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Introductory Section

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Introduction

*Christen A. Smith, Bethânia N. F. Gomes,
& Archie Davies*

The earth is round; the sun is a disc. Where is the dialectic? In the sea.

—“PORTUGAL”

General Introduction

Beatriz Nascimento was one of the most innovative Black intellectuals of the twentieth century in the Americas. During the twenty-five-year period in which she wrote, she produced compelling, avant-garde, and foundational ideas about the Black condition and the Atlantic world. A working-class Black woman who grew up in the peripheries of Sergipe and Rio de Janeiro, she was a radical public intellectual, and an organizer in Brazil's Black Movement from the 1970s through the 1990s. She critiqued white supremacy, patriarchy, sexism, racial capitalism, white paternalism, and racial democracy at the height of Brazil's military dictatorship, making her a critical voice on the Left during one of the most repressive periods in Latin American modern history. She was also one of only a few women to become a leading intellectual voice on the national stage for Brazil's Black Movement in that time of intense political struggle. She was transnational in her thinking, passionate in her critiques, and decisive in her analytics. In 1995, her life was cut short when she was

tragically murdered, leaving behind unfinished essays, unrealized dreams, and our own speculations about the global impact she could have had, should she have lived longer. In the spirit of expanding her reach and her legacy, this book is the first to collect and translate her work into English.

Beatriz Nascimento engaged in topics from Brazilian history, culture, and politics, to race, gender, and sexuality. She wrote academic scholarship, public opinion pieces, essays, and poetry. Her primary theoretical contributions focused on the past and present life of *quilombos*—communities of runaway enslaved Africans that formed in Brazil beginning in the sixteenth century (roughly translated as *maroon communities*). However, despite her deep and richly insightful work, to date her oeuvre has been understudied. Like many intellectuals from the Global South writing and researching in languages other than English—especially Black and Indigenous scholars—Beatriz Nascimento has not received the global academic attention she deserves. The fields to which she contributed most—history, human geography, anthropology, sociology, communications, Black Studies, and gender and sexuality studies—can learn much from her writings. This book hopes to partly redress her marginalization by putting her into her rightful place in the global Black radical tradition.

A Short Biography

Beatriz Nascimento was born in Aracaju, Sergipe, Brazil, on July 12, 1942. Her parents, Rubina Pereira Nascimento and Francisco Xavier do Nascimento, had ten children, of whom Beatriz was the eighth. Her mother cared for the family and the home, and her father worked as a stonemason. When she was seven, the family moved from the northeast to Rio de Janeiro, and settled in the suburb of Cordovil.

After excelling at school, Beatriz Nascimento briefly worked in a textile workshop. In 1967 she married José do Rosário Freitas Gomes, an artist and architect from Cape Verde, with whom she had one child, Bethânia Gomes. That same year, she began her undergraduate studies, and completed her bachelor's degree in history from the Federal



FIGURE 0.1. Beatriz Nascimento, private collection of Bethânia Gomes.

University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) in 1971. Afterward, she interned at the National Archives in Rio de Janeiro, working with the historian of Rio de Janeiro, José Honório Rodrigues (1913–1987). She completed graduate work at the Fluminense Federal University (UFF) in 1981. In 1994 she began a master’s in communication from the UFRJ under the direction of renowned Black Brazilian intellectual Muniz Sodré.

Beatriz Nascimento’s most sustained academic and political concern was “to rewrite and reinterpret the history of black people in Brazil”—a task that she connected directly to the question of Black liberation, freedom, and peace.¹ For Nascimento, writing history was a fiercely political act. She used historical analysis to mount an affront against the racism of the Brazilian academy and the Brazilian state. She relentlessly insisted on documenting the intrinsic and intimate relationship between living Black people, African history in Africa and the Americas, and Black cultural practices and forms. Her research on quilombos was key to this life project. Quilombos became the representation of Black continuity for Beatriz Nascimento. While pursuing her thesis at UFF (in the 1970s), she conducted ethnography on surviving quilombo communities in the

state of Minas Gerais. Between 1976 and 1979 she investigated this topic, often working with Black anthropologist Marlene de Oliveira Cunha (1950–1988). Cunha was the first president of the Grupo de Trabalho André Rebouças (GTAR) and collaborated with Nascimento, undertaking oral history and archival research in a quilombo near Carmo da Mata in Minas Gerais. The most important elements of this work were published and became part of Nascimento's master's thesis. A large portion of this work is gathered in part III of this book.

