

Name	Age (years)	Marital Status	Number of children	Religion	Ethnic-racial self-declaration
Jose	27	Married	1	Evangelical	Black
Mariana	22	Single	0	Evangelical	Black
Marina	56	Married	2	Evangelical	Black

Source: Prepared by the first author.

Image, Reflection, and Stories: Writing and Photovoice in the Construction of Collective Narratives

I sang, worked, and worked hard in this land.

(Quilombo, 2021, song by Samba de Dandara)

The methodology of writing and Photovoice was adopted to build narratives that expressed the occupations performed by the study participants. The concept of writing, created by Conceição Evaristo (2017) from her life story, invites black women to write their history. This vision breaks with the hegemonic, white, colonial, cisgender, heterosexual, and rich paradigm, which only recognizes the writing of men (Evaristo, 2017). According to this author, the social, cultural, historical, political, economic, and gender context disregards the writing of black women, but these discriminations should not prevent women from writing: "(...) when writing to themselves, their gesture expands and, without leaving themselves, gathering lives, stories from the surroundings. That is why it is a writing that does not end in itself, but deepens, expands, encompasses the history of a collectivity" (Evaristo, 2020, p. 35). Writing is creating narratives based on personal experiences, but which also express the history of a group of black women, as the relationship between black women and the collective is inseparable, since black women and the collective walk together, sharing the same social markers and/or the same experiences, albeit in different positions (Evaristo, 2017).

Another work resource used was Photovoice, a visual methodology created in the United States in the 1990s by teachers Wang & Burris (1977). The method is based on theories on education for critical consciousness, on feminist theory, and community participation, and makes it possible for individuals and groups, who are stigmatized in society, to be protagonists of their history, to record and share the reality of their daily lives through photography (Berinstein & Magalhães, 2009; Mamede & Esser, 2015; Touso et al., 2017; Wang & Burris, 1977). The images overcome linguistic, cultural, and literacy barriers, as well as capture the emotions, meanings, and perceptions that the individual has of his reality.

Wang & Burris (1997, p. 370) state that:

Photovoice has three main goals: (1) to enable people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns of their community, (2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important community issues through large groups and small discussions of photographs, and (3) to reach policymakers.

Thus, the creation of discussion spaces allows the images to be analyzed from the individual's narratives about the captured photograph, as well as the reflections carried out with the collective allow the community's demands to be debated in the public sphere (Bertagnoni & Galheigo, 2021; Touse et al., 2017). In the case of this project, during the generation of data, the participants were proactive, and participatory and took the leading role in the reports about their own lives, which allowed collective narratives to be built with these women, based on their experiences, which is why the Stories are told in the first person. In this way, we seek to honor their narratives, respecting the limits and rhythm of each participant, as well as trying to avoid evaluating or making judgments about their opinions and their ways of life.

The writings and photographs brought us a very detailed idea of the individual and collective occupations of the participants carried out in the quilombo of Pinguela. Care for the land, children, and the house, the overload of domestic work, the internal functioning of the group, and the ways of living in the quilombo were recurring themes in the reports of these women. In addition, the narratives highlighted the ways of managing activities in the quilombo, examined here from the narratives and images produced by the participants.

The Daily Life of Quilombola Women and Resistance Practices

I have the color of my people,

the color of my people

(Bluesman, 2018, song by Baco Exu do Blues)

The occupations performed by the participants are crossed by gender disparity, as the women divide their time between carrying out domestic activities, raising children and family, and working in the fields, all of which are their exclusive responsibility, with very few exceptions.

My day-to-day is like I wake up in the morning, I go to work in the fields, I plant cassava, peanuts, corn, and manioc². From the fields I take care of the girl, I help her to do activities, and I do normal day-to-day things, too (Fernanda).

There is an overload of domestic work and difficulty in reconciling this work with other activities:

[...] This little job that we don't get tired of doing, because it's every day [...] you have to pluck cassava, go home, cook food, take care of the house, because you don't even say: no, today I'm just going to take care of cassava or today I'm just going to take care of the house, but it's not just the cassava, it's the house, we leave the house, go for food, from the food we go back to scrape cassava (Eunice).

