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ETHNO-ECOLOGICAL
COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM
FROM WITHIN

Quilombo tourism and the quest
for sustainability in Brazil

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6.1 Introduction

On 19 March 1999, Campinho da Independência—located in the Municipality of Paraty—became the first quilombo in the state of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) to receive official governmental recognition of its status asquilombo remnant. With this decree came collective land titling and the right to preserve its cultural heritage. This achievement was the result of decades of struggle of quilombolas (the gender-neutral term used to refer to the members of a quilombo) to attain visibility. While momentous, Campinho’s leaders knew that this was not sufficient; they knew that this was only the first step towards sovereignty. In identifying sustainable options, they realized that tourism was one logical economic opportunity, given Campinho’s proximity to tourist markets. Having been witnesses to the suggestive power of tourism and its potential negative outcomes if managed improperly, they initiated a process of tourism development with very clear objectives. In this chapter, we discuss this process in order to address the theoretical and applied implications of community-based tourism (CBT). We combine our experiences and expertise as a decades-long community organizer and quilombo leader (Laura), a budding yet highly experienced quilombo leader in charge of CBT at Campinho (Daniele), and an anthropologist of tourism who has conducted ethnographic research in Campinho (Carla), to offer this analysis.

‘Quilombos’ or ‘quilombo residual societies’ are communities composed of peoples of African, Indigenous, and European descent, who constructed independent societies outside the Brazilian plantation colonial system. Similar experiences were carried out by palenques in the Spanish-speaking Americas and in ‘maroon towns’ in the English-speaking Americas. A number of quilombos have engaged in different forms of tourism development in the last ten years. As Blanca Camargo and Alain Lawo-Sukam (2015) rightly note, very few studies discuss the tourism planning and managing processes among ethnic groups (but see Swain, 1989). Even fewer works study how quilombolas interact with the tourism industry and the effects of such interactions. This chapter contributes to filling this void by weaving CBT literature with the on-the-ground, organic process that Quilombo Campinho
Quilombo tourism has taken to achieve successful outcomes. We propose that the model developed at Campinho—ethno-ecological community-based tourism—is an economically and environmentally sustainable tool that also serves as a means to hold on to quilombolas’ territory and sovereignty.

6.2 Community-based tourism and quilombo tourism

CBT developed as an alternative to mass tourism in the 1980s. In *Tourism: A Community Approach*, Peter Murphy (2012) proposed an ecological, community-centred perspective toward tourism development and planning, concentrated on local initiatives and benefits. While the concept has been revised over the years, the focus on community involvement remains paramount. CBT has gained prominence in the last 20 years as a viable pathway to sustainable tourism development (Pearce, 1992; Bartholo et al., 2008, 2009; Moscardo, 2008). Presently, CBT is no longer an alternative development model but one that has become mainstream worldwide (Hamzah & Khalifah, 2009). In Latin America, CBT refers to community initiatives created or supported by the local population, where economic benefits are distributed widely and where protection of local and natural resources are essential components. With minor variations from this premise, CBT has become particularly widespread in Brazil, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Peru. In Brazil, CBT has become a tourism model that, to some degree, is promoted by the state through training workshops and other means.

Meanwhile, tourism in maroon societies is a relatively recent, but not isolated, phenomenon. In addition to Brazil, examples of tourism projects in maroon communities in the Americas can be found in Colombia, Jamaica, and Suriname. An iconic case is found in San Basilio de Palenque, Colombia—a former maroon community founded in the 17th century and located in the northern department of Bolívar. San Basilio de Palenque is considered the first free territory of the Americas; the Spanish government granted autonomy and freedom to all the escaped enslaved peoples who lived there in 1713 (Camargo & Lawo-Sukam, 2015). San Basilio de Palenque was declared UNESCO Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2005. This maroon community has embraced ethnic tourism, providing interpretive tours, showing visitors important communal spaces, and offering music and dance performances (Camargo & Lawo-Sukam, 2015). With some limitations, tourism in Palenque seems to be a promising economic alternative (Gil et al., 2016). The leadership of Palenque is keen on involving key stakeholders (palenqueros; tourism mediators; local, regional, and national governments; and NGOs) while themselves remaining in charge of the tourism path they wish to take (Camargo & Lawo-Sukam, 2015). In a few ways, tourism in San Basilio shares similarities with the model we discuss in this chapter, with noteworthy differences in terms of autonomy and sustainability.