Nascimento carefully crafted a theory of quilombo that argued for a continuous sociocultural-political relationship between the historical practice of quilombo and Brazil's Black culture today—particularly as it manifests in *favelas*. She developed this perspective through her ethnographic interactions with quilombo communities, her close analysis of urban Black culture in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, and her archival research on quilombos in Angola, Brazil, and Portugal. Nascimento always saw this research as intimately connected to her political work. And, as her writing in this collection shows, she also connected this work to her personal experience.

Beatriz Nascimento's political and intellectual trajectory can be traced back to her work as a student organizer in Rio de Janeiro in the 1960s and 1970s. As the global student protest movement reached its apex in May 1968, students on the Left in Brazil protested the military dictatorship, marched in the streets, and occupied universities. These actions were met with police repression, torture, and disappearances.² During this period, Nascimento participated in, and helped found, several Black student groups at UFF. She took part in important public events and debates around Blackness and contemporary racial politics, contributing to the resurgence of Black activism in the context of Brazil's military dictatorship (1964–85). While the stories of student and leftist organizing during the dictatorship have become central to political discourse in Brazil in the four decades since the end of the period, histories of the Black experience under the dictatorship remain silenced and marginalized.³ The dictatorship was a dangerous time for anyone to be politically active, and to be a young Black woman leading student and Black political movements was highly risky work.

Nevertheless, Nascimento remained outspoken and active throughout the most intense periods of political repression.

Beatriz Nascimento was an early member of the Movimento Negro Unificado (MNU, the Unified Black Movement).⁴ In the early 1970s she began to organize student groups in Rio de Janeiro and Niterói, and at the newly created the Centro de Estudos Afro-Asiáticos (CEAA, Centre for Afro-Asiatic Studies), founded in 1973. With others, including Eduardo de Oliveira e Oliveira (1924–1980) and Marlene Cunha, she founded and ran the Grupo Trabalho André Rebouças (GTAR, The André Rebouças Working Group).⁵ The group was both academic and activist, made up of Black students and scholars. It was named, by Beatriz Nascimento herself,⁶ after the Black Brazilian engineer and abolitionist André Pinto Rebouças (1798–1880). Under Nascimento's intellectual leadership, the GTAR had the strategy of taking their meetings outside the university, and they organized events at the CEAA as well as at the Teatro Opinião (The Opinion Theater) in Copacabana. For instance, in 1976 they organized the Week of Study on the Contribution of Black People in the Brazilian Social Formation, and they continued to organize events for two decades.⁷

In 1977 Nascimento was one of only a few women who took part in the Quinzena do Negro (Black Fortnight) at the University of São Paulo. This was a vitally important event in the history of Black Brazilian thought, bringing together activists and scholars, and setting out new directions for the movement. At the Quinzena, Nascimento was in dialogue with other important Black scholar activists, like Hamilton Cardoso (1953–1999) and Eduardo de Oliveira e Oliveira. It was during the Quinzena that Nascimento introduced her early theoretical ideas about quilombos as not just historical occurrences but also cultural and political practices that can be traced back to Bantu-Congo (Angolan) cultural practices. She also expounded her reflections on the intersectional political realities of Black women in Brazil and articulated a critique of racism in the Brazilian academy. In various capacities she worked with, or was in dialogue with, other important Black women intellectuals and activists, such as Thereza Santos and Lélia Gonzalez.⁸ Nascimento maintained a wide and deep network of relationships



FIGURE 0.2. Beatriz Nascimento (*left*) with Abdias do Nascimento (*center*) and Lélia Gonzalez (*right*), photograph by Elisa Larkin Nascimento, archive of Instituto de Pesquisas e Estudos Afro-Brasileiros (IPEAFRO, Afro-Brazilian Studies and Research Institute).

with Black activists not just in Brazil but increasingly across the Atlantic world.