² Manioc and cassava are vegetables used to make flour, women differentiate the vegetables through the format of the leaves and stem of the plants, as they have different shapes.

For the participants, work overload influences self-care, as it is clear in the writings that they spend most of their time taking care of the house, children, husbands, and fields, leaving little or no time for self-care.

[...] I just don't take care of myself very much. After all, I can't be all dressed up, because I have to go to the countryside, but I do take care of myself. Now in this pandemic, we neglected ourselves a little more because we can't be anywhere (Marina).

[...] The situation, too, doesn't ask us to do it, I can't do it [...] you stop and look at the money you earn or you eat, or you do your hair, or do your nails (Eunice).

We have moments for everything, but we don't have moments to take care of ourselves, because we wake up in the morning and think we have to wash clothes, you have to clean the house, and cook food, because the husband will arrive and you never take time for yourself and when you're going to take some time out for you it's not even fun anymore, you're already tired (José).

Despite the work overload, some women revealed that they insist on taking time out of their day to take care of themselves.

I like to take my naps, I like to do my nails, my eyebrows, my hair, and it's not just because we live here that we're going to leave all ragged and finished, because it's not like that, I like to take care of myself (Bianca).

There are moments, there are weekends that I take care of myself, I straighten my hair [...] I do my nails and paint, I do my eyebrows, and on the weekends I take care of myself (Marina).

Silva et al. (2009, p. 699) define self-care as: "an action developed in concrete situations of life, and that the individual directs for himself or to regulate the factors that affect his development, activities for the benefit of life, health and welfare". We emphasize that self-care is a focus of occupational therapy intervention when there are internal and external factors that prevent the performance of occupations. Moments of self-care raise self-esteem, involve care with appearance and personal hygiene, improve health and provide well-being (Castanharo & Wolff, 2014).

It can be considered that the focus of research and intervention of occupational therapists - human performance - suggests that, in different life cycles, individuals present or develop autonomy about activities of daily living (ADLs), becoming dependent in situations of vulnerability, such as diseases and social exclusion. However, these individuals can be helped by occupational therapists in their daily routines, using adaptations, modifications, assistive technology resources, and/or functional rehabilitation. Occupational therapists promote the functional independence of the individual, favoring their autonomy, as well as the resumption of routines (Castanharo & Wolff, 2014, p. 184).

Participants Marina and Bianca revealed that one of the self-care practices they frequently perform is hair straightening. However, this is a common habit among most black women, because in Brazil the phenotype of the black population is inferior, while the aesthetic standard of whiteness is considered superior. Thus, to approach this standard imposed on society and to be accepted, many women perform various aesthetic and cosmetic procedures. Santos (2019, p. 67) states that:

The beauty standard that Brazil has adopted (the European: white skin, straight hair, and green or blue eyes) leads those who differ from this norm to spend years of their lives straightening and lightening hair, using makeup of lighter tones than their skin, and having nose surgery. Looking for momentary changes (straightening and makeup) or permanent (surgeries) that make them approach the instituted beauty and thus, who knows, being able to find a worthy companion, a job that matches the ability and knowledge acquired with the study, of not continue to be considered as an object, which can be used and discarded. I know that the search for an unattainable standard of beauty is common to women as a whole. But for women of African descent, the desired goal, in addition to being much more difficult to achieve, comes up against cruelty, since it is impossible to get rid of one's skin.

Many women straighten their hair since childhood, but over time, when they free themselves from the impositions of racist society on the "perfect hair" policy, they begin to be proud of their phenotypic traits, and they begin the hair transition process to assume their natural hair. Assuming curly hair, or braiding is an act of courage, resistance, and rebellion against the racist system, as well as allowing a connection with African ancestry, and these activities are the object of much interest in studies on black women (Gomes, 2002).

Afro-Latin American Feminism and the Insurgency of Quilombola Women: Violation of Rights and Gender Inequality in Occupations

Não sou livre enquanto alguma mulher não o for,

mesmo que suas correntes sejam

diferentes das minhas.