In Brazil, quilombo tourism is relatively recent. Including Campinho, a number of quilombos have engaged in tourism development in the last ten years (Kenny, 2011, 2018; Silva et al., 2016; Bowen, 2017; Guerrón Montero, 2017, 2020; Lusby & Pinheiro, 2019). In the following sections, we discuss three core characteristics of CBT and introduce the ways in which Campinho da Independência has developed its CBT model in terms of planning and management.

6.3 At the crossroads of community-based tourism and ethno-ecology: Campinho’s model

CBT is “a community development tool that strengthens the ability of rural communities to manage tourism resources while ensuring the local community’s participation” (Hamzah &
Khalifah, 2009). Among its main characteristics, this model can be a means to generate income (thus reducing poverty), diversify the local economy, preserve cultures and environments, and provide educational opportunities for locals and tourists. The model requires a long-term approach, while aiming to maximize benefits and limit negative impacts (Hamzah & Khalifah, 2009). Even though community participation is crucial, CBT projects can also be initiated by governments, NGOs, and tourism mediators—with varying degrees of success (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009). In what follows, we detail some of the main components of CBT and discuss the approach taken by Campinho. Before we begin, however, we should stress that the process that evolved at Campinho was not based on an analysis of the literature on CBT, adherence to CBT manuals, or any other predetermined model. It was based on a profound bottom-up process of trial and error that has been in the making for almost 20 years.

Caminho da Independência is a community formed by 120 families and 550 members. It is divided into 13 nuclei that follow matrilineal (lineage traced through the mother’s line) and matrilocal (residence near the mother’s household) kinship patterns. Campinho is located 14 km from the town of Paraty, in the Municipality of Paraty. Campinho’s land was part of three haciendas, Sertão da Independência, Itatinga, and Paraty Mirim, which produced mostly sugar cane and coffee in colonial times. Once slavery ended in 1888, three former enslaved women (Vovó Antonica, her sister Marcelina, and her cousin Luiza) settled in this territory and formed the quilombo known today as Campinho da Independência. Most residents in Campinho live off agriculture and salaried jobs in Paraty and nearby towns.

Paraty, a Portuguese colonial and imperial town founded in the early 17th century, is located 248 km from the city of Rio de Janeiro and 267 km from the city of São Paulo. It was declared a National Historical and Artistic Heritage in 1962 and is on the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage sites in Brazil since 2004. Since the 1980s, tourism has been one of the main industries in the region. More recently, Paraty has become a well-known cultural, recreational, and ecological destination for national and international tourists. Campinho residents started their involvement with tourism in the early 2000s. At present, the tourism offerings at Campinho are framed as ethno-ecological on the quilombo’s website and are described as follows:

Come to a guided visit of the first titled quilombo in the state of Rio de Janeiro […] We will learn the history, struggle and resistance [of quilombolas] for their right to their lands, their culture, art and gastronomy. Our itinerary includes storytelling by the griots, visits to the family nuclei, flour house, agro-ecological nursery and handicraft store.

(Quilombo Campinho da Independência, 2014)

The Association offers guided tours of the quilombo and hiking tours to nearby waterfalls; it has a handicraft store and a well-equipped restaurant and bar. It serves not only organized tour groups managed mostly by the Association, but also individual tourists on their way to or from tourism attractions in the Rodovia Rio-Santos. In what follows, we discuss three crucial aspects of CBT and explain how they are experienced at Campinho: community participation broadly understood, connection to tourism circuits, and governmental support.

