

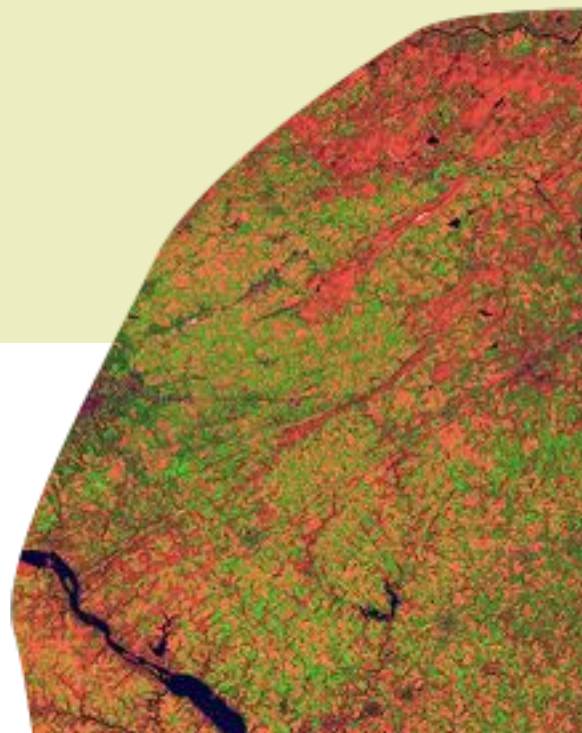
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FORMAS



The Message from the Tide: quilombola fisherman communities in the ruins of environmental and climate injustices (Baía de Todos os Santos, Bahia, Brazil)

Rafael Palermo Buti

Where is this grassroots initiative implemented?

Baía de Todos os Santos, State of Bahia, Northeast Region of Brazil.

Who are the promoters? Who are the beneficiaries?

The initiatives have been engaged by the quilombola fishing communities of Ilha de Maré, Boca do Rio and Dom João, located in different portions of the Baía de Todos os Santos, in State of Bahia, Northeast Region of Brazil (Image 1). In Brazil, quilombola communities are ethnic-racial groups with a history linked to the slavery past, with specific territoriality and black ancestry related to resistance to the historical oppression suffered. There are more than 5 thousand quilombola communities spread across Brazilian territory. Of these, less than 7% have their territories regularized by the Brazilian State. This is the case of the quilombola communities of Ilha de Maré, Boca do Rio and Dom João.

These communities inhabit the coastal area of Baía de Todos os Santos, and practice artisanal fishing. Their modes of existence depend on the preservation of mangroves and the tide, so they establish relationships of care and respect with these environments. For this reason, they are known as “quilombola fishing communities”. They are part of the Artisanal Fishermen Movement of Bahia. They fight for environmental protection and acquisition of formal property rights by the Brazilian State.

The Baía de Todos os Santos is the second largest bay in the world. It is formed by a set of beaches, coral reefs, estuaries, and mangroves with a naturally navigable inlet channel, as well as two inland bays and deep internal channels. Its contours comprise fourteen municipalities located in the insular portion and surroundings, which house a total population of 2,783.73 inhabitants (IBGE; Census 2010). Of these, 87.76% live in the city of Salvador, capital of the State of Bahia and the fourth largest city in Brazil.



Image 1: Location of the Dom João, Ilha de Maré and Boca do Rio quilombos in the Baía de Todos os Santos. Source: Google Earth

Linked to the history of Portuguese colonialism as the main American sugar cane producer and recipient of enslaved African workers, the Baía de Todos os Santos inaugurated the oil extraction chain in Brazil in the 1940s. From these economic activities unfolded the implementation of the Landulpho Alves refinery in 1950, and the industrial and petrochemical complexes of Aratu in the 1960s. Inaugurated in 1975 to enable the Aratu Industrial Complex, the port of Aratu is one of the largest outlets for chemical and petrochemical production in Brazil.

The territories of traditional fishing and quilombola communities in the northern and northeastern portion of the Baía de Todos os Santos are shaped by infrastructure for extracting and moving commodities of this petro and petrochemical enclave. Oil and industrial infrastructures on land and sea radically impact the territories and livelihoods of the region's fishing communities. They are responsible for landfills, suppression of mangroves and the Atlantic Forest, contamination by hydrocarbons and heavy metals, and restriction of access to territories of traditional use by artisanal fishermen (HATGE et al 2009; ZAGATTO e SOUZA 2020; BUTI 2020).

These are the cases of the quilombo Dom João, located in the ruins of the first extraction oil field in Brazil; the quilombo Boca do Rio, located in the Port of Aratu; and the quilombo Ilha de Maré, located in an island opposite the Landulpho Alves Refinery and Port of Aratu. The

images 2 and 3 show the location of the communities of Ilha de Maré and Boca do Rio in relation to these petro-industrial infrastructures.



