

**BUREAUCRATIZATION, TERRITORIAL LAW AND ANCESTRY: A REVIEW OF
DEVIR QUILOMBA, BY MARILÉA DE ALMEIDA*****BUROCRATIZAÇÃO, DIREITO TERRITORIAL E ANCESTRALIDADE: UMA
RESENHA DE DEVIR QUILOMBA, DA MARILÉA DE ALMEIDA******BUROCRATIZACIÓN, DERECHO TERRITORIAL Y ANCESTRALIDAD: RESEÑA DE
DEVIR QUILOMBA DE MARILÉA DE ALMEIDA***Irene SILVA¹

e-mail: irene.adryane@ufpe.br

How to reference this paper:

SILVA, I. Bureaucratization, territorial law and ancestry: a review of Devir Quilomba, by Mariléa de Almeida. **Rev. Cadernos de Campo**, Araraquara, v. 25, n. esp. 1, e025009. e-ISSN: 2359-2419. DOI: 10.47284/cdc.v25iesp1.19079



| Submitted: 27/02/2024

| Revisions required: 07/02/2025

| Approved: 19/04/2025

| Published: 12/09/2025

Editors: Prof. Dr. Maria Teresa Miceli Kerbaux
Prof. Me. Paulo José de Carvalho Moura
Prof. Me. Luana Estela Di Pires
Prof. Me. Lucas Barbosa de Santana
Prof. Me. Maurício Miotti

¹ State University of Campinas (Unicamp), Campinas — São Paulo (SP) — Brazil. Social Scientist, Anthropologist, and Doctoral Candidate in the Graduate Program in Social Anthropology at Unicamp.

Rev. Cadernos de Campo, Araraquara, v. 25, n. esp. 1, e025009, 2025.
DOI: 10.47284/cdc.v25iesp1.19079

e-ISSN: 2359-2419

*As I fumble for the right words and a voice to
speak about writing, I look at my dark hand
holding the pen and think of you, miles away,
holding yours. You are not alone.*

(Anzaldúa, 2000, p. 232, our translation)

“What does it mean to be quilombola? As soon as you say you are a descendant of slaves, people respond: oh, but I never knew any slaves, even though they share the same color” (p. 93, our translation). This statement by Eliene Matos, a leader of the Black community of Santana (RJ), categorically expresses the various complexities currently surrounding the struggle and claims related to quilombola rights in Brazil, as well as the feminization of the concept of quilombo addressed by historian, psychoanalyst, and professor at the University of Brasília, Mariléa de Almeida. In this work, which stems from her doctoral dissertation at the University of Campinas (2018), the author draws upon the experiences of various women in Rio de Janeiro, articulating their convergences, divergences, and specificities in light of the new contours attributed to Black communities, particularly within the historical conditions that have brought visibility to these subjects in their struggle for land. In doing so, she examines how women have contributed to challenging prevailing political practices regarding collective recognition, where bureaucratization is perceived as a form of legitimizing “racism in the perpetuation of social injustices” (p. 31, our translation). This review aims to explore the notion of *Devir Quilomba*—a process of becoming that is intrinsically connected to a way of doing politics rooted in the appreciation of care for oneself, for others, and for the space one inhabits.

In her work, Almeida offers a profound reflection on Black identity, the African diaspora, and processes of subjectivation in the postcolonial context, as well as how Black academic thought, in conjunction with women’s contributions, has directly influenced the development of Black and intersectional feminism, along with the constitution of subjectivities in relation to the State. With an emphasis on the social and cultural constructions that shape the Black experience in Brazil, the author invites us to reconsider *quilombos* in contemporary times. Her thesis unfolds through a philosophical and critical analysis, grounded in the notion of racist governmentality, which she elaborates across five chapters. These chapters examine exclusionary practices enacted against the bodies inhabiting quilombola territories and their entanglement with bureaucratization and racism.