6.4 Community participation

One indispensable aspect of CBT is that it assumes that community participation in tourism is desirable and that empowering community members to engage in the development and
management of this kind of tourism fosters sustainability, both in cultural and in economic terms. In other words, governance in the hands of the local community is essential. At Campinho, community participation has taken many forms. As stated earlier, Campinho was the first in the state of Rio de Janeiro to legalize its status as a quilombo remnant. On March 19, 1999, President Fernando Henrique Cardoso formally conceded 287.9 hectares of communal land to the Association of Campinho Residents (Associação de Moradores do Campinho, AMOC), formed in 1994 (Estado do Rio de Janeiro, 1999). Once this step was completed, the Association moved quickly to identify five crucial areas for economic development and community building, namely agro-ecology, health, artisanal work, differentiated education and culture, and CBT. The Association’s leaders were very mindful that a piece of paper grants simultaneously some guarantees and no guarantees. In 2000, they launched the Ethnic and Sustainable Tourism Project (Projeto de Turismo Étnico e Sustentável), to teach tourist groups about family organization, landscape, cultural practices, and history (Santos, 2008). The leaders of the Association were acutely aware that “local management and control can prevent outside interests from capitalizing” (Camargo & Lawo-Sukam, 2015) on Campinho’s cultural and ecological heritage. In 2003, members of the quilombo created the Cultural Project Manoel Martins, which later became the Cultural Spot Manoel Martins (Ponto de Cultura Manoel Martins), an entity recognized and financed by the Brazilian Ministry of Culture.

At first, Campinho did not have the kind of infrastructure needed to welcome tourists. When the first tours were available, they included lunch, handicraft offerings, and a visit to a communal manioc flour house (casas de farinha) in the quilombo. Manioc flour houses are places were manioc is transformed into flour. This is a very elaborate and lengthy process that starts with planting and harvesting the root of the manioc and ends with the artisanal preparation of manioc flour. Historically, each one of the 13 nuclei in Campinho had its own manioc flour house and flour production was conducted by means of task forces or collective efforts, known as mutirões. Manioc flour houses are vital political, economic, social, educational, and cultural tools in Campinho for several reasons. One of the means Campinho residents used to finance lawyer fees for the process of legalization of their collective land was precisely through manioc flour production. This work was so strenuous physically and emotionally that manioc flour houses were left to decay afterwards. Once the quilombo received official recognition and communal ownership of their land, the Association built one collective manioc flour house, which became one of the tourism spots of the initial itinerary. It is worth noting that in 2019, manioc flour houses have been reconstructed on each nucleus, and the relevance of these houses for Campinho residents remains alive.

Back in the early years of tourism development, lunch was prepared by the Tourism Committee at the local elementary school during the week and at the home of one of the members of the committee on the weekends. Tourists also had the opportunity to buy handicrafts from the artisans themselves. In the 21st century, the itinerary offered at Campinho is much more elaborate and well planned. Because quilombolas are in charge of the tourism process from beginning to end, most profits remain within the community, benefitting directly or indirectly 60 of the 120 families at Campinho.

Tourists can visit the spacious restaurant and well-stocked handicraft store every day of the week without previous reservations. However, if they want a tour of Campinho, they need to arrange a visit through Daniele, the quilombolain charge of CBT at the present time. Upon arrival, tourists are required to be guided by one of the quilombola tour guides throughout their visit. Currently, there are four quilombola tour guides and three griots (wise men and women who are versed at keeping Campinho’s histories alive), all of them
women (cf. Guerrón Montero, 2020). Daniele, in addition to serving as coordinator, is a tour guide and a spokesperson or palestrante for tourism-related activities of the quilombo outside Campinho.

