



Southern Bahia Rural workers and quilombolas breaking the silence of violence against women

PHOTO: Natasha Arsenio



Mrs. Moça during the Women's Agro-ecological Fair of Low South

“Today I feel happy. I will not deny, despite the prejudices against Candomblé, even those which I had and I had to overcome. Because they say: ‘she is **macumbeira**’ or ‘Don’t go there because they are macumbeiros’. ‘I will not take a medicine made by her, because it’s macumba’. ‘I do not want to get **blessed** by her because that is macumba’. ‘I will not take a tea because it’s macumba’. We had no right to anything. Sometimes we did some ritual and people thought that we could not do it. Several times, in addition to being criticized, we were threatened with aggression for belonging to the Candomblé. But Candomblé is a religion. And I know that at some moments I feel protected by my Orishas. Today I identify myself as descendant of **Quilombo**, from **terreiro**, as I am. Just like my grandparents and my uncles were.

The testimony of Mrs. Moça, Candomblé priestess and quilombola leader in Southern Bahia, shows how gender violence can be linked to racism and religious intolerance to silence women. Fortunately, also reveals that

About this publication:

Our mission is to mobilize the ecumenical solidarity and provide services to groups that have been historically and culturally vulnerable, and in process of social and political emancipation. Accordingly, this publication aims to show how we translate our mission into action. Thus, in every issue we present a case that has impact on ensuring rights of communities. We want to show how resource mobilization and partnerships in national and international alliances are a determining factor for transformational development. We want to compose a portrait of our best practices, even if it only shows part of our work.

Happy reading!

Macumbeira: Derogatory word to name Afro-Brazilian religious peoples (Macumba: derogatory word used for identifying Afro-Brazilian religious rituals)

Blessed (benzido): Protection ritual also in the religions of african origin

the affirmation of identity and of religious belonging has been essential to the process of breaking the silence, naming oppressions that affect her and her community and her struggle.

KOINONIA has been present alongside women from traditional (grass root) peoples of the Lower South, supporting their struggle to overcome gender inequalities, of which the most radical translation is violence against women - a problem that has required of us and of our partners in the region even more creative strategies.

Context of gender inequalities in Southern Bahia

In Bahia, 14 municipalities make up the region of over 7,000 km² known as the Lower South. The region with a population of over 330,000, of which 45% live in rural areas, concentrates a large number of quilombola communities. These are, more precisely, 39, within an area whose inhabitants are 83% blacks, descendants of slaves. The average HDI of the region is 0.63, below the national average of 0.73. While in the country, only 6% of the population live with half the minimum wage, in the Lower South, over 19% of people over the age of 10 live with that income. Among rural women, the situation is worse: over 25% of them live with half of the minimum wage.

Gender inequality, as clearly expressed in its economic aspects, assumes different forms, such as lack of access to rights, that among other consequences have contributed to the naturalization of violence against women, racism and religious intolerance. On the other hand, state responses have been inadequate. This can be seen from the fact that none of the 14 municipalities of the area has even a specialized police center to attend women.

KOINONIA for overcoming violence against women

With the support of KOINONIA, women quilombola leaders in the region - many of them, also heirs of the religious traditions of African origin - have organized themselves to overcome inequalities and the different forms of discrimination that result in an unfavorable context that affects all dimensions of women's lives in Southern Bahia.

KOINONIA's action in the region has been strategic especially with regard to the empowerment of local people to defend and expand their rights. In tackling multiple discrimination against women Quilombola Women Protagonists and Financial Literacy Project stands out. It consists in the joint, grass root development of methodologies for management of finances and of small projects, with women from 10 different quilombola communities in the area. In parallel, the project offers training on women's rights and supports the articulation of a group for local advocacy on the subject. The project is developed under Egbé Black Territories, KOINONIA programme, that aims to overcome racism and religious intolerance, especially against traditional populations.

Its most recent activity was the Women's Agro-ecological Fair of the Low South in Camamú (BA), whose goal was twofold: to create conditions for rural workers and quilombolas display and commercialize, especially their agricultural production; and promote public discussion around the topic of violence against women - of which the most striking feature is the silencing of the victims.

Counting on direct assistance and resources mobilized by KOINONIA, the event was the high point of work that have mobilized our efforts in various fronts to turn visible the issue of violence against

Quilombos: communities set up by runaway slaves during (quilombolas) the slavery period whose descendants remain in their territories until nowadays

Terreiros: Candomblé place of worship and community center



Watch the testimony of Mrs. Moça clicking on the picture

women, provide insight to strengthen the social and identity bonds with traditional communities and support the articulation of local women leaders in the struggle for rights.

Mrs. Moça has actively participated in this process of empowerment against

racism, inequality and gender violence and religious intolerance. She tells how her faith has been important to her in overcoming discrimination.

“Candomblé in my life, is a religion that at times gives me the strength to carry on. So it’s one of those things that I’ve been bringing from roots, although at first I did not want to. Today, I am proud to belong to Candomblé. I thank God for the strength with which. God brought me up to this age. This is not a thing to which I just pay lip service. This comes from the deepest of my heart. As a woman, I want to deliver peace for us all. I wish my Father, Oxalá, lightens increasingly the path of each woman”.

The stories of Mrs. Moça and other women were documented in the video that recorded the activities of the Camamu’s Agro-ecological Fair. The movies bring stories of how some of the women leaders in the region have used religion and identity as ways of tackling violence and intolerance. The material has inspired women from traditional communities throughout Brazil to break the silence and fight for their rights

Currently, the Lower South women have mobilized themselves to advocate for the set up of Special Police Stations for Women.

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