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DOSSIER: IDENTITIES IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Dynamics of organizational identity in an urban quilombo in the Global South: memory, forgetting, silence

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Abstract

This article analyzes the dynamics of organizational identity in an urban quilombo in the Global South. Moving beyond hegemonic perspectives, we examine the quilombo through an organizational lens, incorporating identity via a narrative approach grounded in storytelling. This was achieved through a qualitative study based on the life histories of older women residing in an urban quilombo in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil. The main findings reveal organizational identity dynamics operating across three interrelated processes: memory (identity construction), forgetting (organizational disputes), and silence (regarding the organizational future), exposing an underlying logic of violence and racism. The enduring question remains: who benefits from a city shaped by the erasure of those who fall outside its urban planning paradigms?

Keywords: organizational identity, memory, urban quilombo, Global South.

Dinâmica da identidade organizacional em um quilombo urbano no Sul Global: memória, esquecimento, silêncio

Resumo

Este artigo analisa a dinâmica da identidade organizacional em um quilombo urbano no Sul Global. Indo além das perspectivas hegemônicas, examinamos o quilombo sob uma lente organizacional, incorporando a identidade por meio de uma abordagem narrativa fundamentada na contação de histórias. Isso foi possível graças a um estudo qualitativo baseado nas histórias de vida de mulheres idosas residentes em um quilombo urbano em Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brasil. Os principais resultados revelam a dinâmica da identidade organizacional em três processos inter-relacionados: memória (construção de identidade), esquecimento (disputas organizacionais) e silêncio (em relação ao futuro organizacional), expondo uma lógica subjacente de violência e racismo. A questão persistente permanece: quem se beneficia de uma cidade moldada pelo apagamento daqueles que estão fora de seus paradigmas de planejamento urbano?

Palavras-chave: identidade organizacional, memória, quilombo urbano, Sul Global.

Dinámica de la identidad organizacional en un quilombo urbano del Sur Global: memoria, olvido, silencio

Resumen

Este artículo analiza la dinámica de la identidad organizacional en un quilombo urbano del Sur Global. Más allá de las perspectivas hegemónicas, examinamos el quilombo desde una lente organizacional, incorporando la identidad mediante un enfoque narrativo basado en el relato de historias (storytelling). Esto fue posible gracias a un estudio cualitativo basado en las historias de vida de mujeres mayores residentes en un quilombo urbano en Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brasil. Los principales resultados revelan la dinámica de la identidad organizacional en tres procesos interrelacionados: la memoria (construcción de la identidad), el olvido (disputas organizacionales) y el silencio (en relación con el futuro organizacional), poniendo de manifiesto una lógica subyacente de violencia y racismo. La pregunta persistente sigue siendo: ¿quién se beneficia de una ciudad moldeada por el borrado de quienes quedan fuera de sus paradigmas de planificación urbana?

Palabras clave: identidad organizacional, memoria, quilombo urbano, Sur Global.

Submitted on April 21, 2025 and accepted for publication on May 11, 2026.
[Original version]

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1590/1679-395120250067x

RESEARCH IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH: A STARTING POINT

This article analyzes the dynamics of organizational identity in an urban quilombo in the Global South. The expression "Global South" is a complex and contested term, marked by tensions and contradictions – much like the regions it typically designates. It has also been criticized for its overly broad scope, often used to refer to everything outside the "Global North," despite the fact that the North is imbued with elements of the South, and vice versa. Broadly speaking, it refers to a possible "new cartography (rather than simply a more palatable term for the 'third world'), then the term South must indicate a critique of the neoliberal economic elite and its management of the globe according to a developmentalist paradigm" (Dawson & Edwards, 2004, p. 1). The term signals a kind of subaltern political identity (Ballestrin, 2020), whereby the "North," by presenting itself as wealthy, orderly, and homogeneous, exemplifies, disciplines, and prescribes the developmental path deemed necessary for the poor, chaotic, and heterogeneous "South" (Srinivas, 2018).

Beyond the evident processes of subalternization and the perpetuation of coloniality, the term "Global South" introduces several points relevant to the discussion proposed in this article. The first concerns the notion of peripheralization associated with the term, wherein the "others" of colonial modernity (Al-Hardan, 2022) are cast as "those from the South." Due to its alleged lack of resources, infrastructure, and, ultimately, civilization, the Global South is unilaterally blamed for its precarious conditions, as though it holds no place in the current capitalist system of production (Canettieri, 2021). The second point is that, despite its geographic reference, the term conveys a perspective without central command, scale, or fixed form, encompassing a wide range of institutions, movements, actors, and discourses (Ballestrin, 2020). This diversity implies productive differences and polyphonies that are useful for exploring identity. Finally, given that "the North is in the South" just as much as "the South is in the North" (Trefzer et al., 2014), binary polarizations lose meaning in the face of complexity. Racial and ethnic differences, migration flows, divergent historical trajectories, and other factors render such analytical binarity inadequate, even if the tensions arising from persistent asymmetries remain undeniable.

In light of these brief reflections on the Global South – marked by heterogeneity, dynamism, complexity through difference, and the simultaneity of social coexistence – cities emerge as a powerful context for organizational analysis of identity. As a "point of intersection of different local, national and transnational scales... a multidimensional system of actors articulated by everyday life, hierarchized by the power it holds (or may hold), living in common times and spaces" (Fischer, 1997, p. 75), the city embodies and represents multiple realities at once – a fact not lost on the field of Administration. On one hand, there is a functional perspective that views the city as a space for management opportunities, a focus common to both public administration and specialized business fields like logistics. On the other hand – the one that concerns us here – there is a non-instrumental lens of organizational theorizing and analysis, aligned with the understanding that the city is its people (Saraiva & Carrieri, 2012).