Image 2: Location of the Landulpho Alves Refinery in relation to Ilha de Maré. Source: Google Earth



Image 3: Location of the Port of Aratu in relation to the communities of Ilha de Maré and Boca do Rio. Source: Google Earth

These communities are implementing resistance strategies based on a network of intercommunity and international mobilizations, linking the struggle for territorial rights and racial justice to socio-environmental and climate change issues. The industrial pollutants have caused irreparable damage to the entire way of life in different parts of the Baía de Todos os Santos (HATGE et al 2009). Therefore, coping strategies also have an interspecies dimension, as they aim to protect all forms of life in the coastal zone.

Who are the actors involved? What is their background?

The collective actors involved are the associations of the quilombos of Ilha de Maré, Boca do Rio and Dom João. These communities live mainly from artisanal fishing and have a centuries-old history of occupation in the Baía de Todos os Santos. The Artisanal Fishermen's Movement of Bahia allows for collective articulation for the rights of quilombola fishing communities. Some groups linked to social movements provide legal and environmental advice, such as the Conselho Pastoral da Pesca (Pastoral Council for Fisheries), the Associação dos Advogados dos Trabalhadores Rurais (Association of Lawyers for Rural Workers) and the Grupo Ambientalista da Bahia (Environmental Group of Bahia). Collaborative research carried out by universities in the region has contributed to the production of knowledge in favor of community rights, especially Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), Federal University of Recôncavo Baiano (UFRB), Estate University of Feira de Santana (UEFS) and University for the International Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony (Unilab).

How does this initiative engage with climate? Does it tackle mitigation, adaptation, both or other dimensions of climate change?

I propose to think about two dimensions of the relationship between the quilombola initiatives in Baía de Todos os Santos and the debate on climate change. First of all, this initiative can be included among the many grassroots initiatives that are not directly framed in terms of climate change actions. Nonetheless, I frame those initiatives in terms of climate action because they contribute to think about the mitigation of some crucial aspects of the new climate regime: especially the effects of oil extraction and petro-industry infrastructure on the environment and the way of life of traditional communities. The quilombola fishers have a specific perspective on transformations landscapes and precariousness of their territory in long term. The actions taken by the communities in the last 15 years include land and sea claim, onboard demonstrations, occupations in oil bases, public civil actions, and letters of complaint against leaks, contamination, and deforestation in the coastal zone.



Image 4: Artisanal fishermen prepare a demonstration at sea. On the flag the words: “Stop Environmental Crimes Without Punishment”.

Source: <https://www.brasildefatoba.com.br/2019/11/20/artigo-or-pescadores-marisqueiras-e-quilombolas-de-ilha-de-mare-um-povo-lutador>

In other instances, those grassroots organizations are explicitly framing their initiatives in relationship to climate change. In this dimension, some local quilombola leaders in Baía de Todos os Santos engage the climate change debate in the public arena because of the unequal exposure to environmental and climate risks to which their communities are subjected. One event is of special relevance: the publication, in July 2020, of an official document by the Municipality of Salvador called Plan for Mitigation and Adaptation to Climate Change in Salvador (PMAMC, 2020). This document establishes the Salvador Climate Risk Index and analyzes the level of local vulnerability. The document shows that the places inhabited by the black population are more exposed to the different risks of the new climate regime, including the quilombo Ilha de Maré. The Climate Risk Index projects the impact of sea level rise on the island up to 2030.

Image 5 shows the projection of the threat of sea level rise in Salvador for the years 2030, 2050 and 2100 (PMAMC, 2020). In blue are the threatened areas. The community of Ilha de Maré is in blue at the top of the maps.

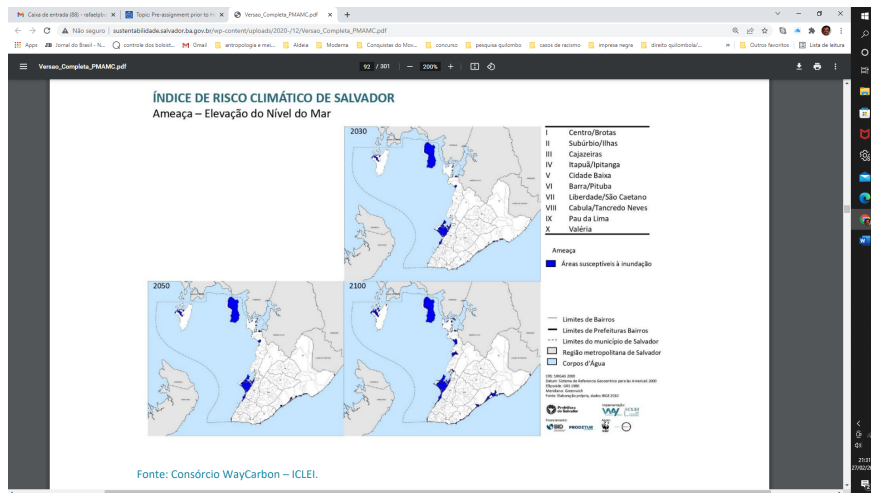


Image 5 - Threat of Sea Level Rise in Salvador Climate Risk Index. Source: Plano de Mitigação e Adaptação às Mudanças Climáticas do Clima em Salvador, Prefeitura Municipal de Salvador, 2020.