In September–October 1979 Nascimento made an important trip to Angola, via Portugal, to conduct research on quilombos and write on newly emerging social and national formations in the recently independent African nation.⁹ In 1987–88 she traveled to Dakar with a Brazilian delegation to attend the Festival Pan-Africaine des Arts et Cultures (FESPAC, The Pan-African Festival of Art and Culture). Her archive attests to a growing international network in this period,¹⁰ and in the early 1990s she traveled to the Caribbean, to Martinique and Haiti. Following the success of her film *Ôrí* (1989), which won international prizes from Ouagadougou to Portugal and San Francisco, Nascimento was invited, alongside her collaborator, the film director Raquel Gerber, to present the film outside Brazil, including in Germany.

Nascimento's activism is indissociable from her writing and research, and she writes explicitly about her activist work in texts published here, such as "The Slaves Seen by the Masters: Merchandise and Counterculture



FIGURE 0.3. Beatriz during screenings of *Ôrí*, private collection of Bethânia Gomes.

in National Cinema,” and “Maria Beatriz Nascimento: Researcher.” The most poetic source, however, for her activist work, is perhaps the film *Ôrí*, which she worked on between 1977 and 1988 with its director, Raquel Gerber. The film, which was released in 1989, draws on her research, writing, and political practice, and constitutes one of Nascimento’s most significant intellectual offerings.

Nascimento continued to write and research while teaching in the early 1990s, particularly in publications linked to the Black Movement.¹¹ Beatriz Nascimento’s life ended tragically on January 28, 1995. She was murdered while defending a friend, Áurea Gurgel Calvet da Silveira, against an abusive partner. Upon her death, the secretary of the antiracist



FIGURE 0.4. Beatriz Nascimento at book signing, private collection of Bethânia Gomes.

organization the Centro de Articulação de Populações Marginalizadas (Centre for the Articulation of Marginalized Populations), Ivanir dos Santos, placed her death in a long line of murders of Black political activists.¹² She was in a relationship with Roberto Rosemburg at the time of her death. She was buried in the São João Batista cemetery in Botafogo, Rio de Janeiro.

In addition to her published articles and essays, Nascimento left a substantial archive of unpublished academic and nonacademic work. It is clear that if she had continued living, she would have published prolifically. Her research incorporated a broad range of topics, including but not limited to African and Afro-Brazilian history, the Black condition, gendered racism, and Black love. Her work helped build the intellectual foundation for Brazil's Black Movement at a key moment in its history by forging a new Brazilian thought and politics.

Since her death, Beatriz Nascimento has been increasingly recognized as a vital figure in Black Brazilian intellectual and political history. In 1997 the Afro-bloco Ilê Aiyê paid homage to her in their carnival presentation. In 2016 the National Archive in Rio de Janeiro named its

main library after her. In October 2021 the UFRJ, her alma mater, bestowed her an honorary doctorate.

In the rest of this introduction, we first place Beatriz Nascimento's work in the context of the Black radical tradition in Brazil. We then introduce how her work might be read in relation to contemporary English-language Black Studies, Black feminism, and critical geography, articulating how her theorizations of the quilombo and transatlantic Black history and experience can extend and challenge our understandings of Blackness, race, space, and nature in the anglophone world. Finally, we discuss the spirit of collaboration that lies behind this book, as well as some of the challenges and nuances of translating Beatriz Nascimento into English.

The Black Movement in Brazil

Brazil's Black radical tradition must be understood within the context of the broader transnational Black liberation movement of the 1970s. The Black Movement in Brazil—which was indeed a resurgence of national Black organizing against anti-Black racism—is the milieu of Beatriz Nascimento's *militância*—radical Black political action—and the intellectual context in which she developed her most influential ideas. Yet, it is the broader historical arc of Black radical politics in Brazil that comes to shape Beatriz Nascimento's thinking about Black history, quilombos, and Black resistance.