This paper adopts a non-functionalist organizational perspective, which means that it is not outcomes that define an organization. Other perspectives are possible, involving different references for identification and organizational belonging beyond the large industrial capitalist enterprise. In this view, work – beyond its instrumental function for organizational members – can also serve as a marker of organizational belonging. For instance, when an organization maintains only marginal economic ties with others, subsistence – detached from the conventional management notion of paid employment – may take on identity-forming attributes (Silva & Saraiva, 2020). This standpoint enables the examination of alternative forms of organization, subjectivities, and identities, such as the case we analyze here: a quilombo that was "de-identified[1]" by the expansion of the city of Belo Horizonte.

Following this brief introduction, we will outline our methodological choices, which precede two main sections. The first discusses the concept of identities, beginning with business-oriented debates and expanding to encompass broader organizational possibilities for analysis. The next section explores the dynamics of organizational identity within an urban quilombo, examining – through the lens of storytelling – the identity processes shaped by memory, forgetting, and silence. This section is followed by the discussion and concluding remarks of the study.

[1] This term refers to "disidentification," a "[...] critical engagement with the inseparable power that has been internalized [...]" (Bacchetta, 2023, p. 61). As subjects recognize the unfavorable conditions to which they are subjected because they are "different," that is, outside the normality that sustains the entire modern social order, they can produce other subjectivities, rejecting the forms of domination to which they are subjected in a dynamic process of reidentification and reaffirmation of identity. In the case analyzed, the identity was quilombola. But the advance of the city transformed the quilombo into a part of the city, de-identifying it. Reaffirming the quilombo from an identity perspective is to resist an order that automatically marginalizes everything that is "of no interest" to the city, thus re-identifying the quilombo.

METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES

This study is situated at the intersection of urban studies and organizational studies, distinguishing itself from research typically confined to one or the other of these domains. Here, the city is not treated as a mere backdrop; it is conceptualized as an active agent that plays a decisive role in the phenomenon under investigation, thereby transcending purely illustrative or geographic interpretations. The study seeks to understand the city as something constituted by and for people, in order to uncover deeper relational dynamics – hence the adoption of a qualitative approach. Analytical depth is crucial in this context, as the focus is on an "alternative" and complex form of organization analyzed through various levels of approximation: an urban quilombo, rooted in racial dynamics, affective ties, and memory.

Rejecting the notion of objective science conducted aseptically by neutral researchers concerned only with facts as immediately presented, this study adopts an explicitly political stance aligned with the struggle against inequality. In this sense, it is critical in its design, theorization, methodology, data production, and analysis. Therefore, it was not sufficient to simply select an organization, fit it into pre-existing analytical frameworks, and append observations to an organizational construct that treats heterogeneity as an outlier. Committing to engaged scholarship requires the rejection of certain intellectually and culturally naturalized assumptions – such as the belief that civilization began with the advent of writing, a graphocentric view that hierarchizes peoples by suggesting that history is limited to what can be recorded and read. In studying an organization of African origin, it is the phonocentric tradition that prevails. Thus, in contrast to the mainstream, we affirm that for oral cultures, memory is history – told to honor ancestors and to establish meaningful connections between past, present, and future. Therefore, another organizational perspective was employed, as will be discussed theoretically below.

This research is grounded in a post-structuralist perspective, appropriate to a context characterized by fluidity, dynamism, discursive contestation, and the fragmentation of meanings, affections, familial bonds, and material resources – as observed in the quilombo under study. This theoretical lens is particularly suitable for examining an organization that, although retaining a kind of essence in its original name, has undergone a process of de-identification through its "absorption" into urbanity. This is evident both at the organizational level – through the application of the adjective "urban" – and at the professional level, as its members, once engaged in subsistence agriculture, have come to occupy subordinate roles within the urban economy (Silva & Saraiva, 2020).

It should be noted that we do not treat "community" and "organization" as synonyms. Quilombo Luizes is, first and foremost, a traditional community, bound by ties of territory, affection, kinship, and historical resistance. Our argument is that this community can also be analyzed as an organization, not because it possesses a formal structure or hierarchy along corporate lines, but because within it we identify organizational processes expressed in recurring and minimally coordinated forms of preserving knowledge, distributing scarce resources such as the territory itself, and responding collectively to threats. This line of reasoning can be found in Saraiva (2020), who examines organized social life within a dating app, as well as in Crawford and Branch (2015), who highlight interests as a defining organizational element in a rural community. Therefore, throughout the text, we will use the terms "community" or "quilombo" to refer to [we refer to the group in its full sociocultural context, and the term 'organization' or 'organizational dynamics' to highlight those procedural and relational aspects that allow for an analysis from the perspective of Organizational Studies.

The research presented challenges linked to the conception and execution of a historical study guided by memory. The first was how to approach the quilombo in theoretical terms. As an organization shaped by and within the context of racism, composed of a historically vulnerable group, the quilombo placed ethical demands and tensions on the study, underscoring our dual commitment to scientific rigor and the social impact of producing knowledge beyond academic confines. Boyer (2015) notes that much research in this area is conducted by scholars sympathetic to the quilombola cause and that such studies often frame these communities as metanarratives of a minority oppressed by external forces – a conception that becomes reductive by homogenizing the organization and overlooking internal tensions. However, addressing these conflicts, especially in the context of ongoing disputes with the city regarding the urban quilombo, presents a delicate ethical dilemma. If handled carelessly, a critically engaged analysis such as this one may unintentionally weaken the organization's social and political standing. On the other hand, if one adheres strictly to a romanticized view of the quilombo, academic integrity is compromised in favor of uncritical advocacy (Furtado & Saraiva, 2024).