Audre Lorde

In the quilombo of Pinguela, there are jobs that only men do, such as civil construction work.

The activity that men do and women do not is household (Ana Paula).

[...] There are activities that only men carry out because when there is a party, only men set up the tents, only men organize things and we only participate when it is to put things up for sale (Elaine).

However, while men migrate to urban centers in search of better working conditions in the civil construction industries, women remain in the territory educating their children and grandchildren, performing domestic activities, and taking care of the family and the collective (Sousa et al., 2020). According to the participants, older women and adolescents perform the same activities; however, the younger ones only help during school holidays.

There is no division, all women of all ages perform the same activities (Bianca).

The only people who take care of the fields are older women, there are very few young women who take care of them, even because they are not studying because when they are studying it is not just the mothers who do it (Eunice).

The narratives indicate that, in the past, quilombola women did not know their rights, and were victims of domestic and family violence, and many believed that the role of women was limited to taking care of the home. Over the years, they have come to know their rights:

After we got the certificate, many people came here to teach us about the rights of black women, everything about empowerment, which many people did not know, about our rights [...] they passed on to the women here in the community that we can be whatever we want because there are people here who don't have this full understanding of things. Some women suffer verbal abuse and this was also passed on, many people even suffered this and after that, we started to mature and see that we can, because many of us thought that a woman's right was just to stay at home inside of four walls and it ended, but after these courses that they were bringing, we matured more and more, because some who studied have an understanding, but some who have not studied do not have this understanding (Elaine).

[...] There are women like that who don't like to open up to another and tell their personal life what is happening at home with their husbands and the speakers said that in the morning, even as one lives next to the other, ask her neighbor how she spent the night if she's feeling something, what's going on. After that, many things changed among the women here, even the way of talking to each other changed, because in the past it was not united like this [...] sometimes, we look at it like this and think why she is sad, but we don't know what's going on and there are a lot of people who don't like to be open and also get scared (José).

Marina reports that the first president of the Pinguela quilombo association was a woman, who assumed this position because it is women who manage the quilombo's activities:

I didn't want to be one of the founders because at the beginning when we were recognized, the lawyer said that there had to be an association and that the association was the size of the community and someone had to be responsible, there had to be a founder of that, then they said it had to be me, it couldn't be anyone else [...] I think it had to be me because I'm a woman. After all, the men who have

here go out to work, women are always at home, and we're always at home. is there in that day-to-day struggle. And I, because I don't have many studies, but I have skill in things, I know how to get to places and if I don't understand, I ask for what, why, and there's that thing that I've always been like that, despite not having many studies, but I always ran after things [...] here in this position I never suffered discrimination, for being a woman and black. Not yet, that I didn't notice, only if it already had and I glanced at it and didn't notice (Marina).

In the writing, the participants reported that they previously believed that the role of women was limited to domestic activities and care for children and spouses. That is why they performed occupations considered “feminine”, such as taking care of the house and husband, and raising children, for example. In addition, some women from the quilombo of Pinguela reported having suffered domestic and family violence. After taking a course on women's rights, they began to understand that women can occupy other spaces, as well as perform the occupations they want.

Empowering yourself is the act of taking power over yourself. Female empowerment goes through several paths: in society, through knowledge of women's rights, through their social inclusion, education, professionalization, awareness of citizenship, and also through a transformation in the concept (Azevedo & Sousa, 2019, p. 9).

The awareness processes enable women to create forms of resistance against the sexist and patriarchal oppressions imposed by society and to fight for gender and ethnic equality, independence, and autonomy. Azevedo & Sousa (2019) point out that “when a woman claims her right, she demands a change of posture, conquers more social space, empowers herself, and emanates female power so that others also assume a new posture that is not patriarchy” (Azevedo & Sousa, 2019, p. 10). The women of the quilombo of Pinguela collectively fight for the community, for its independence and autonomy, and the conquest of rights. These positions bring these women closer to Afro-Latin American feminists.