The history of the Black Movement in Brazil is punctuated by various key junctures that mark paradigm shifts in the approach to Black politics. Since the first enslaved Africans were brought to Brazil, Black Brazilians have struggled for equality and justice within Brazil's system of racial oppression. Throughout the legal slavery period (ca. 1541–1888), enslaved Africans fought against their forced servitude by organizing successful and unsuccessful revolts and escapes. This fight continued after the legal end of slavery as de facto conditions of slavery persisted. Before 1888, this fight included, most notably, the establishment of quilombos as autonomous Black/African societies outside of and against Portuguese colonial rule.¹³ As historian João Reis notes,

the practice of quilombo was everything from stealing away from plantation work to attend candomblé ceremonies (African-Brazilian religious practices), to periodic escapes and the establishment of autonomous societies that lived independently from Portuguese rule and refused enslavement. From the notable quilombo kingdom of Palmares, to the Malê Revolt in Bahia in 1835, African people fought Portuguese oppression directly, often at great cost. The threat of slave revolts was a real and present danger in the minds of the ruling classes within slave society. The most famous of these was arguably the Malê Revolt, which was ultimately unsuccessful but which set the stage for the repression of Black people in Brazil for generations to come. Many of the laws resulting from this crackdown led to the increased victimization of Black people by the courts and heightened restrictions on the movement of Blacks both free and enslaved. The revolt also inspired a spirit of refusal and subversion among enslaved Africans and their descendants for generations. In many ways, the practice of quilombo is the inaugural expression of Black anti-colonial, anti-slavery political articulation in Brazil and even in the Americas.

The quilombo kingdom of Palmares became one of the more important historical symbols of the Black Movement beginning in the 1970s. Palmares was a cluster of quilombos self-governed by enslaved Africans who escaped servitude and inhabited by a diverse population (including a few white and some Indigenous people). The kingdom was founded in approximately 1605 when enslaved Africans on a large plantation in the captaincy of Pernambuco, in the present-day state of Alagoas, revolted.¹⁴ Preferring to take their chances in the wilderness than remain on the plantation and wait to be discovered, they fled. Their community grew, and they established a system of government, army, and society while periodically fending off invasion attempts by the Portuguese. Palmares managed to remain independent until 1694, when the quilombo was overtaken. The king of Palmares, Zumbi, evaded capture until 1695, when on November 20 Portuguese colonizers captured, hanged, and quartered him, gruesomely displaying his body. The colonizers stuck his head on a pole and put it in the town square as a threat to all enslaved Africans. The death of Zumbi became more than a warning sign,

however. For generations of Black Brazilians, the death of Zumbi became a symbol of African resistance and a sign of Black agency. In Porto Alegre in 1971, a Black Movement group named *Palmares* suggested that the Black community declare November 20 the annual day of Black consciousness in Brazil. As we discuss in the introduction to part I, May 13 (the date of legal abolition) became an insult to many Black Brazilians because of its focus on the alleged benevolence of Princess Isabel, who was responsible for signing the law of abolition in 1888 (*Lei Áurea*, Golden Law), rather than the agency of the enslaved. As a counter to this narrative, the Black Movement came to embrace November 20 as the true day of Black consciousness.¹⁵ This date became nationally recognized as the Day of Black Consciousness in 2003 and was officialized as a commemorative date in 2011, although it has yet to become a national holiday.¹⁶

After slavery legally ended, the descendants of Africans continued to organize against racialized oppression. Two Black political expressions reflected this moment: the emergence of the Black press and the 1931 founding of the *Frente Negra Brasileira* (FNB, The Black Brazilian Front), Brazil's first national Black political party, to combat racism on the state and federal political levels.¹⁷ The organization addressed issues pertinent to the Black community like unemployment, a phenomenon the FNB linked (and rightfully so) to the state's immigration policies at the time.¹⁸ It also became a defender of Far-Right political tendencies—a counterpoint to the later leftist trajectory of the Black Movement in the 1970s onward. The Black Brazilian Front was never successful in promoting its political agenda, but its legacy of political activism would reverberate through the years.