The second challenge was methodological. We pursued a historical approach, deemed appropriate given that the object of study – an organization rooted in ancestry – naturally calls for such a perspective. As "every history was once a word" (Thompson, 1992), and in line with the phonocentric tradition necessary for examining organizations of African origin, our methodology could only be oral history. It was through oral narratives that we accessed the memories of two elders from the quilombo and were able to analyze the identity dynamics of an organization situated in a Global South urban context. Drawing on the principles of the École des Annales (Burke, 1991), this study is grounded in the discursive construction of memory by members of the *Quilombo dos Luizes*.[2] Oral history was combined with life history, as the recollection of memories emerged through numerous meetings with the interviewees, conducted without a structured interview script. Nonetheless, four thematic prompts guided the conversations: childhood, work, community, and society. Interruptions were kept to a minimum, occurring only to clarify unfamiliar terms, locations, or significant information. As the interviews were not based on a predefined script, the narratives were guided by the interviewees' memories – often non-linear and unbound by chronological sequencing. These encounters yielded nearly 22 hours of audio, which were fully transcribed.

Bosi (2016) provided methodological guidance for selecting the two elders who participated in the study. The experiential repertoire accumulated over time, particularly within an organization based on ancestry and reverence for elders, positioned the interviewees as key transmitters of the past, reinterpreted in light of present-day experiences. These women, given the pseudonyms "Francisca" and "Zilda" Luizes for the purposes of this article, are cultural and political figures who identify as matriarchs. Born within the community, their life stories are inextricably tied to that place. Gaining access to them required extensive negotiation with other quilombolas – not only due to the community's constant vigilance against potential land invaders but also because of strained relations with academics who had previously conducted research without offering any reciprocal benefit. This context prompted us to integrate teaching, research, and extension as an ethical mode of scientific practice. As a result, intervention activities were implemented in the quilombo, including workshops on oral health, income generation, personal finance, and the development of community-focused cultural projects. The research was conducted in tandem with these outreach initiatives and culminated in the creation of a course offered in the university's undergraduate administration program, where we were able to share the insights gained through this process with our students. It should be noted that when research arises from outreach activities, several formal procedures expected in conventional research, such as approval by the university ethics committee, are not part of the methodological process. This does not mean that a rigorous protocol was not adopted, especially since people remaining in a quilombo are considered vulnerable.

The data were analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which presupposes social heterogeneity. This assumption necessitates a "model of multicausal, mutual influences between different groups of persons" (Wodak, 2001, p. 63). Since discourse is shaped by power and domination, CDA is concerned with the interstitial space between research interests and political commitment, understood here as a form of critical science. Given that Wodak (2001) approach is historically grounded, the analysis of the material necessarily incorporates historical context. A final methodological point must be noted: due to the substantial volume of data and the continuous, associative flow of memories recounted by the interviewees, space constraints made it impossible to include extended excerpts from the testimonies without compromising the integrity of the life histories they conveyed. For this reason, we chose not to present direct quotations from the interviews. Instead, we reconstitute memory through narrative (Linde, 2015) – that is, by recovering memory via storytelling (Langer, 2016) – a method that requires a dense and deeply contextualized analysis, as will be demonstrated in the sections that follow. This text seeks to reproduce the stories of the people interviewed, literally as storytelling. This was not just a matter of style, but of fidelity to the way the whole process took place. In addition, the issue of page limits was very clear from the outset. As the interviews were long and covered many topics, our decision to delete excerpts was also due to a concern not to present meaningless snippets taken from long and multi-referenced interactions.

Still on the subject of methodology, it is worth highlighting the analytical challenges involved in identifying organizational processes within a traditional community. Analyzing Quilombo Luizes from an organizational perspective required a specific analytical shift. It was not a matter of seeking analogies to business functions (strategy, marketing, finance), but rather of tracing, in the narratives of the elders, evidence of latent organizational processes. Thus, we investigate: (a) forms of coordination and decision-making (how did the community historically decide on land swaps with the mining company? How does it deal today with land invasions and rents? Are there collective bodies?); (b) moral economy and resources (subsistence agriculture, compensation, rents; how do these material flows affect cohesion and internal conflicts?); (c) learning and collective memory

[2] The name of the community is linked to the formerly enslaved Manoel Luiz, as all of the couple's children were given Luiz or Luiza as their middle names.

(how are stories of struggle and violence passed down to new generations and how does this influence their willingness to act?); (d) conflicts and disagreements (the sale of land by some members, renting to non-Quilombolas, growing heterogeneity—how do these elements strain the organizational "we"?). Memory, forgetting, and silence, as we shall see, are not merely issues of identity: they are the very mechanisms through which this organization preserves or erodes its capacity for collective action.

IDENTITIES BEYOND THE LARGE INDUSTRIAL CAPITALIST ENTERPRISE

Beginning in the 1930s, as Fordism began to show its first signs of decline and psychological studies applied to the workplace gained prominence, various approaches emerged to understand (and optimize) individuals in professional environments. One such approach – identity – was rooted in ontological reflections on the question of who we are, a concern dating back to 5th-century Greece and later enriched by Psychology and Sociology before entering the field of Management. There, it became known as organizational identity and later assumed more specific designations such as "professional identity" or "work identity." Evolving from a representational element of who one is to a relational representation of the self in connection with others, identity began to reveal inherent tensions. These tensions stem from its framing within a private, corporate logic, lending itself to interested and instrumentalized interpretations of identity processes (Moran, 2015).