As Selma Dealdina (2020, p. 30)—a quilombola woman from Angelim III, in the Sapê do Norte Territory, Espírito Santo—points out, the slow pace of recognition measures for these

territories, the systematic omission of the violence suffered, the lack of political goodwill, and the preservation of third-party vested interests not only hinder access to basic public policies but also reinforce institutional racism. It is within this framework that, by foregrounding the role of ancestry in the present, Almeida seeks to understand how quilombola women have transformed exclusionary narratives as a form of resistance to racism. Through the constitution of safe spaces, as explored later in the book, new identities are forged—both individually and collectively—while political action matrices enable the reshaping of debates and practices emerging from their lived experiences.

By highlighting the conceptual tensions surrounding the recognition of difference and its direct consequences, the author engages in dialogue with scholars such as Achille Mbembe, Paul Gilroy, Maria del Guadalupe Davidson, bell hooks, and, in the Brazilian context, Sueli Carneiro. In this dialogue, the feminization of the concept of quilombo is not understood merely as an association with women but rather as a critical approach to political-scientific models marked by violence, individualism, and competition in contrast to practices of care. Thus, Almeida demonstrates how Black people—particularly women, historically excluded from positions of power—have mobilized through forms of political creation grounded in networks of affect.

Directly influenced by Black women writers such as Toni Morrison and Conceição Evaristo, Mariléa de Almeida's writing goes beyond an in-depth conceptual discussion by never losing sight of her "characters" and by sensitively portraying their aspirations. The literature of Black women plays a central role in *Devir Quilomba*, serving both as a method of analysis and as a mode of writing. By reconfiguring the complex interactions between identity, racism, gender, and the reconstruction of historical and cultural narratives from the perspective of these interlocutors, Almeida foregrounds narrative as a means through which personal stories—when approached with a sensitive political and poetic lens—enhance understanding of their realities. In doing so, the work disrupts dominant perspectives by reclaiming collective memory and placing these women as protagonists of their own histories. Hence, the meaning of *quilombo* acquires new contours within its territories. Conceived as a process of becoming, these spaces emerge as sites of transformation, identity affirmation, and the construction of multiple modes of existence—resisting a logic of the past and of escape.

It is from this convergence of different fields and the crafting of new horizons that Almeida introduces the first chapter, entitled "*Encruzilhadas Teóricas* (Theoretical Crossroads)." Defining herself as a writer of crossroads, she underscores the theoretical complexity inherent in bridging historical analysis and philosophy in order to interrogate the existential field from which these women's experiences emerge. Constructing her thought as a patchwork by interweaving diverse areas of knowledge, Almeida also draws upon the fields of feminism and the philosophy of difference to

reflect on the modes of subjectivation and lived experiences of Black women, particularly quilombola women. This is developed in dialogue with the conceptions of Scott (1999), who introduces gendered trajectories into historical analysis, thereby challenging traditional scientific paradigms. By developing the concept of a “*territory of affections*,” Almeida reveals how she mobilizes herself in response to the demands brought forth by her interlocutors, situating herself “beyond essentializing models of legal or cultural identity” (p. 45, our translation), which are directly traversed by a “racist governmentality” that emphasizes a rigid conception of the enslaved past.

In asserting the notion of “*becoming quilombola*,” in reference to Beauvoir’s (1967) theoretical project that conceives gender as a social construction, Almeida tensions the concept of quilombo, highlighting the historical resistances embedded in Black thought. Influenced by the perspectives of hooks (1982), Gonzalez (1984), Collins (1991), Davis (2016), and other Black feminists, the author discusses the dual invisibility of race and gender within the demands of quilombola women. Almeida manages to balance the notion of experience without treating it as determinative for the conception of their identities, employing an approach that interrogates “how to narrate their practices without running the risk of turning them into new quilombola heroines, stripped of their humanity” (p. 59, our translation). In dialogue with Paul Gilroy, she emphasizes how this suggests a form of accountability for enacting change in the world through heightened consciousness, which challenges legal and historiographical approaches to the question of what it means to be quilombola.