The first stage of the tour includes a gathering at the upper part of the restaurant. Here, tourists, one or more local tour guides, and one or more griots gather in a circle (roda) to learn about the history of Campinho as it connects to the larger struggles of the peoples of the African diaspora. This part of the tour is the lengthiest and most elaborate, and it involves vibrant conversations between the griots, the local guides, and the tourists. Translations from Portuguese to English are generally carried out by the tour guide who brings the group to Campinho, or occasionally by a quilombo member by marriage who speaks English. After the roda, the quilombola tour guide leads tours on a predetermined path throughout Campinho, explaining the use of medicinal plants, the social configuration of the quilombo, and other aspects of their history. If tourists request it, they are able to visit one of the casas de farinha or communal plant nurseries. This part of the tour ends at one of the handicraft stores, also managed collectively by local artisans. This is followed by a workshop if the group requests it in advance. There are workshops available for groups of at least five tourists in basketry and planting, and ten tourists in jongo. Currently, eight women lead basketry workshops, and five men and women manage the planting workshops. The most requested activity by tourists involves the dance jongo. Jongo, caxambu, or tambor is a semi-religious dance of African origin. According to Ribeiro (1984), the jongo has been practiced by enslaved peoples since colonial times. Then, the jongo served multiple purposes, including planning revolts and escapes and marking important celebrations (Silva Costa & Brasil Fonseca, 2019). Currently, the jongo of the south-eastern region of Rio de Janeiro is considered a historical intangible heritage by the Institute of National Historical and Artistic Heritage (Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional, IPHAN), and continues to be practiced in the Vale do Paraíba and the northern and southern coasts of the Fluminense region (Alves, 2016; Da Silva Costa & Brasil Fonseca, 2019). At Campinho, the jongo was revitalized in the context of state-sponsored workshops and has become an iconic cultural marker for quilombolas’ quest for sovereignty. Thirty men, women, and children form the jongo troop and participate in the workshops.

When reflecting upon the process of developing CBT in its current version, the Association’s leaders recognize that, at first, they embarked in an industry about which they were not fully aware. For instance, they referred to the tourism attractions they offered (their gastronomy and handicrafts, or a visit to the casa de farinha) simply as “activities” rather than “products.” Tourists were allowed to visit Campinho without previous permission, and this meant that tour operators in the state or nearby states brought tourists who simply roamed around the quilombo without respecting the privacy of its residents. Moreover, there was almost no profit left for the quilombo, with the exception of the sale of lunch or a few handicrafts. The Association’s leadership quickly realized that they needed to make changes, ultimately launching their ethno-ecological community-based tourism model.

The participation of Campinho’s leaders in regional workshops and their full immersion in the creation of the Forum of Quilombo, Indigenous, and Caiaçara Traditional Communities – Angra/Paraty/Ubatuba-SP (Foro das Comunidades Tradicionais Quilombolas, Indígenas, e Caiaçaras – Angra/Paraty/Ubatuba-SP) in 2007 contributed to the realization that what they had done on their own, through improvisation and extensive deliberations was, in fact, a highly sustainable and pedagogical kind of tourism—CBT at its best. In 2008, this vision was solidified when Campinho’s project “Caiaçaras, Indigenous Peoples and Quilombolas: Building Cultural Tourism Together in the Green Coast Region” (Caiaçaras, Indígenas e Quilombolas: Construindo Juntos o Turismo Cultural na Região da Costa Verde) was funded by the...
Ministry of Tourism. This allowed the Association to organize their activities in line with tourism services and to find ways to protect and rescue what quilombolas call “traditional knowledge and ways of doing” (saberes e fazerestradicionais).