The early discussions of identity in organizations were shaped by a hegemonic understanding of the organization as synonymous with the "company" or "firm" – more specifically, the large industrial capitalist enterprise. This means that the hegemonic view of organization refers to a group of people focused on achieving a goal. Such a perspective could not be more economical, and for this very reason it is well suited to a capitalist context. It is therefore unsurprising that initial conceptions of identity were oriented toward categorization, structure, and pattern recognition, with the aim of transforming identity into a tool for performance optimization within business contexts (Albert & Whetten, 1985). This perspective was influenced by a persistent – albeit flawed – conception from the early 20th century: that individuals fully align with their formal roles in organizations, and that their positions and functions are sufficient to ensure their rational and harmonious adherence to the organization's goals. In this view, no significant conflicts would exist between individual and organizational objectives, as both workers and employees were presumed to share a common goal – the prosperity of the enterprise. This notion, reflected in the writings of Taylor (1999/1908) and Fayol (1989/1910), overlooks not only alternative forms of rationality beyond the economic paradigm, but also the fact that conflict is not merely a dysfunction – it is a constitutive element of individuals, organizations, and societies.

The so-called cultural turn expanded this perspective by introducing symbolic elements into the discussion, bringing previously overlooked dimensions – such as organizational culture and identity, whether at the level of the organization, profession, or workplace – into analytical focus. These concepts helped explain contemporaneous phenomena, such as the rise of Japanese industry and the corresponding decline of U.S. industrial dominance. Identity became increasingly associated with diversity. Scholars such as Nkomo and Cox (1996) argue that identity definitions during this period oscillated between two categories: "a) narrow ones, with emphasis on race, ethnicity, and gender; and b) broad ones, encompassing history, educational background, lifestyle, and demographic origin" (Saraiva et al., 2010, p. 17). At that point, it was already acknowledged that organizations were composed of individuals with diverse identities, and this connection to diversity marked a form of recognition of difference. However, within the context of business organizations, professional categories, or workplace dynamics, identity continued to be shaped by and subordinated to business logic. These dimensions were seldom approached from the standpoint of identity itself or its singularities (Côté, 1996). This limitation becomes increasingly evident the more functionalist the approach and the closer it remains to the business domain.

When we consider perspectives beyond the corporate framework (Carrieri et al., 2010), we encounter broader possibilities for addressing the issue of identity, beginning with the premise that we are dealing with identities in the organization – rather than of the organization – to avoid reifications, as discussed by (Kopaneva & Cheney, 2019; Rodgers et al., 2015). These are identities in the plural because within non-positivist epistemologies such as post-structuralism – which underpins this article – identity is inherently fragmented, fluid, and shaped by multiple, simultaneous influences. Accordingly, it is conceived as plural, relational, and singular, in constant flux, thereby eluding essentialist frameworks rooted in fixed certainties and regularities (Holmer-Nadesan, 1996). Given that non-business organizations may be grounded in alternative forms of association, practices, or structural elements, it becomes plausible to consider that the bases for individual identification operate within a different

register – and that narrative may serve as a sufficiently rich and comprehensive framework (Brown & Humphreys, 2002) to account for the complexity of this organizational phenomenon. This path is only possible if organization is approached from a different angle, in which the social sphere is more important than the economic sphere. It is the groups, and the ways in which they organize themselves according to their needs, that define the organizational structure. We take the concept of organized social life as more appropriate for the study: "Organized social life refers to how different social groups put into practice the organization of their multiple forms of existence in society" (Saraiva, 2020, p. 13).

The author goes on to say that even if we encounter forms of existence "without defined purposes, without specific resources, without precise assignments, without people being led and without monitoring, they still contain tacit conceptions of organization and organizational practices in action amid social dynamics" (Saraiva, 2020, p. 14). As urban quilombos descend from a concrete resistance that was not foreseen within the society that enslaved men and women kidnapped from Africa, hegemonic Western models prescribe inappropriate frameworks in these contexts (Rosa, 2025; Schmitt et al., 2002). To study an urban quilombo, as well as other African-based organizations, another logic needs to be considered and, therefore, another concept of organization needs to be employed and inserted into another research dynamic.

THE DYNAMICS OF ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY IN AN URBAN QUILOMBO

As mentioned, quilombos cannot be defined in the same way as other organizations because they are born out of an exceptional circumstance: resistance. During the colonial period, they embodied the resistance of former slaves to the situation they found themselves in after being kidnapped. Although they had economic activities, mostly linked to subsistence, "it was at the end of the 19th century that the quilombo took on the meaning of an ideological instrument against forms of oppression" (Nascimento, 2006/1978, p. 122). This allowed the term to acquire an ideological meaning over time, with many possibilities for updating, including this one, which will support this phenomenon from a theoretical point of view:

The quilombo as a historical category has a significant meaning, located in time, and is currently the subject of legal reinterpretation when used to legitimize claims to ancestral territory by the so-called remnants of quilombos. The term was revived in the 1980s as a result of mobilizations by rural groups, the black movement, and entities supporting the legal movement's struggles for lands of former occupation. At the heart of the matter are the issues of so-called black lands or quilombola lands associated with a strong sense of belonging to the history of a group identified with the territory (Acevedo & Castro, 1998, p. 9).