In the second chapter, “*Labirintos de Direitos: burocracia e feminização do quilombo* (Labyrinths of Rights: Bureaucracy and the Feminization of the Quilombo),” Almeida engages directly with anthropological research, such as the analyses by Arruti (2006), Munanga (2009), and Silva (2012), demonstrating how the emphasis on the recognition of ethno-cultural identity, when placed at the center, risks the folklorization of quilombola practices while simultaneously concealing the racism produced by the State. Beyond the consequences that directly affect access to these rights—through the idealized framing of cultural difference and memory under the sign of “remnants,” oriented toward the past—this posture disregards their present-day demands and the immediate effects of racism in the process of affirming and recognizing their identities.

The concept of quilombo in Brazil has always been contested, with efforts directed toward establishing a historical continuity based on the legal definition of “remaining” communities. This conception reinforces racist practices by perpetuating stereotypes of the past through a biologizing understanding of direct descent from enslaved Black people. By advancing a movement of denaturalization toward the cultural dimension, Almeida aligns with the anthropological displacement

proposed by Rubin (1975) in the conceptualization of gender, foregrounding historical and social perspectives. Following a similar path to that outlined by Carneiro (2023), Almeida adds further layers of complexity by considering the dimensions of raciality in this process, thereby rethinking *quilombo* as a becoming.

In this regard, by shifting away from a narrowly land-centered urgency confined to property disputes, such knowledge begins to critique a dictionary-like logic that inserts traditions as immutable symbols. The author also identifies another gap in this type of approach: the intentional invisibility produced by concealing the effects of racism in the processes of quilombo recognition. According to Almeida (p. 98), until 2003, public policies prioritized cultural affirmation over territorial recognition and its guarantees, as well as access to health and education. This practice demonstrates that, through the bureaucratization of these processes, a racist governmentality becomes evident, further reinforcing the lack of access to basic rights among Black and impoverished populations.

Moreover, the prevailing approach toward these groups had long been structured around narratives of flight, war, enslavement, and isolation. These narratives, constructed since the colonial period, not only emphasized a “masculinist bias, stereotyped by virility and strength” (p. 120, our translation) but also relegated the practices developed within quilombos to a place of homogeneity and marginality. In doing so, their bodies were epistemologically inscribed with an external, racist, and colonial discourse that disregarded their efforts to construct new meanings. Feminist approaches, therefore, do not merely dissolve the notion of ancestry as fixed in the past through the formulations of Black and quilombola women but also promote the affirmation and recognition of their resistance—resistance that has always been present in Brazilian history as a vanguard movement. This shift moves away from a discourse grounded in hereditary belonging, redirecting their mobilizations toward reviving historical processes of violence in favor of legitimizing their knowledge under different matrices, as exemplified in the experiences of Terezinha Azedias from the São José da Serra Quilombo and Marilda Francisco from the Bracuí Quilombo, both of whom make significant use of ancestry and tradition in the present.

In the third chapter, “*Terreiros da reparação: usos da tradição* (Terreiros of Reparation: Uses of Tradition),” the sharing of this knowledge takes place through oral traditions, reinforcing bonds of belonging and solidarity among those who constitute the quilombola communities. By centering the narrative on the practices of these two women, Almeida demonstrates the importance of religious affirmation processes and the preservation of their histories as avenues for reparation. Drawing upon a concept formulated by Mbembe, which “in the face of the pain provoked by racism, shifts from a gesture of resentment and nostalgia to a gesture of self-determination” (p. 175, our translation),

reparation becomes a way of envisioning spaces beyond the racialized sense of oppression. Terezinha, a *mãe de santo* (the mother of saints) and quilombola leader, continues the legacy of her mother, Dona Firina, establishing a mode of resistance through what Foucault (2010b) defines as “care of the self and of others.” The *terreiros* of Umbanda thus represent not only collective political and spiritual affirmation but also resistance to the neoliberal co-optation of culture—whether through its spectacularization as a means of State recognition or through the encroachment of other religious practices in these communities. Similarly, Marilda, a storyteller, imagines new ways of “being Black.” By rethinking the mechanisms of power that have acted upon their bodies since the era of enslavement, she reflects on how womanhood shapes the desire to recreate these memories without stripping these actions of their transformative potential. To this end, she conducts historical-cultural tourism workshops that trace the history from the former Santa Rita do Bracuí plantation to the community as it exists today.