For these two different dimensions of impacts (precariousness and contamination of territories in long-term and sea level rise) some quilombola leaders engage the discussion about environmental racism and climate injustice, including their presence at the 26th United Nations Conference on Climate Change (COP 26) held in Glasgow in November 2021.

What are the main objectives? What are the main values?

The quilombola fishing communities of Baía de Todos os Santos connect three types of agendas: land claims, anti-racist movement, and socio-environmental debate. The communities understand that only after the regularization and recognition of their property rights on land and sea territories by the State they will they have autonomy to live, protect their living environments and guarantee food security.

The lack of territorial recognition contributes to the precariousness of their territories and ways of life, increasing the pressure of extractive corporations linked to the extraction and movement of commodities. For this reason, most of the complaints about environmental crimes have been voiced by the communities themselves. They denounce the public authorities' non-compliance with environmental legislation in relation to control over contamination and demand their presence in decision-making spaces on megaprojects that may affect their lives and territories.

An important dimension brought by grassroots associations is the relationship between the environmental crimes suffered and the notion of “environmental racism”. This is a term used

by quilombola fishers in public debate, since black and poor people inhabit the most precarious territories of the region. In this sense, quilombola men and women have positioned themselves as “guardians” of the nature, mangrove, and the tide against environmental racism, claiming their perspectives in socio-environmental care and recovery policies.

Due to this long-term relationship with their territories and the consistent engagement with environmental racism, some leaders have started to be involved in the debate on climate injustice. One of the main leaders of the quilombo Ilha de Maré, Eliete Paraguaçu, is a member of a Brazilian collective of black activists called Coalização Negra por Direitos (Black Coalition for Rights). This collective was present at the 26th United Nations Conference on Climate Change (COP26) held in Glasgow in November 2021.

Some aspects of the proposal are present in the preparatory debate for COP26 held by the group. Titled "No Racial Justice, No Climate Justice", the debate can be accessed at this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S6e3_pqX-0E. The main message of this collective is the importance of intersectionalizing the discussion of environmental racism in the climate debate. During demonstrations in the streets of Glasgow, they showed a poster with the following sentence: “*CLIMATE JUSTICE WITHOUT RACIAL JUSTICE IS THE NEW COLONIALISM*”.

The poster image can be seen at this link: <https://oeco.org.br/analises/justica-climatica-sem-combate-as-desigualdades-raciais-e-colonialismo/>.

What is the timeline? Are there already visible effects?

An important milestone was the Manifesto launched by the quilombo Ilha de Maré and Artisanal Fishers Movement against the explosion of the foreign vessel Golden Miller in December 2013. Moored in the port of Aratu, the vessel was carrying butadiene and propylene gases from the company Braskem/SA, contaminating the fishing territories of the region. Since then, quilombola communities have been engaging in strategies to denounce and resist environmental racism through a network of inter-community juridical actions and public mobilizations.



Image 7: Artisanal Fishers Movement protest against impunity over the Golden Miller Ship.

Source: <https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2020/05/23/que-desenvolvimento-e-esse-que-traz-morte-questiona-pescadora-e-lider-quilombola>

One of these took place on July 2018, with the publication of an open letter written by the Quilombo Dom João and signed by partner entities and groups denouncing an oil spill that occurred in May of the same year (ASSOCIAÇÃO QUILOMBOLA PORTO DOM JOÃO 2018; BUTI 2020). At the time, a Petrobras pipeline had ruptured in the vicinity of the community, contaminating residential areas and mangrove.

Launched on the day of commemoration of the independence of Bahia, that document claimed the community's independence from contamination. In doing so, the quilombola denounced the negligence of environmental agencies. One of the results of the mobilization was the opening of the legal process against Petrobras for compensation of fishers who work in areas affected by oil spill.



Image 8: Mangrove swamp killed by oil spill near Dom João. Source, BUTI 2020

The other took place in September 2020, when the quilombo Boca do Rio held an act in defense of mangroves and the Aratu River. At the time, some residents denounced extensive deforestation in the community's mangroves, as a result of actions taken by Bahia Terminais to build a port terminal.



Image 9: Complaint by the Environmentalist Group of Bahia against the deforestation of mangroves in the quilombo Boca do Rio. The poster informs that “Bahia Terminais terrorizes quilombo Boca do Rio with an explosion of dynamite”, and that the “Company has already deforested 5 hectares of mangroves within the quilombola territory”.