The process of rapid urbanization in Latin America since the 1960s may partly explain why the rural issue highlighted in the concept has lost momentum. The quilombos, which were rural, were surrounded by a city that transformed them into "peripheries," a process of erasing the historicity transmitted by oral history into a less important appendix of "true" history, written (by whites). The question of identity thus emerges as a central discussion for understanding the dynamics of this organization.

Pollak (1989) seminal article "Memory, Forgetting, Silence" lays the foundation for this section, which explores the identity of a so-called "alternative" organization through a dialogue between theory and empirical field data. In the initial phase of organizational identity dynamics, **memory** emerges as a central element in the constitution of identity, operating along a continuum that seeks coherence through a foundational narrative – one that evokes a shared reference point (Zundel et al., 2016). It is through memory that meaning is attributed to the past, with the production of amalgams that begin to value elements and preserve them each time the memories are recounted to younger generations. Social memory attributes the possibility of a quilombo existing as long as its memory exists.

The interviewees trace the origins of the Quilombo dos Luizes to two Portuguese couples and seven families of enslaved people who established a farm. This farm was managed by Anna Apolinário Lopes, a formerly enslaved woman who married one of the Portuguese men, Manoel Luiz, in a region now known as Nova Lima, part of the metropolitan area of Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil. Following the abolition of slavery, these formerly enslaved individuals began to divide and settle the land in that same region, eventually forming the *Quilombo das Piteiras*.

In 1930, the Morro Velho mining company proposed a land exchange to the community, offering to relocate them from their ore-rich territory to another parcel of land owned by the company that lacked mineral resources. The community, which holds documentation of the agreement, sold part of this new land, using the proceeds to acquire additional properties. In addition to this transaction, land was also acquired through labor compensation and inherited assets, including those of Manoel Luiz. Anna's three daughters – Maria Luiza, Aurora, and Eulália – joined with the three sons of Nicolau Nunes Moreira and Felicíssima Angélica de Jesus – Vitalino, Francisco, and Quirino. Maria Luiza and Vitalino are recognized as the founders of the community in the Grajaú neighborhood, having received a portion of the 6,050m² Calafate Farm, an area purchased from Vitalino's father. The community maintains records of its settlement in Grajaú dating back to 1865 – a date that precedes the founding of Belo Horizonte in 1897.

On this land, the emerging community developed a lifestyle closely resembling that of Piteiras, including the cultivation of *pitas*,[3] irrigated by the waters of the Piteiras stream, a tributary of the Arrudas River on the western edge of Belo Horizonte. A natural spring also supplied water to the community. In addition to growing *pitas*, the residents cultivated food crops, using part of the yield for subsistence and part for selling vegetables locally. Urban development began reaching the Grajaú neighborhood in the 1930s and 1940s, marked by the paving of streets and the introduction of public transportation, which at the time was provided by streetcars.

In the 1970s, the *Piteiras* stream was diverted to make way for Avenida Silva Lobo – an outcome of a sanitation initiative that implemented sweeping urban transformations to accommodate the city's rapid growth. The construction of the avenue ended the community's relative spatial isolation and ushered in a period of intense diversification, infrastructure expansion, and vertical urban development. This urban encroachment initiated a process of de-identification for the quilombola residents. Although the community predates the formal establishment of the Grajaú neighborhood, the families living there experienced abrupt and profound changes, particularly after 1970. As the neighborhood developed, the quilombo's occupied territory diminished. But the loss was not merely spatial: historically grounded in agriculture, the community became increasingly surrounded by an urban environment that exerted significant pressure on its traditional way of life. The rural foundations of the community were thus placed under existential threat.

The area where the community is located has gradually attracted residents with high purchasing power, as evidenced by the luxury real estate developments in the region. The canalization of the stream and the construction of Avenida Silva Lobo required the development of surrounding streets to accommodate increasing traffic, which led to the expropriation of part of the community's territory. From the community's perspective, the compensation paid for these expropriations was far below what was considered fair, prompting legal action to investigate the terms of the settlement. Following the 1980s, the rapid expansion of Belo Horizonte fueled real estate speculation and intensified territorial disputes in the area. The community's original land was drastically reduced due to repeated incursions and, according to residents, large companies – including the municipal government – invaded quilombo territory, leaving the community owed thousands of Brazilian reais (Belo Horizonte, 2009).

Urbanization presented a complex challenge for the community for two main reasons. First, it underscored the clash between rural and urban life, with the latter visibly dominating the former. Once relatively autonomous farmers, rooted in their traditions and ways of life, community members now faced a city that marginalized and subjugated them. There were no viable means to sustain their former agricultural practices, particularly due to the reduction of the quilombo's land and the urban infrastructure changes – such as the stream's canalization – that eliminated their primary source of irrigation. This forced a confrontation with the fact that, in the urban labor market, the roles and associated identities available to them reproduced the subaltern status they had experienced under slavery.

Second, due to the area's increasing economic value, Quilombo Luizes came under growing pressure from individuals and companies seeking to acquire its territory. Several plots of land were sold to secure short-term income, even at the cost of relinquishing ancestral land that formed the basis of the community's identity. In many instances, these sales occurred under coercive or fraudulent circumstances, involving threats, forged documents, or paperwork filed with minimal scrutiny at local notary offices. Another form of territorial loss was through invasion. Interviewees recounted multiple incidents in which outsiders destroyed existing structures and erected new ones in their place. Until 2004, the community regularly contacted the police and sought legal assistance from professionals, including attorneys, to initiate legal proceedings. The invasions

[3] Pita refers to Agave americana, a plant cultivated by the community for multiple purposes, as documented by (Sidônio, 1998).

took various forms, from irregular land transactions and sudden, unexplained property registrations to physical and symbolic violence – including the murder of a community member – and systemic racism endured by the community.