These two figures, each in their own way, exemplify this reconstruction of knowledge. Having endured a long process of disarticulation through a notion of Blackness marked by radical otherness—what Mbembe (2020) terms *alterocide*—they mobilize their histories and memories through narrative appropriation. Building on Foucault’s (1988) notion of constitutive exteriority, Almeida deepens the analysis to reflect on bodies unrecognized in power structures, establishing a compelling parallel with the anthropological concept of alterity, which positions the recognition of the other as a methodological stance for recognizing the self. By emphasizing cultural aspects in defining quilombola rights, a new attempt at erasing race—and, consequently, Blackness—becomes evident, with Black people being naturalized as relegated to conditions of stigmatization, marginalization, exclusion, and discrimination in accessing basic rights. In this context, where multiple social markers intersect, certain groups remain even more vulnerable in their claims before the State (BRAH, 2006).

This dynamic reflects what González identified in the 1980s with the notion of “*Brazilian cultural neurosis*” in *Racismo e Sexismo na Cultura Brasileira* (1984), exposing how the condition of “the Black” has been consistently framed through a negative identity that, in contrast to its positive double—the white identity—epistemologically constitutes “territories of truth,” such as the false construct of racial democracy in Brazil. In practice, this dynamic established a significant locus of exclusion for these subjects within knowledge production, primarily due to their lack of access to education. For women, these forms of violence act doubly, reinforcing the specificities of racial and gender inequalities.

This is the reality experienced by Terezinha, Marilda, and many other women portrayed in Almeida’s work, who, faced with the urgent need to work for their families’ survival, were deprived

of basic access to education. Thus, producing narratives that escaped the imposed lens of suffering—markedly persistent in their contexts—enabled their actions to displace rigid perspectives about their lives, their communities, and the formulation of racial knowledge as a whole. Almeida refers to this process as the “*feminization of the quilombo*.” However, she stresses that these values are not exclusively biologized in terms of women. Even as they are embodied, this knowledge is constituted through the valorization of their experiences and the mobilization of affect in a political sense. It is through the potential of quilombola educational spaces—beyond formal schooling within the communities—that Almeida develops her idea of *devir* (becoming), this time grounded in the Black collective experience, with the purpose of de-essentializing a long-standing trajectory that she, her interlocutors, and other Black people frequently experience: the pervasive feeling of inadequacy surrounding their knowledge.

Thus, in her fourth chapter, “*Campos de parrésia: antirracismo e educação quilombola* (Fields of Parrhesia: Anti-Racism and Quilombola Education),” the author establishes a reframing of how these traumatic experiences, when collectively processed, become powerful tools for the construction of emerging fields of knowledge (Coelho, 2013), as has occurred with Black epistemologies more broadly. For centuries, the struggle for visibility has been a central demand of Black and feminist movements; although this demand has not been fully overcome, a growing body of scholarship now seeks to understand how these social markers operate. As a result, we are also witnessing a moment of systematization and differentiation of these knowledges. Through a markedly sensitive style of writing, the author introduces the discussion by addressing how being a Black woman in the position of researcher “ruptures the silence” and how “the racial issue facilitated the articulation of narratives.”

This sensitivity reveals how the lack of access to education, particularly among older individuals, “opened a wound” caused by the State’s negligence, generating a series of hardships, insecurities, and diminished quality of life throughout their trajectories. Similar limitations were also faced by those who, upon entering such spaces, encountered constant doubt about their intellectual capacities. “For the women who were able to attend academic and educational spaces, the fissure pulsates in the perception that the school had failed to fulfill its role of encouraging them toward knowledge” (p. 227, our translation). According to the author, this stems from the notion that Black individuals supposedly lack the same intellectual capacities and that their knowledge would not be deemed scientifically legitimate. Thus, by reclaiming these spaces through their own experiences, profound transformations occur not only in their self-esteem but also in their self-perception.