Image 10: Mangrove of the quilombo Boca do Rio devastated for construction of the port of Bahia Terminais in an area of Environmental Preservation, 11/3/2021. Source: <http://www.cppnacional.org.br/noticia/o-quilombo-boca-do-rio-continua-sendo-violentado-pela-empresa-bahia-terminais-controlada>

This action triggered the launch of a campaign in defense of the territory of Boca do Rio in March 2021 (ASSOCIAÇÃO QUILOMBOLA BOCA DO RIO, 2021). At the time of this campaign, the association denounced a “chemical warfare” operated by Braskem against families through the release of toxic products. The complaint included the history of devastation operated by the industrial infrastructures of Volpak, Braskem, GDK, Mendes Jr,

Ford, and Dow Química, leading to the devastation of forests and mangroves, the removal of hills, the restriction of access, the expulsion of families, the filling of the sea, rivers and water sources, and finally the contamination of the environment and residents. One of the results of the mobilization was the stoppage of the port works by the Public Ministry of Bahia.

Which limits (institutional, physical, social, etc.) does it encounter?

To reflect about the "limits" encountered by quilombola communities in the environmental and climate injustice debate, I will cite the speech of a quilombola leader from Ilha de Maré, Eliete Paraguaçu. This speech is present in the documentary “Invisible Killer: industrial waste on the island of Maré reaches deadly levels”, released in 2019 by the collective Midia Ninja.

It's a very unequal fight, it's one thing for you to fight with an enterprise, it's one thing for you to fight with a world of enterprise, it's one thing for you to fight with chemical pollution that you don't feel, you don't touch, you can't punch, this is very uneven, this is very perverse, what we have been experiencing here in Bahia is this. And the criminalization of the movements that we face, because we have to defend the mangrove, for us to defend the crowns and the areas that we fish, we are criminalized, with police at the door, with the right to be arrested, because you defended the right to survive, you defended the right of your community, you defended the right of a class that has always lived exclusively on what does, which is the fishing, the fish, the food that we produce, that we move this Bay with what we do.

According to Eliete, the quilombola and fishing communities are in an unequal and perverse struggle because it is not possible to “feel”, “touch” and “punch” the enemy, in this case, the “chemical pollution” released by the “world of enterprises” in Baía de Todos os Santos. This is something similar to what Nixon (2011) calls “slow violence”, as a form of structural and lasting destruction dispersed in time and space inherent to predatory extractivism. In slow violence, it is difficult to map and prove the causative agent of environmental crimes.



Image 11: Documentary poster "Invisible Killer: industrial waste on the island of Maré reaches deadly levels". Source: <https://midianinja.org/news/assassino-invisivel-lixo-industrial-na-ilha-de-mare-chega-a-niveis-mortais/>

Added to this, oil and petro-industrial corporations tend to deny the occurrence and severity of their effects on territories and on the health of the population. Large extractive corporations are protected by the Brazilian state, where regulatory institutions have been complacent with crimes. It can be said, therefore, that the limit for the actions of communities lies in the institutional and structural racism that marks the relations of power in Brazilian society. Some places and people need to be sacrificed for the benefit of capitalist projects. These places and bodies are predominantly black.

Another point raised by Eliete concerns the criminalization of quilombola leaders. Some leaders have responded individually to lawsuits brought against them by corporations and other agents contrary to the interests of quilombola communities. Pressures on community leaders have increased in Brazil after President Jair Bolsonaro took power in 2018. A report by the NGO Global Witness lists Brazil as the fourth country in the world for number of environmental and land rights leaders killed in 2021. This created a more hostile context for socio-environmental agendas in the country, including Baía de Todos os Santos. For this reason, some quilombola leaders have engaged with international networks of mobilization. The participation of quilombola leaders in the climate debate promoted by COP 26 is a way of engaging new global perspectives in historical local problems.

How would it be potentially replicable in other settings?

The environmental and climate activism to which quilombola leaders from Baía de Todos os Santos are involved is part of a larger movement engaged by indigenous and traditional communities from different parts of the world. COP26 is proof of this, as for the first time it brought together indigenous leaders and traditional peoples from different countries engaged in occupy the climate debate. One of the groups active at COP26 was the Global Alliance of Territorial Communities (GATC), a coalition of organizations from Latin America, Africa and Asia representing traditional communities in 24 countries. The participation of Brazilian indigenous peoples and quilombola is part of this movement where communities claim a place in the fight against the climate crisis. To a certain extent, the climate debate has become a common language for communities to formulate an agenda of planetary commitments based on their local realities. By intersecting the racial debate in the climate debate, Brazilian quilombola communities offer the world the message from the tide.

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