Afro-Latin American feminism advocates that black and indigenous women be protagonists of their history. Bambirra & Lisboa (2019) state that, in the political agenda of white feminism, ethnic-racial discussions were non-existent. The exclusion of black, quilombola, indigenous, and Latin women from hegemonic feminism was due to racism by omission, a concept created by Lélia Gonzalez, based on the Eurocentric and neocolonialist cosmopolitanism of reality (Gonzalez, 1988a, 1988b). In this way, these activists included discussions on ethnic-racial relations, studies on racism, and the urgency of having access to public policies in the feminist agenda. Afro-Latin American feminism is situated in the Global South and has a decolonial, anti-racist and anti-heterocispatrilial perspective. It is worth mentioning that there is no feminism if there are no strategies to face racism, patriarchy, capitalism, sexism, and classism (Cardoso, 2014; Gonzalez, 1988a).

Lélia Gonzalez created the concept of *Amefricanity* due to the processes of violation of rights and segregation suffered by the black and indigenous populations, located in the countries of Latin America, the Caribbean, and Brazil. The term allows territorial,

language, and ideological barriers to be overcome. For this author, all Brazilians are Latin Americans, and the denial of Afro-Amerindian heritage is a manifestation of racism. Therefore, the concept proposes proximity to Africa, as well as valuing one's own culture and ancestry (Gonzalez, 1984, 1988a).

In addition to its purely geographical character, the category of *Amefricanity* embodies an entire historical process of intense cultural dynamics (adaptation, resistance, reinterpretation, and creation of new forms) that is Afrocentric (Gonzalez, 1988a, p. 76-77).

Amefricanity refers to the diaspora, resistance, and struggle movements of black and indigenous people - subaltern and stigmatized subjects of society. African women bear the marks of racial, economic, and sexual exploitation, and the awareness of oppression occurs primarily because of race, as racism and sexism are harmful to women (Cardoso, 2014; Gonzalez, 1988a). In the relationship between the women of the quilombo da Pinguela, the sense of collectivity is evidenced, as they created a support network that allows moments of exchange of affection, reception of needs and emotions when they create collective strategies to fight for rights, protection, and preservation of Afro-Brazilian knowledge. In addition, they continually take a stand against racism, sexism, and social inequalities. Understanding that social discrimination and racism affect occupational performance, health, and well-being, we reiterate the need for this issue to be addressed in occupational therapy and science. The importance of Afro-Latin American feminism for Latin American occupational therapy and occupational science is to recognize the inequalities of gender, social class, and race that have important effects on women's occupations. Therefore, in their professional practice, it is necessary that occupational therapists, from each locus of enunciation, assume ethical-political commitments and adopt a critical and counter-hegemonic perspective with an emphasis on collective practices as a form of intervention.

Collectively Occupying the Quilombo: An Investigation into Sorority, Dorority, and Occupation

I'm proud of where I came from,

from the field that I lived

and who it made me from.

Marianna Moreno

In the Pinguela quilombo, most of the occupations carried out by women are collective, such as scraping manioc and handling the flour mill, example. Individual occupations are not prioritized, as the sense of collectivity is valued in the quilombo. "It is not uncommon to hear from quilombola leaders the expression "our people", demonstrating that the quilombola struggle is a collective, immeasurable and also ancestral project of emancipation" (Andrade & Fernandes, 2020, p. 125). Ramugondo

& Kronenberg (2015, p. 10) emphasize the importance of thinking about collective phenomena in the construction of knowledge about occupations. For these authors, collective occupations are:

Occupations that are engaged in carried by individuals, groups, communities, and/or societies in everyday contexts; these may reflect an intention towards social cohesion or disjunction and/or advancement of or aversion to a common good. Collective occupations may have consequences that benefit some populations and not others.

The relationship between quilombola women involves a lot of empathy, union, respect, and solidarity.

My relationship with the women here is good, I have nothing to say because we get along well, thank God, especially when we pull cassava and everyone is going to scrape it [...] or when we go to church, then we all go together or I go to one of them, we sit down to talk, we are not all the time at the other's house, but there are times when we get together. So, we are always in communication, not a day goes by without anyone talking to anyone (Bianca).