More sustainable was the Black press. While social movement organizations and Black political mobilizations waxed and waned from the nineteenth century through the twenty-first century, the Black press has been a relatively stable and continuous voice of Black politics. From *Clarim d'Alvorada* and *A Voz da Raça* in the nineteenth century to *Maioria Falante* in the 1980s and 1990s and *Jornal Irohin* in the 1990s and 2000s, Black newspapers and magazines have historically been a key way for Black Brazilians to express their political thoughts and

frustrations.¹⁹ As we will see, these venues became a critical outlet for Beatriz Nascimento's writing. Many of her most widely read essays were published in and by the Black Press.

Ultimately, President Getúlio Vargas dissolved FNB for being a separatist organization, shifting, once again, the national paradigm of Black politics in the country. In 1944 actor, *militante* (literally *militant* but widely used by the Black Movement to self-identify as radical Black organizers), scholar and artist Abdias do Nascimento founded the Black Experimental Theater (O Teatro Experimental do Negro [TEN]) in Rio de Janeiro.²⁰ The organization won a place in the national spotlight from 1944 to the early 1960s by radically questioning how the Brazilian stage should and would represent Black people, and by using the theater as a political base for organizing the Black community around issues of social change. The fact that the theater became such a vital voice against racism and for the valorization of Black culture and heritage was and still is significant. The Black Experimental Theater not only set the tone for Black politics in the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s; the company also set the stage for the resurgence of Black radical politics in the 1970s through the medium of the arts. TEN would become the precedent for cultural groups like the Black carnival group Ilê Aiyê, which we discuss below. These groups would use cultural spaces and expressions as a method of radically refusing the myth of racial democracy—the utopic and erroneous notion that race does not exist in Brazil, only color gradations of a unified, national people.²¹

In 1964 the military dictatorship began in Brazil. Intense censorship started in December 1968 with the enactment of Institutional Act Number Five, “which gave juridical sanction to the institutions of repression and ‘internal security.’”²² Criticisms of Brazilian society and, in particular, attention to racial discrimination, became subversive acts punishable by law.²³ During the most intense period of the military dictatorship's censorship (1969–75), Black communities across Brazil politically stirred. In 1974 two Black men, Apolônio de Jesus and Antônio Carlos “Vovô,” exasperated by the racism of Bahian carnival and Brazilian society established Ilê Aiyê, an Afrocentric carnival group (Afro-bloco) designed to valorize Black aesthetics and Black culture. Ilê Aiyê would

become a critical moment in the shift in Black politics during the dictatorship period. The Afro-bloco movement would come to have a tremendous impact on the country, particularly in the case of Salvador, Bahia. Ilê Aiyê became a catalyst for a new generation of Black politics in Brazil under the shadow of the repressive regime.²⁴

In 1978, motivated by de facto segregation and police violence, Black community leaders in São Paulo organized the Movimento Negro Unificado Contra Discriminação Racial (MNUCDR, later just MNU), the first nationwide Black political organization since the FNB. When the MNUCDR organized in 1978, it also revived the memory of Zumbi. The group's manifesto used Zumbi as the symbol of pride that empowered them to fight for justice against discrimination and for full citizenship rights for Black people. The words that the MNUCDR used in their 1978 manifesto draw directly on this historical connection: "We, Black Brazilians, proud descendants of Zumbi, leader of the Black Republic of Palmares, that existed in the State of Alagoas from 1595 to 1695, are today united in a fight to reconstruct Brazilian society, directing it toward a new order, where there will be a real and just participation of Black people, who are the most oppressed of the oppressed; not just here, but everywhere we live."²⁵ In addition to invoking Zumbi, the MNUCDR also took care to acknowledge the transnational connections between the plight of Black people in Brazil and the plight of Black people everywhere around the globe. This reminds us that Pan-Africanism has played an important role in defining Black Movement politics in Brazil, and we see this clearly in Beatriz Nascimento's writings.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, cultural and political organizing around Black identity issues intensified, and Black/Afro-identity became a symbol of cultural as well as political resistance. This politicized aesthetic was exemplified by the Afro-funk movement in the periphery of Rio de Janeiro. Black poets and actors across the country also actively engaged the theater and performance as a means of both cultural and political expression. This engagement was tied closely to the broader Black Movement happening around the country. For example, in books and at public events, the poetry collective Quilombhoje of São Paulo talked openly about racism and issues facing the Black community.