Throughout its history, the community has had leaders who actively defended its material and cultural heritage. In addition to Anna Apolinária, a key figure was Cordelina Eugênia Nunes, known as Nina, the daughter of the founding couple. Nina was regarded as the "custodian" of the community's assets, overseeing its collective property and institutional relations. She also represented the community before institutions such as the City of Belo Horizonte, private companies, and judicial bodies, including the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Public Defender's Office, at all levels. According to community accounts, Nina was found dead in her home three days after her death. Although the house showed no signs of forced entry, her body bore evidence of physical assault. The circumstances surrounding her death – and any individuals potentially responsible – were never clarified. Following Nina's passing, individuals carrying promissory notes allegedly signed by her appeared in the community, claiming rights to portions of the land.

With regard to racism, local residents describe Quilombo Luizes as "a neighborhood within a neighborhood," due to the community's predominantly Black population. In contrast, the surrounding area is largely inhabited by white, economically privileged residents (Belo Horizonte, 2009). The quilombolas, who occupied the territory even before the city's founding, are symbolically reclassified as a kind of "residue" that must be removed to render the neighborhood more homogeneous – an expression of contemporary urban "hygienism," a logic of spatial purification that seeks to eliminate what is deemed socially or racially undesirable. This dynamic involves more than spatial segregation; it is a manifestation of racism, made possible in part by the residents of the Grajaú neighborhood, who possess the authority and legitimacy to articulate discourses that are taken as truth by others. In Foucauldian terms, they institute the real through discourse (Foucault, 1996). Meanwhile, the quilombolas are disqualified on the basis of their identity and consequently denied the legitimacy to speak beyond the confines of their personal narratives. This process constructs and reinforces a hierarchy between two worlds. On one side: white, affluent individuals, with "normal," desirable bodies, and access to literate culture – that is, embedded in a graphocentric order in which any forged yet properly registered document holds legal weight. On the other: Black individuals, impoverished, with abject (Butler, 1993), unwanted bodies, whose oral histories are devalued by those who arrived after the city had already taken shape.

This origin narrative is not merely a backdrop for identity. From an organizational perspective, it functions as a mechanism for symbolic coordination: by invoking their ancestry, the matriarchs align expectations, justify territorial claims, and mobilize resistance. Shared memory serves as an institutional repository that guides current decisions (such as rejecting certain offers to purchase land) and maintains the minimum cohesion necessary for collective action, even in the face of spatial and economic dispersion.

The second movement in the dynamics of organizational identity concerns **forgetting**. And there should be no illusions about the supposed subtlety of forgetting. In this context of conflict, forgetting reveals itself as a form of violence: it constitutes erasure since only what is remembered persists. What falls within the politics of forgetting ceases to exist (Foroughi & Al-Amoudi, 2020) – that is, what is deliberately or incidentally deemed unworthy of remembrance. This framing places different versions of the past in competition, creating a kind of race for the right to be remembered. That which prevails in memory remains; the rest disappears. The violent events recounted by interviewees are both physical and symbolic. Even when considering the gravity of murder or territorial division through arbitrarily registered deeds, it is the symbolic violence of forgetting that appears to be the most profound challenge they face. Since diverse social groups coexist in the same restricted space in a city, it is not surprising that part of the battle is fought in the historical arena. This logic frankly disadvantages the quilombolas because they bear the burden of proving who they are. None of the mechanisms for institutionalizing the quilombo involve equating memory with history, as defined by modernity. And this gives rise to a violent process in many forms.

One example is the attempt to disqualify Quilombo Luizes as a quilombola community. The promulgation of Decree No. 4.887, on November 20, 2003, which regulates the procedures for identifying, delimiting, and titling quilombola lands, introduced significant changes. The community was officially certified as a quilombo remnant by the Palmares Foundation on November 25, 2004 (Ministério Público Federal, 2015), and the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA) initiated the process of regularizing the community's land. As part of this process, the Center for the Study of Traditional Populations and Quilombolas at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (NUQ/UFMG), commissioned by INCRA, produced an anthropological report documenting the historical, economic, environmental, and socio-cultural dimensions of the Luizes community, along

with the territorial boundaries. This document, known as the Technical Identification and Delimitation Report (RTID), was completed in 2008 and published in 2009.

The possibility of regularizing the community has been marked by intense conflict. The first point is that the community claims the area defined in the report is smaller than the actual territory. Portions of the land containing buildings considered to have high commercial value were excluded. Indeed, according to the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office, INCRA published the RTID with a reduced territorial delimitation (Ministério Público Federal, 2015). This led the Federal Public Defender's Office to take legal action against other institutions, including Belo Horizonte City Hall, the Newton Paiva University Center, and various real estate companies.

In September 2017, INCRA issued a public notice validating the approval of the Technical Report. However, the regional superintendence of INCRA reduced the area recognized as occupied by the community, excluding ten properties. The securitization process stipulates that the land is to be de-accessioned, and those not affiliated with the quilombo but residing within its bounds are to be compensated by the federal government. According to INCRA, the reduction was based on the excessive costs associated with expropriation (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, 2017). Amid these ongoing tensions and disputes, one positive development for the community has been the growing public support. An increasing number of individuals and groups have reached out, both to engage with the community and to support its political struggle. From an original farm area of approximately 18,000 m², once home to over 2,000 residents, around 6,000 m² remain today, where roughly 159 people reside. The community's territory is now divided into a housing nucleus – home to over 70 residents – and several scattered units in adjacent areas.

