

Antônio Bispo dos Santos (author)

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Antônio Bispo dos Santos (1959-2023) was born in the Berlingas river valley in the state of Piauí, Brazil. He was trained in the teachings of the men and women craft masters of the Saco-Curtume *quilombo*, in the municipality of São João do Piauí. *Quilombo* is the denomination of Kimbundu origin for communities originally founded by maroons, escaped enslaved men, and women of African descent, called *quilombolas*, who resisted slavery in Brazil from the 16th century until its legal abolition in 1888. Antônio Bispo dos Santos completed his basic schooling, becoming the first member of his family to be literate. Nego Bispo, as he is also known, was the author of articles, poems, and the books *Quilombos, modos e significados* [*Quilombos, ways and meanings*] (2007), *Colonização, Quilombos: modos e significações* [*Colonization, Quilombos: ways and significations*] (2015), *A terra dá, a terra quer* [*The land gives, the land wants*] (2023). As a *quilombola* leader, he worked at the Coordenação Estadual das Comunidades Quilombolas do Piauí [State Coordination Office for *Quilombola* Communities of Piauí] (CECOQ/PI) and at the Coordenação Nacional de Articulação das Comunidades Negras Rurais Quilombolas [National Coordination Office of the Black Rural *Quilombola* Communities Alliance] (CONAQ). He has risen to prominence through his political activism and militancy, which are strongly connected to his *quilombola* training, revealing a cosmivision through which *quilombola* peoples construct symbols, meanings, and ways of life in defense of their traditional territories.

Bispo's thinking is based on the experiences and conceptions of *quilombola* communities and social movements campaigning for land. Setting out from this perspective, he developed several epistemological propositions rooted in the

traditional knowledge of the ‘Afro-Pindoramic’ peoples. Combining Africa and *Pindorama*, the ancient term of the Tupi Indigenous people for the land of Brazil, meaning ‘Land of the Palm Trees,’ he formulated this expression to refer to the African descendants and Indigenous/Pindoramic peoples in substitution for the designations imposed by European colonizers. His thought has stimulated debates inside and outside academia, especially around the concept of ‘counter-colonization,’ which postulates a relationship between sociopolitical and cosmological regimes. The author understands colonization as an ethnocentric process that seeks to replace one culture with another through invasion, expropriation, and ethnocide. As the quilombola thinker suggests, the concept of ‘counter-colonization’ entails a resignification of the cultural matrix of traditional peoples and their practices within the colonial process as a means to anchor forms of enunciation and resistance to colonization.

His book *Colonização, quilombos: modos e significações* [Colonization, Quilombos: ways and significations] (2015) proposes a new perspective to decolonial studies, albeit without dialoguing directly with this literature. Containing essays and poems, the work elaborates a singular viewpoint concerning the ‘organic’ formations – as Bispo calls this regime of subjectivation – of traditional communities, revisiting the history of the resistance of Palmares, Canudos, Caldeirão, and Pau de Colher communities since colonial times. The epistemological critique presented by the book is inspired by the cosmovision of counter-colonizing peoples, indissociable from their practices. Counter-colonization is located, therefore, in the context of a theoretical and practice debate, offering tools to examine the modes of resistance of black and Indigenous peoples who have not allowed themselves to be colonized. The author’s critical perspective rests on the ‘organic’ and political experience of *quilombola* populations, such that counter-colonialist thought is shown to be put into practice through the Afro-Pindoramic cosmovision.

Another core aspect of the concept of counter-colonization is the relationship between discourse and practice, allowing what the author calls a ‘confluence,’ that is, the conviviality between elements that are mutually different but, nonetheless,

converge in their cosmovisions. According to Bispo, these confluences have continually mobilized the thoughts of traditional peoples, deriving from the inherently pluralist worldview of polytheistic peoples. ‘Transfluence,’ by contrast, governs the ‘relations of transformation of elements of nature,’ associated with processes, discourses, and practices derived from the monist conception linked to Eurocentric and monotheistic thought. These two points are important to the comprehension of what the author calls ‘organic thought’ and ‘synthetic thought’: the organic refers to knowledge constitutive of the development of the living being, the organicity stemming from the process of subjectivation and empirical potency of the trajectory of the Afro-Pindoramic peoples; the synthetic is the knowledge canonized in academia, characterized by a colonialist practice, constituted through the emphasis on ‘having.’ While the organic is the knowledge of confluence, the synthetic is that of transfluence.

Nego Bispo’s thought offers political and academic contributions to these movements in their fight for land, foregrounding the political-social organizations of Indigenous and *quilombola* peoples. By strengthening collective manifestations and placing the political emphasis on orality, he has played a significant role in the conceptual restructuring of decolonial studies. Fomenting the academic debate, for years Bispo gave talks, lectures, and courses, participating as a teacher at the Encontro de Saberes [Knowledge Encounters] program at the University of Brasília (UNB/INCT). He has also taught classes in the Transversal Training Program in Traditional Knowledge at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil.

**Editor’s note:** Nego Bispo’s essay ‘We Belong to the Land’, originally published in the edited volume *Terra – Antologia Afro-Indígena* (Ubu, 2023), was translated into English and published online in the magazine and publishing platform *Piseagrama* in 2023. Palmares, Canudos, Caldeirão, and Pau de Colher, mentioned above, were communities of mostly black people located in the Northeast of Brazil that resisted slavery, violence, oppression, exclusion, and poverty in different moments of the country’s history since the colonial era. The communal land rights of *quilombolas* and the protection of their traditional ways of living and memory were only

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recognized in the 1988 Federal Constitution of Brazil. According to the 2022 Brazilian Census, 494 *quilombos* are officially recognized but only 147 have been granted land titles, and more than 1,800 communities have requested recognition from the Brazilian Institute of Land Reform and Settlement (INCRA).

## HOW TO CITE

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## KEYWORDS

black diaspora; black intellectuals; Brazilian anthropology; Brazilian social sciences; education; Negritude; race

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