One fundamental aspect of self-governance is the ability of local residents to decide their own level of involvement in tourism as well as the number of tourists welcomed at a given destination (Nyaupane et al., 2006). At Campinho, residents interested in engaging in tourism do this through several means: they can become tour guides; they can contribute with their produce or knowledge of agro-ecology; they can share their knowledge of the history of the quilombo; they can use their cooking skills at the community’s restaurant or their artistic abilities producing handicrafts for sale at one of the two handicraft stores. In regard to managing number of tourists, in similar fashion to Palenque, which is located close to the city of Cartagena, Campinho da Independência is located close to the city of Paraty. Paraty has become a tourism mecca in Brazil. Although the tour offerings in Paraty highlight the town’s historical, tangible, and intangible heritage, its predatory model could very well be considered an example of over-tourism (Van der Borg et al., 1996; Coldwell, 2017). One example suffices: in a town of 40,000 people (IBGE, 2019), the International Literary Festival of Paraty (Festa Literaria Internacional de Paraty, FLIP) regularly attracts more than 25,000 tourists during the five days in July on which it has taken place since 2003. The estimated 376 hotels and hostels with 11,330 beds are not sufficient (interview G.R.C.; March 9, 2015), thus stretching the town’s capacity to its limits and becoming unsustainable (cf. Axer, 2009).

A critical decision made by the Association early on in the process was to recognize Campinho’s own capacity to handle tourists. The choice was made for small-scale, highly controlled tourism reception. In practice, this is achieved by requiring that any tour group interested in visiting Campinho request permission in advance, and by arranging tours directly through the Association rather than through mediators. While the Association works with the largest tour agency in Paraty and other agencies in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, they mostly receive direct bookings through partnerships developed over the years.

One of the most important indicators of the success of the CBT model is that the local community be in charge of their own representations. Most quilombo communities that engage in tourism emphasise their tangible and intangible heritage (Kenny, 2018). At Campinho, the central tangible cultural markers that signal otherness are the handicraft store and restaurant, both catering to tourists. At one entrance of the quilombo, the AMOC office displays a mural with Campinho’s emblematic symbol: a depiction of Campinho’s map with the three women who founded the quilombo. While there is no interpretation centre, the quilombola tour guides themselves act as interpreters of their heritage and their cultural spaces; thus, tangible and intangible heritage coexist.

The right to self-represent is, in fact, at the centre of the ethno-ecological community-based tourism conceived by quilombolas. While food, workshops, and even a stroll through the interpretive path are optional, the only aspect of the itinerary that is not optional is the roda where tourists learn from the griots the history of the struggle and marginalization of Campinho’s residents. For Laura, it does not make sense to travel to a place and not have the opportunity to learn about its history from those who forged it. For Carla, who was present at numerous rodas during her fieldwork at Campinho, this is the most dynamic and engaging part of the tour, where the griots and quilombo members demonstrate their acute understanding of the structural conditions that force peoples of African descent in general and quilombolas in particular to fight tirelessly for self-governance.

The literature on CBT points to some of the problems of assuming that the model is fail-proof, particularly when it comes to achieving self-sufficiency within heterogeneous
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communities (Salazar, 2012). At Campinho, in spite of the common origin of all its members, heterogeneity is present in terms of experiences; level of education; religious affiliation; and, certainly, interest in and support for tourism. Tourism is not a traditional sector (Gascón, 2013), even for a community such as Campinho, which has co-existed alongside Paraty for decades. The controlled tourism approach taken by the Association has made tourism commonplace and non-intrusive. While not every member of the quilombo is interested in becoming directly involved with tourism, there is respect for the difficult work of those who are involved and recognition of the broader benefits to the community.