Black arts politics constituted the soul of Black political fervor. It was amid this political context of Black expression that Beatriz Nascimento emerged as a Black radical thinker.

The Black Radical Tradition

Beatriz Nascimento's ideas on Black liberation made an indelible impact on Black politics in Brazil during the military dictatorship. As Bethânia recalls in our conversation that closes this volume, Nascimento was arrested by military police in the 1970s while she was a university student. During that time, one of the questions the police asked those they arrested was "What are you reading?" Ironically, what may have saved Nascimento from disappearance and torture is the racist state assumption that Black people from the favela could not possibly be reading, because they could not possibly be intellectuals. They did not even come to her house to look through her books, despite the fact that her family, in their concern, rushed to get rid of them. In the Brazilian social imagination, the dominant image of the university student was (and still is) a white person. Black people and especially working-class Black people living in the periphery were not imagined to be intellectual subjects. Although Black people from the peripheries were indubitably criminalized by the military and its repressive rule, the idea that these same people could be intellectual threats to the state was counterintuitive . . . or was it?²⁶ This assumption, of course, was wrong.

Beatriz Nascimento was, in every sense, an intellectual militante—an intellectual whose research and thinking were accompanied by a fierce commitment to organizing and dismantling oppressive social structures. Each word that Nascimento wrote was also part of a larger political project of Black liberation and antiracism. When she conducted in-depth ethnographic research in the surviving quilombo communities of Maranhão, spent time in the archives, and completed major academic research projects that were both individual and collaborative, she was doing so not only to satisfy her intellectual curiosity but also to contribute to the larger project of Black liberation in Brazil.

Nascimento's academic research anchored her in the practice of radical Black organizing: protest, contestation, confrontation, and deconstruction. For this reason, much of her writing is public writing—she wrote to shape public discourse, not to satisfy the arbitrary benchmarks of the academy. She was politically active from her days as a university student until her death. In each of her texts, we see the same goals: dismantling and demystifying anti-Black racism and sexism in Brazil, and delegitimizing the repressive, anti-Black state and its correspondent discourses of racial democracy.

In using the phrase “the Black radical tradition” to define Beatriz Nascimento's thinking, we deliberately locate her intellectual legacy within a particular global discourse. The term *radical* is not one that she used to describe herself (at least not to our knowledge). The word *radical* in English translates literally into *radical* in Portuguese, but carries a negative and even pejorative connotation in the Brazilian cultural context. Our decision to employ it is not, therefore, a linguistic one. Rather, it is a genealogical mapping that recognizes the resonance between her ideas and those whom anglophone Black Studies scholars have traditionally considered part of the Black radical tradition: for example, Andaiye, Amílcar Cabral, Angela Davis, Frantz Fanon, W.E.B. DuBois, C.L.R. James, Claudia Jones, Audre Lorde, Eric Williams, Huey Newton, Kwame Nkrumah, Cedric Robinson, Walter Rodney, Thomas Sankara, Aimé Césaire, Suzanne Césaire, Richard Wright, and Sylvia Wynter, among others.²⁷