If members of the organization forget their status as descendants of a quilombola community, the area can be reclassified – often with strategic intent – as a *favela*, tenement, ghetto, or other terms associated with so-called "informal" urban typologies. These labels denote territories that deviate from official urban plans and are thus deemed in need of urbanization. In reality, this is a hygienist logic – a longstanding ideology aimed at "cleansing" the city of that which is deemed undesirable, dating back to Haussmann's Paris. Urbanization here acts as a kind of panacea, not only with homogenizing intent but also with an implicit or explicit goal of disciplining urban life (Sarayed-Din & Saraiva, 2024). In this vision, no part of the city should appear ugly, disorganized, dirty, or poor. Such attributes are relegated to the informal city, which must be controlled through formal planning mechanisms. These tools, grounded in technical rationality, often ignore how technicality itself turns a blind eye to racism in urban settings (Furtado & Saraiva, 2024).

Still on the theme of forgetting, a few words are needed about the growing heterogeneity within Quilombo Luizes. As Belo Horizonte has expanded and enclosed the community, many quilombolas have resorted to renting out their homes to tenants with no connection to the community – mere renters. This practice weakens collective belonging, erodes identity bonds, and diminishes the community's capacity for mobilization around its many ongoing struggles. When forgetting is driven by material survival, identity becomes a burden (Appiah, 2018; Cohn, 2018) and forgetting it may seem like the only viable way to endure – an illusion that forgetting who you are and where you come from could make life simpler and struggles more bearable (Ybema, 2014). The problem with forgetting, however, is that it always exacts a high cost, as the past is continually contested by those with the power to access and reconstruct it according to present-day interests, as noted by (Casey & Olivera, 2011; Holan & Phillips, 2004).

Here, forgetting is not merely a loss of identity, but an organizational process of demobilization. When members rent houses to non-Quilombolas or sell land, they are not merely acting as individuals: they are, albeit unintentionally, weakening the foundation material and symbolic, enabling collective decision-making, risk-sharing, and a shared memory. An organizational trade-off emerges: the immediate economic survival of some members accelerates the erosion of the organization as an entity capable of political action.

The third movement in the dynamics of an organization's identity concerns **silence**. It is important to acknowledge that while silence does not articulate anything explicitly, it nevertheless signifies – particularly through the absence of a stated position – and this is essential for understanding what is at stake (Orlandi, 2007). The institutional support expected following the recognition of the Luizes community by the Palmares Foundation in 2004 has been timid and ambiguous. Governmental bodies and institutions have responded in equivocal and largely silent ways. Even in the face of recurrent land invasions, which were formally denounced by special committees of both the Belo Horizonte City Council and the Brazilian Bar Association (Minas Gerais chapter), the municipal government has failed to implement any measures aimed at preventing or discouraging such

actions. The city administration itself has been sued by the Public Defender's Office for failing to comply with court-ordered compensation related to the opening of public roads within the community (Belo Horizonte, 2009).

At present, there is reason to believe that the City of Belo Horizonte has more competent and informed personnel to engage with the community, not least because various municipal initiatives have aimed to support the Luizes and the city's two other quilombola communities – such as the creation of the city's Intangible Heritage report. However, territorial fragmentation has divided the community into one main unit and several disconnected plots. While there is a differentiated tax policy for quilombola communities, in the case of the Luizes, it applies solely to the main unit. For example, an elderly person who previously lived within the central area of the community now resides approximately two kilometers away. Because the tax exemption applies only to the main unit, she and others in similar situations are taxed at the same rate as the surrounding neighborhood – despite having incomes that are not commensurate with the area's socio-economic profile. This selective application reveals an institutional omission, expressed through the denial of rights, particularly by treating all residents symmetrically without accounting for the community's specific vulnerabilities.

Another issue is the lucrative potential of building high-end properties on land belonging to the quilombo. After an invasion occurs on land that has already been identified and delimited in the Technical Report, the state often compensates the invaders for the structures they have built – using public funds. Given the scarcity of these resources and the considerable number of illegal developments within the community's boundaries, the state often justifies not proceeding with expropriation on the grounds of excessive cost. This not only rationalizes inaction but also reveals a possible incentive for the invaders themselves: at worst, they are reimbursed by the government for the investments made during the illegal occupation. In effect, the institutional logic of expropriation fails to penalize the invaders and ultimately harms the community. From the community's perspective, justice would require that the burden of the invasion be borne by the perpetrators, as it is they who have disrupted the rightful use of the territory. Although legal action for compensation is an available recourse, it has proven insufficient to deter continued invasions. These processes are notoriously lengthy, as illustrated by the case of Cambury (Claudino, 2013), where the claimants are unlikely to witness the final resolution, given that the lifespan of those involved is often shorter than the duration of the legal proceedings.

Ultimately, the deliberate or inadvertent silence surrounding the progress of the community's recognition process exposes a troubling stance on the part of various actors – particularly public institutions – whose actions appear slower or less forceful than they might otherwise be. This inertia may be partly explained by the fact that the community's quilombola status has already been formally acknowledged. The interviewees report a prevailing sense of institutional sluggishness, which borders on omission, and has led to their own silence regarding the future – a silence that is deeply symptomatic. It may point to a horizon marked by diminished hope that circumstances will change, and that the quilombolas will be genuinely respected as citizens, fully recognized in their right to have rights – especially over the land they occupied long before the city of Belo Horizonte came into existence.