Such is the case of Laura, from the Quilombo Campinho da Independência, who, through her return to the territory, was able to reframe a range of subjective issues, as well as her relationship with the political movement to which she belongs. Following a process of illness caused by the strain of political resistance, the author underscores this crucial dimension of mental health, a topic still timidly addressed among Black communities. In this process, she links the importance of these ancestral knowledge frameworks to dialogue with spirituality, which, in Laura's case, manifests through her relationship with the orixás. It is through these processes of experimentation that the *Devir Quilomba* contributes to various dimensions of education, the formation of subjectivities, and the building of community bonds—a movement that Gonzalez (1984) associates with the uses of “consciousness” and “memory.” If consciousness operates through alienation and concealment, in the sense of an official history, memory regimes foster the “not-knowing that knows—the place of inscriptions that restore a history that was never written, the site of the emergence of truth, of that truth that is structured as fiction” (ibid., our translation).

It is from these shared memories that the fifth chapter, “*Tranças Políticas: o direito aos espaços seguros* (Political Braids: The Right to Safe Spaces),” emerges, in which the author renders her project tangible by evoking the imagery of the home, of what is familiar and everyday, in dialogue with Collins' (1991[2019]) concept of “safe spaces.” Safe spaces enable the *Devir Quilomba* by providing “essential cognitive and affective resources for the anti-racist struggle” (p. 292, our translation). Drawing on the imagery of braids—an affective symbol among women and children across generations, present in the memories of most Black girls—Almeida positions affection and storytelling as the foundation of experiences and political practice as a whole, a point of departure rooted in collective action, which Abdias do Nascimento defines as *aquilombamento*. The idea of safe spaces is deeply connected to the need for environments in which Black women can feel protected, respected, and free to express their experiences and identities—spaces that go beyond those marked by suffering. Thus, safe spaces are fundamental to the construction of subjectivities and to resisting the oppressive structures of society, which manifest in access to land, community, and the exercise of rights, as well as in the externally imposed limitations. In this sense, to speak of quilombola rights is to speak of their protagonism and of how it has been forged in a new field of knowledge—one that is Black, feminine, and rooted in the land.

In summary, *Devir Quilomba* is an academic, philosophical, and cultural reflection on the historical processes of subordination and resistance that shape Black identity in Brazil. Mariléa de Almeida's work proposes a reconfiguration of historical and cultural narratives, aiming to affirm a Black identity—particularly a quilombola identity—that does not conform to stereotypes or historical

oppressions, but rather reinvents itself through *devir* (becoming), struggle, and collective memory. The work, therefore, can be understood as a powerful and profound invitation to reflect on issues of identity, resistance, and the urgent need to reconstruct historical and cultural narratives from the perspective of Black women. In this way, it stands out for its ability to articulate a discourse that challenges both the dominant structures of society and the social practices that marginalize and subordinate the knowledge produced by Black women.

REFERENCES

- ALMEIDA, M. **Devir Quilomba**: antirracismo, afeto e política nas práticas de mulheres quilombolas. São Paulo: Elefante, 2022.
- BRAH, A. Diferença, diversidade, diferenciação. **Cadernos Pagu**, n. 26, p. 329-376, 2006.
- COELHO, Raimunda F. G. **As educações escolar e social na formação da identidade racial de jovens nos quilombos de São João do Piauí**. 2013. Orientador: Francis Musa Boakari. 163 p. Dissertação — Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação da Universidade Federal do Piauí (UFPI), Teresina, 2013.
- DAVIS, A. **Mulheres, raça e classe**. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2016.
- DEALDINA, S. S. Mulheres Quilombolas: defendendo o território, combatendo o racismo e despatriarcalização da política, *In*: DEALDINA, S. S. (Org.), **Mulheres Quilombolas: territórios de existências negras femininas**. São Paulo: Sueli Carneiro; Jandaíra, 2020. p. 26-44.
- GONZALEZ, L. Racismo e sexismo na cultura brasileira. **Revista Ciências Sociais Hoje**, v. 2, n. 1, p. 223-244, 1984.
- MBEMBE, A. **Políticas da Inimizade**. São Paulo: N-1 edições, 2020.
- RUBIN, G. **Políticas do sexo**. São Paulo: Ubu, 2017.

Processing and editing: Editora Ibero-Americana de Educação
Proofreading, formatting, standardization and translation