Black women's place within the Black radical tradition has often been erased or undervalued. Carole Boyce Davies engages the work of Robin D. G. Kelley when reflecting on where and how Black women fit into the Black radical tradition.²⁸ Specifically, Davies notes that Kelley argues that Black intellectuals writing about the “global implications of black revolt” is in part what defines Black radical thought.²⁹ Indeed, anti-colonialism, anti-racism, anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism, the deconstruction of anti-Blackness and the insistence on the right to Black self-determination might all be characterized as aspects of the Black radical tradition. In addition, writings and musings on Black

freedom and autonomy, particularly when tied to aspirations for Black revolution, are also dimensions of the Black radical tradition. Beatriz Nascimento and her contemporaries fit squarely into this rubric. Her writings take direct aim at the repressive, racist/sexist regime of the Brazilian state and Brazilian society. Many of these critiques are via a historical lens, which is both a brilliant and savvy way to critique the state without referring to contemporary politics during dangerous political times. For example, in speaking of slavery, she often uses the present tense despite referring to the past. This allows her to imply the perpetuation of the conditions of slavery into the present without directly (and dangerously) critiquing the Brazilian military state's dictatorial investment racial democracy. It is interesting to note, too, that her research on quilombos was funded by not only the Léopold Sédar Senghor Foundation but also by the Ford Foundation.³⁰ However, as she notes in the unpublished text "Alternative Social Systems Organized by Black People: From Quilombos to Favelas (b)," translated here, the Ford Foundation, while willing to fund her historical research, refused to fund the extension of that work into the contemporary world of favelas. Though one of the more progressive funding bodies working in Brazil at that time, the Ford Foundation balked at the revolutionary potential of her move to see the quilombo in the favela.³¹

Beatriz Nascimento is a Black radical intellectual precisely because her writings helped buttress the Black Movement's efforts to confront the white supremacy of the Brazilian state by delegitimizing racial democracy and celebrating a diachronic Black history—the existence of a Black past, a Black present, and a Black future. It was her writing—along with that of other Black intellectuals like Clóvis Moura and Abdias do Nascimento—that helped create a narrative around the history of Black insurrection, fugitivity/flight, and autonomous community-building that became the backdrop to the fight against racism and anti-Blackness in the 1970s through the 1990s, which included the ratification of the new constitution in 1988 after the end of the dictatorship. By researching and writing about quilombos, Black everyday resistance, Black psychology, Black cultural expressions, Black solidarity, Black trauma, and Black life

more generally, Beatriz Nascimento effectively argued that Black Brazilians have a revolutionary, anti-colonial genealogy of struggle that continues to shape the culture and mindset of Black people in Brazil today. This deceptively simple concept became the principle historical and intellectual battle cry of the Black Movement during the military dictatorship and continues to define present-day Black radical politics in Brazil.

Another fundamental element of Beatriz Nascimento's work that locates her squarely within the Black radical tradition is her focus on the African diaspora through her theorization of the Atlantic. For Nascimento, the Atlantic Ocean is not only a physical geographic zone but also a metaphysical space of Blackness.³² This thinking comes out clearly in the film *Ôrí*, which was based largely on her master's thesis. This beautiful film, primarily narrated by Nascimento, traces the historiography of the practice of quilombo as a Black cultural legacy intimately connecting Brazil with Angola/the Americas and Africa. *Ôrí* builds on her research on quilombos, as well as her autobiography and her philosophical and cultural interpretation of transatlantic Black space. It traverses the ocean, and brings into critical and creative juxtaposition Black dance, philosophy, history, and politics. It is also a powerful archive of Brazil's Black Movement in the 1970s and 1980s. In making the film, Raquel Gerber created invaluable footage of Black Movement debates at the height of the Black struggle in the 1970s and 1980s, footage that demonstrates the important contribution that Beatriz Nascimento's theorizations of Black politics and culture made to those discussions. *Ôrí* displays Nascimento's diasporic sensibility, which is at once grounded in contemporary Brazilian urban space and connected to global African histories of the transatlantic slave trade and colonial economy. Nascimento's conscious refashioning of elements of the politics and discourse of a global Black radical tradition were particularly palpable toward the end of her life. We can read this engagement, for instance, in the discussion of Steve Biko, and the allusions to Frantz Fanon, in "For a (New) Existential and Physical Territory."

Seriously engaging the work of Black intellectuals from Latin America in the discourse of the Black radical tradition is long overdue. Beatriz

Nascimento is a key thinker who deserves a place in the Black radical pantheon.