The absence of narratives of hope or explicit collective plans reveals an organizational process of strategic paralysis and can be summed up as a silence regarding the future. In formal organizations, inaction in the face of recurring threats would be attributed to failures in leadership or planning. Here, the silence is a sign that coordination costs have exceeded the group's capacity to respond in the face of a hostile institutional environment. Examples of this include a government that acknowledges the problem but fails to protect its citizens, and a real estate market that acts in a predatory manner. The organization still exists, but its influence has been drastically reduced; it now focuses more on passive resistance—simply maintaining its presence in the territory—than on proactive action, such as retaking lost areas or exerting more effective political pressure.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article set out to analyze the dynamics of organizational identity within an urban quilombo in the Global South. Revisiting some of the conceptual premises established at the beginning, the Global South is often portrayed as too uncivilized to accommodate a heterogeneity deemed unacceptable by the Global North – hence its prescribed pedagogical role of learning from the North how cities should function. First, it is crucial to recognize that wealth and global poverty are co-produced within the capitalist system of production and that in the urban market, the existence of asymmetries – upon which solutions can be invented and commodified – constitutes a profitable enterprise (Simone, 2020). Acknowledging that conditions of

heterogeneity and poverty are neither illegitimate nor in need of prescriptions from those unfamiliar with the South is a step toward an urbanism of crossroads (Sarayed-Din, 2024), where intersections are as generative as the rich and diverse realities of the Global South (Simone, 2012).

The escape and isolation that gave rise to Quilombo Luizes enabled formerly enslaved individuals to reclaim a measure of autonomy and equality. Beyond fostering a sense of collectivity, cohabiting with kin and community members made it possible to construct an organizational identity markedly distinct from the hegemonic model of the large industrial capitalist enterprise. Core themes in the community's narratives – rurality, kinship, affection, resistance, and subsistence labor – form a storytelling framework around the pursuit of a minimally dignified existence, historically denied to them from the moment they were abducted, exiled, and enslaved on a foreign continent. The urban expansion of Belo Horizonte has replicated the violence of physical and symbolic erasure (Saraiva & Silva, 2024), echoing prior historical injustices, such as the official narrative that the city was built on a "geographic void" – despite recent evidence indicating the presence of a Black population in Curral Del Rey, the area that preceded the city's founding (Pereira, 2019; Queiroz, 2015; Salgueiro, 2020).

The three movements of identity dynamics in Quilombo Luizes – memory, forgetting, and silence, in Pollak (1989) terms – reveal organizational processes with profound identity implications. First, we must emphasize a de-identification with context. As a traditionally rural quilombo – aligned with the patterns documented in quilombola histories – it experienced a rupture in its rural identity due to a city that was founded later but expanded until it surrounded the community entirely. This urbanization obliterated irrigation systems and rendered the community's agrarian lifestyle unviable. Second, associated with the disidentification from context, came a professional disidentification, as subsistence work in a rural setting gave way to the landscape of the city and urban labor. The isolation that once ensured relative equality was eroded, and the quilombolas, now integrated into urban economies, were relegated to precarious, subordinate roles – perpetuating the legacy of social inferiority inherited from enslavement.

The community's forced integration into the city has unfolded as a multifaceted struggle – one waged particularly through efforts to dismantle the community's quilombola identity. Economic pressures and strategies aimed at undermining collective resistance have led some members to sell land or rent out their homes. In doing so, they risk a process of unlearning – a gradual forgetting of who they are, where they come from, and why they inhabit this space – an outcome that is deeply problematic from an organizational identity perspective (Klammer & Gueldenberg, 2019). This facilitates the re-signification of the community, allowing it to be de-identified and redefined as a favela or ghetto – discursive shifts that align with urban hygienist logic and open the door to real estate speculation.

In short, memory, forgetting, and silence are not merely dimensions of a social group's identity. In this article, we demonstrate that they function as organizational processes that shape, sustain, or erode the Quilombo Luizes' capacity for collective action. Memory functions as a mechanism for symbolic coordination and a repository of knowledge; forgetting, as a process of demobilization and erosion of the material foundation of the organization; silence, as strategic paralysis induced by a hostile environment. These processes neither replace nor mimic the managerial functions of a capitalist enterprise; they are specific ways of "organizing" in contexts of vulnerability, orality, and territorial struggle. This article's contribution to Organizational Studies is therefore twofold: (a) empirical, by analyzing an organization that has thus far been marginalized in the literature (an urban quilombo in the Global South); and (b) theoretical-methodological, by proposing that the dynamics of identity — which intertwine memory, forgetting, and silence—can be interpreted as an organizational process, provided that functionalism is set aside and a narrative and critical perspective is adopted. The question that remains is: who benefits from a city shaped by erasing the people who do not fit into urban planning?

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Elisângela Prado Furtado: Conceptualization (Supporting); Data curation (Supporting); Investigation (Leadership); Funding acquisition (Equal); Methodology (Supporting); Project administration (Supporting); Resources (Lead); Software (Equal); Supervision (Supporting); Validation (Supporting); Visualization (Equal); Writing – original draft (Support); Writing – revision and editing (Supporting).

RESEARCH DATA AVAILABILITY

The entire dataset supporting the results of this study was published in the article.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE USAGE

No artificial intelligence tools were used.

FUNDING

We would like to thank the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) for its financial support, which was essential to the completion of this research.

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