Living with the women here in the quilombo is good, but we need to improve more and get together more [...] because if we get together more, we grow more. So, we need to get closer, we are united in certain parts, and in certain parts we are not because I think that we should get together more, have more ideas together so that we can expand [...] I think that only when there are these courses do we get closer or when we are going to scrape cassava they get closer (Elaine).

For women, one of the strengths of the quilombo of Pinguela is their union, as the relationship between them involves a lot of respect and solidarity. According to them, the act of scraping the cassava and the process of producing cassava flour are the moments when they are closest, as they divide and share the tasks. It is possible to perceive that this support network is related to the concept of the sorority, a word defended by the feminist movement (Piedade, 2020). In the view of a patriarchal society, women must compete with each other; however, feminist groups suggest that women should have a sorority, which is empathy and lovingness, in this way female judgments and rivalry are discouraged (Piedade, 2020). However, this author warns that the concept of a sorority does not cover all the demands of black women, so she coined the concept of dorority, defined as the phenomenon that "contains shadows, emptiness, absence, silenced speech, pain caused by racism. And this pain is Black" (Piedade, 2020, p. 16). The word dorority originates from the prefix pain, which refers to the physical, mental, emotional, and moral pain to which black women are subjected.

In the photos referring to this category, the participants make evident the union of quilombola women in their writing, explaining that, in addition to a sorority, they are also united by dorority. Mariana (Figure 1) reveals that quilombola women are united by the sufferings to which they are exposed.

*I'm wearing a shirt [...] it's written *Elas por Elas* [...] this sentence for me, represents what happens whenever we are usually women who know each other's pain, what we go through daily, so it's us for ourselves (Mariana).*



Figure 1. Photo produced by Mariana.

This photo for me (Figure 2) represents the union of women, a woman alone cannot scrape so much cassava, so one has to help another, has to share [...] Only women scrape, it is very rare for a man to scrape. We scrape the manioc to make the flour, I sell some of it and also give some to the women who helped scrape (Claudia).



Figure 2. Photo produced by Claudia.

During the harvesting period for cassava and manioc, the women of the quilombo agree on the day they want to go to the countryside to pluck the vegetables. The next day, they gather to scrape cassava and then extract the gum. Finally, on the third day, they go to the flour house. They combine the tasks in advance because the Pinguela quilombo only has one mobile flour mill that is already worn out, so the equipment cannot support working many days without a break. In addition, only two women know how to handle this equipment, and the other women only help during the process. So, first, they need to know the availability of these women and then they set the day to uproot and scrape (peel) the vegetable. They usually invite all the women of the quilombo to shave the day before or on the same day. Whoever is available help, as the process of scraping the vegetable and handling the equipment at the flour mill is a collective occupation performed only by women (Pereira, 2022).

In the plantation, each one has its garden, just to scrape the manioc that each one helps the other. To save one, let the other know, and even if I didn't give you time to let you know on the day, let me know later or at the time and whoever is available is arriving. In this part, one helps the other (Eunice).

We scrape cassava to make flour, which is a good distraction for the women because we only scrape and handle the flour mill (José).

[...] In the shaving part, the men do not participate, because they do not want to and the men also do not participate in making the flour (Fernanda).

Ramugondo & Kronenberg (2015) present the concept of collectivity from the notion of Ubuntu (I am because we are; we are because I am), an African ontological orientation that diverges from the individual-collective dichotomy advocated by the European paradigm, understanding that, in the African context, human interconnection is formed from the interaction with the other (Ramugondo & Kronenberg, 2015). Ubuntu philosophy is based on the critical emancipatory perspective, on the ecology of knowledge, and the epistemologies produced in the Global South. Kronenberg et al. (2015) consider that the professional reasoning of the scientist and the occupational therapist in the development of interventions with groups of people, who in power relations are not considered human, the focus cannot be on the consequences of the problems, but above all, it is necessary to make a critical analysis of the origin of inequalities. This also requires the professional to commit to social transformation and emancipation. Far from being understood in a romanticized way, collective occupation, supported by the notion of Ubuntu, can reveal how collective occupations manifest themselves in a continuum between oppressive and liberating relationships. Ramugondo & Kronenberg (2015) also criticize the understanding that populations are subordinated to the perspectives of those who "define collectives", whether for research purposes or in the distribution of resources and services. At the same time, they maintain that occupational therapists have sought to understand what is involved in designing and sustaining communities or society, insofar as occupations are or are not inclusive. The political force of this logic lies in overcoming the individual-collective dichotomy, with a reorientation based on social and cultural perspectives. That said, the writings

