

Beatriz Nascimento (author)

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Maria Beatriz Nascimento (1942-1995) was born in Aracaju, in the state of Sergipe, Brazil. She was the eighth daughter of Rubina Pereira do Nascimento and Francisco Xavier do Nascimento, who migrated to Rio de Janeiro at the end of 1949. Beatriz studied History at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), graduating in 1971. Under the supervision of historian José Honório Rodrigues, she completed a research internship at the Arquivo Nacional (National Archives) and then worked as a history teacher in Rio's state school system. Specializing in the history of Brazil at the Fluminense Federal University (UFF) in Niterói, in the state of Rio de Janeiro, she became renowned for her research into what she called "alternative social systems organized by black people," investigating examples ranging from *quilombos* to *favelas* (slums). *Quilombo* is the denomination of Kimbundu origin for communities founded by maroons, escaped enslaved men and women of African descent, who resisted slavery in Brazil from the colonial era until its abolishment in the late 19th century. Her research on race relations in Brazil, mostly conducted outside academic institutions, reveals the conjunctions between history and anthropology.

Nascimento's academic studies and anti-racist political activism were inextricably connected throughout her career. At UFF, in 1974, she participated in the creation of the André Rebouças Group, named after the Black engineer and abolitionist, and, in 1975, of the Instituto de Pesquisa das Culturas Negras [Black Cultures Research Institute] (IPCN). During this period, she met black intellectuals with whom she shared research projects and activism, the sociologist Eduardo de Oliveira e Oliveira (1923-1980), the philosopher and anthropologist *Lélia Gonzalez (1935-1994)*, and the journalist Hamilton Cardoso (1953-1999). At the invitation of Eduardo Oliveira, she

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participated in Quinzena do Negro [Black people's fortnight], an event held at the University of São Paulo (USP) in 1977. At this event, Nascimento presented the paper "Historiography of the quilombo," delineating the contours of what would later develop into spaces of black cultural resistance. From the black dance halls to the territories of *favelas*, these spaces constitute a black identity as an instrument of racial, intellectual, and existential self-affirmation, as well as a symbolic territory rooted in black bodies themselves.

In 1979, on a trip to the African continent, the author visited the territories of former Angolan *quilombos* and reaffirmed the link between Brazilian and African black cultures through the prism of Atlantic connections. In the documentary *Ôrí*, released in 1989 and directed by the filmmaker and sociologist Raquel Gerber, Nascimento narrates some of the trajectory of black movements in Brazil between 1977 and 1988, anchored in the concept of the '*quilombo*' as a fundamental idea, which runs through her own biographical narrative, in order to retrace historical continuities between the *quilombo* and its redefinitions in the present day. In the film, central themes of her works like embodiment and the black diaspora are brought to the fore, with an emphasis on cultural resistance. Candomblé and Afro-Brazilian religiosities are also highlighted where 'making the head' signifies rebirth and reconnection with the ancestors.

Nascimento wrote a series of texts, poems, scripts, essays and theoretical studies, including "Por uma história do homem negro" [For a history of the black man] (1974), "Kilombo e memória comunitária: um estudo de caso" [Kilombo and communal memory: a case study] (1982) and "O conceito de quilombo e a resistência cultural negra" [The concept of quilombo and black cultural resistance] (1985). In her works, the author problematizes stereotypes and naturalizations of *negritude* [blackness] in the Brazilian social imaginary, making significant conceptual contributions to anthropology in the process, such as '*kilombo/quilombo*,' which redimensions our understanding of the category through cultural and racial resistance, as well as the notion of black body/territory. A body understood as a document and a territory in the individual and collective reconstruction of the 'I am,'

as the author affirms in *Ôrí*. It is in this sense that, beyond the strictly historical understanding, *kilombo/quilombo*, as an African and diasporic institution, represents a landmark in the black population's capacity for resistance and organization, materialized in the bodies of individuals who unite towards a common societal project. *Kilombo/quilombo* is the symbolic space of the body that moves, whose potency is made concrete in the encounter with other bodies, in circulation, in the black community movement of the body-memory that resists colonial sequestration and racial annihilation.

In 1995, the historian was the victim of femicide. Despite her early death at the age of 52, her works remain fundamental references for the field of social sciences and the humanities. Recently, the geographer and anthropologist Alex Ratts (1964-) wrote a biography on her, *Eu sou Atlântica* [I Am Atlantic] (2007), and edited three collections, bringing together some of Beatriz Nascimento's most important texts: *Uma história feita por mãos negras – relações raciais, quilombos e movimentos* [A story made by black hands – racial relations, quilombos, and movements] (2021), *O negro visto por ele mesmo – ensaios, entrevistas e prosas* [Black people through their own eyes – essays, interviews, and talks] (2022), and the collection of poems and texts *Todas (as) distâncias: poemas, aforismos e ensaios de Beatriz Nascimento* [All (the) distances: poems, aphorisms and essays of Beatriz Nascimento] (2015) – the latter with Bethânia Nascimento Gomes, Nascimento's daughter.

By emphasizing the political-cultural resistance of the organizations and productive spaces of black culture, Nascimento resets the terms of the debates on Brazilian history and anthropology, with significant repercussions in the field of race relations. In recognition of her notable contributions to academic research, in October 2021 she was posthumously awarded the title of doctor honoris causa in memoriam by the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. Alongside [Lélia Gonzalez \(1935-1994\)](#), [Suéli Carneiro \(1950-\)](#), and Luiza Bairros (1953-2016), Nascimento ranks as one of the most important black intellectuals in Brazil.

Editor's note: Bethânia Nascimento Gomes, Archie Davies, and Christen Smith translated a collection of her texts into English, *The Dialectic is in the Sea: the Black*

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Radical Thought of Beatriz Nascimento, published by Princeton University Press in 2023. Christen Smith and Archie Davies have also translated two of her essays, “The concept of quilombo and black cultural resistance” and “For a (new) existential and physical territory”, as well as two poems, for the journal *Antipode* in 2021. Her textual, audiovisual, iconographic, and research materials were donated by her daughter Bethânia Nascimento Gomes to the National Archives in Rio de Janeiro in 1999.

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KEYWORDS

black diaspora; black intellectuals; body; colonialism; decolonial studies; history; memory; race

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