6.5 Connections with tourism circuits

For the CBT model to work, communities involved in tourism need to be connected to tourism circuits. The Association’s leaders have struggled with making these connections, because there is little support for quilombola tourism from tourism mediators. The travel agency that monopolizes the tourism industry in Paraty, Paraty Tours, lists quilombola tourism at Campinho as one of its cultural tourism offerings, in addition to visits to a caíçara community, two indigenous communities, a puppet theatre, a cooking academy, and a historic city tour (Paraty Tours, 2019). In practice, however, groups booked through Paraty Tours are not frequent. Anecdotally, when Carla conducted fieldwork in Campinho and Paraty between February and July 2015, she was not able to participate in a tour to Campinho led by Paraty Tours because there were not enough tourists interested in making this trip. Her name was put on a waiting list for the five months she lived in the area. Nonetheless, the Association’s leaders have found ways to make lasting connections with institutions and organizations beyond local travel agencies. For instance, the Association regularly welcomes student groups from private institutions from the states of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. These institutions abide by the federal directive set up though Law 10.693 in 2003, which establishes mandatory education on Afro-Brazilian and African cultures and histories in Brazilian schools. Some private schools can afford to take their students to visit quilombos in person; Campinho has developed a long-established relationship with some of these schools and regularly welcomes sizable student groups among their tourists. Likewise, through long-term connections and word of mouth, Campinho’s leaders work with international travel agencies in Germany, the United States, and Canada. It is worth noting that Campinho not only appears in Brazilian tourism circuits but has also been featured in travel guides such as the English DK Eyewitness since 2010 (Ghose, 2018), which highlights its tangible and intangible heritage, and the French Petit Futé (Futé, 2019), which stresses its equitable handicraft commerce.

6.6 Governmental support

For the success of CBT to be sustainable, governmental support is decisive. Governments that consider residents of a destination as partners are more likely to provide them with the necessary resources to advance any initiative (Gray, 1985). At the state level, the Brazilian government has encouraged CBT by offering training workshops through the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuária, EMBRAPA) and the creation of Agro-Ecological Brazil (Brasil Agroecológico), as well as the National Plan for Tourism (Plano Nacional de Turismo, 2013–2016; 2018–2022). In fact, CBT is one of the tourism models promoted by the Brazilian state. However, at the local level, things are not
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as transparent (Bartholo et al., 2008). At Campinho, on the one hand, the government of Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva (2003–2011) through the Ministry of Tourism offered concrete resources for CBT to grow. On the other hand, the regimes of Michel Temer (2016–2018) and Jair Bolsonaro (2019–2023) embarked on a systematic process of criminalization of quilombolas and the institutions and professionals who supported them. Both regimes have undertaken evaluations of the work of the National Foundation of Indians (Fundação Nacional do Índio, FUNAI) and the Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária, INCRA), which historically have made some important strides in support of marginalized populations. Moreover, President Bolsonaro denies the existence of structural racism in Brazil, thus delegitimizing the rights of quilombos and other historically underrepresented groups (Instituto Socioambiental, 2019).

6.7 Conclusions: the quest for sustainability

While challenges in the model implemented remain, CBT in Campinho has been successful in several ways. For Laura, CBT offers sustainability through the variety of opportunities to obtain economic resources. As noted previously, while not every member of the quilombo engages in tourism, everyone respects the work that it takes to make this industry prosper. The challenge for quilombolas in Laura’s eyes is to remain fully centred while working in an industry that both seduces and drains. Dealing with the feelings of tourists who imagined their experience at Campinho but never dreamed it would be so enthralling demands great energy. Working with people is a trade-off: quilombolas receive economic retribution from the tourists, but the tourists demand responses and sharing of Campinho’s wealth—a wealth that perhaps not even its residents recognize. For Daniele, the years of systematic experimentation with tourism have produced a highly effective formula. As long as tourism remains in the hands of quilombolas, and as long as quilombolas do not transform their routines and lifestyle to please tourists’ whims, tourism will continue to be sustainable. For Carla, the CBT model implemented in Campinho is successful in a number of ways: it is informed by an ethnic community development tenet; it promotes gender equality, and it is part of an interrelated system that integrates health, agro-ecology, differentiated education and culture, and material culture production. The relevance of CBT arises exclusively in connection with the other four areas identified by quilombo leaders.

Tourism can reduce ethnic struggles to folklore, limit political advances, and make spectacles of peoples. But it also has the potential to open up opportunities for marginalized groups to find their own voice. In similar fashion to San Basilio de Palenque, capitalizing on the rich cultural heritage of Campinho through CBT has the potential to produce both economic development and cultural sustainability.

References


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