produced to show that the occupations performed by the participants, such as working in the fields and the act of peeling manioc, have a fundamental symbolic and political meaning. However, these occupations are devalued and discriminated against by society, the State, and institutions. This prevents quilombola women from having their importance recognized, as well as from performing their occupations in spaces outside the quilombo, which can be described as an occupational injustice (Pereira, 2022).

The concepts of occupational justice and injustice constitute opposite poles, with occupational justice being the full equitable distribution of resources and opportunities (Emery-Whittington, 2021; Simaan, 2021; Pereira, 2022), while occupational injustice constitutes the inequality of this distribution, privileging certain groups at the expense of others. In the case of the black population, for example, it is essential to take into account the rights that allow for significant occupations from an Afro-centered and diasporic framework, because this population deals with specific demands (Martins & Magalhães, 2021). Thus, as Pereira (2022) shows, when working with quilombola communities, the occupational therapist must consider Afro-Brazilian knowledge, values, and culture, as well as the sense of collectivity and the relationship of quilombolas with the territory, must be evidenced as these are central elements of any social exchange in quilombola contexts.

In colonized countries, women of color still suffer the impacts of colonization, capitalism, and globalization. Thus, it is necessary to rescue the traditional values linked to their experiences, such as culture and customs. Likewise, universalist perspectives should not be advocated, because they do not represent all women. Therefore, it is necessary to think from the locus of the person who enunciates their particularities. As such, Afro-Latin American feminism is also based on the notion of the collectivity of the insurgent voices of black and indigenous women, as well as on the collective resistance and strategy to confront racism, sexism, and colonialism (Gonzalez, 1984; 1988b). Thus, one of the strategies advocated by Afro-Latin American and African feminism is to leave the individualizing perspective, often emphasized by Eurocentric perspectives, radicalizing actions that value collectivity (Andrade & Fernandes, 2020; Gonzalez, 1988b; Huff et al., 2018).

Final Considerations

We, quilombola women,

we know each other's pain

Mariana, participant

Our study showed that women assume most of the occupations in the quilombo of Pinguela, such as those carried out to support families through sustainable agriculture, mainly cassava cultivation, and the organization of activities in the community. The study showed that the union between them allows the articulation of a network of solidarity and support. Although women recognize the meaning of work and individual and collective care within the quilombo, occupational injustices also cross the daily life of this population, marked by racism, sexism, colonialism, devaluation of work, and,

consequently, violation of rights. An important milestone in the history of this group was having a woman as the first president of the association, chosen because of her leadership skills and because of her gender since most of the time they are present in the quilombo. However, this struggle is not just for black, Latino, quilombola, and indigenous women, as it refers to a society in general. Therefore, it is necessary for women of color to commit to occupational justice and collectively fight for citizenship and social emancipation. Thus, it is necessary to rescue Afro-Brazilian values, culture, and customs, avoiding universalisms that do not represent all ethnic groups. Understanding that occupations are crossed by gender disparities, social inequalities, and racism, the occupational therapist must consider the social markers that affect the bodies of quilombola women, so that they can perform their occupations to fulfill their potential and ensure equity in their opportunities. It is also worth mentioning that, in Brazil, studies on the practices of occupational therapists with quilombola women are scarce; thus, it is urgent that, in their professional practice, occupational therapists assume ethical-political commitments that are based on the critical perspective of Afro-Latin American feminism, as well as on the theoretical-methodological perspectives of collective practices, to build interventions capable of promoting social change.

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Author's Contributions

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