Black Studies

Beatriz Nascimento played a fundamental role in forming what Alex Ratts calls “the academic Black Movement” in Brazil in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Like many of her Black Movement contemporaries, Nascimento began organizing while she was studying at the university—a place that was fertile ground for leftist political formation at this time. Black students interested in Black organizing, the majority of whom were working class, developed a parallel political articulation that was both academic and community engaged. Thus, the Black Movement emerged in the classroom and in the streets in parallel. Nascimento’s university organizing played a fundamental role in shaping the academic Black Movement. As she notes in “Letter from Santa Catarina,” her work was read at one of the early meetings that led to the founding of the Centro de Estudos Afro-Asiáticos by students from the Fluminense Federal University. This influence is in addition to her founding the GTAR. Beatriz Nascimento can quite easily be described as one of the founders of Black Studies in Brazil.

During the late 1960s, close to the time that Nascimento and her contemporaries were organizing, the academic field of Black Studies (in African American/Black Studies departments and programs at universities) in the United States emerged in the wake of the student uprisings of the Black Power movement. Efforts to create the first Black Studies program (which would become a department) began at San Francisco State University in 1968 after a series of successful student protests that insisted on the institutionalization of Black Studies. This moment was part of a larger wave of student protests for the creation of Black and ethnic studies that reverberated across the country over the next decade. As Robin D. G. Kelley observes in *The Black Scholar* (2020), in his retrospective on the fiftieth anniversary of Black Studies, “The interdisciplinary project we have come to call ‘Black studies’ has always been about Black lives, the structures that produce premature

death, the ideologies that render us less than human, and the struggle to secure our future as a people and for humanity. It emerged as an intellectual and political project rooted in a Black radical tradition without national boundaries and borders.” The project of Black Studies has historically been an activist-intellectual project grounded in the insistence on the preservation and proliferation of Black life and the upturning of all social systems of oppression ideologically anchored in anti-Blackness.

In Brazil, Black Studies as an intellectual-political project was defined by the organic intellectualism of the Black Movement. We distinguish Black Studies from Afro-Brazilian studies, which, within the context of Brazil, have historically been programs established *within* (not against or despite of) universities to research Black people not as subjects but as objects of study. This disciplinary area has historically been dominated by white-mestizo liberal intellectuals who study race and Blackness rather than Black intellectuals who come from Black Movement political spaces.³³ This is significant for understanding many of the critiques that Beatriz Nascimento registers here in her writings, particularly in part I of this book. Black Brazilian intellectuals have developed a unique Black Brazilian radical tradition in direct conversation with grassroots political organizing for Black liberation, and often in tension if not in direct conflict with the white-mestizo university system.³⁴

Space, Time, and Spirituality

Nascimento’s writing reminds us of the need to expand our knowledge of Black women’s unique experiences and theorization of space, time, and spirituality (including embodiment, ontology, and subjectivity) in the Americas. It is her symbolic interpretation of quilombos that has left its most lasting legacy, as her biographer, Alex Ratts, discusses in this volume. Connected to this work are deep reflections on history, geography, and spirituality that demonstrate her epistemological groundings and philosophical approach to the world.

Beatriz Nascimento’s work can be put fruitfully into dialogue with the field of Black geographies and Black feminist geographies, which

have emerged as rich spheres of work in the last two decades.³⁵ Her contribution, here, is to be found in the interconnections between territory, embodiment, liberation, and the transoceanic space of the Black diaspora. Katherine McKittrick, following Dionne Brand, observes, “humanness is always geographic—blood, bones, hands, lips, wrists, this is your land, your planet, your road, your sea.”³⁶ For Nascimento, Blackness, the body, the earth, and the sea are also similarly interconnected and profoundly geographic. The sea, the body, and the land constitute physical and metaphysical spaces of grounding for Blackness in the Americas. The term *grounding* here is both energetic and physical. It is also historical cultural, political, and spiritual. It gels people of the African diaspora together across time and space, even in the absence of physical exchange and connection. In other words, quilombo—as praxis, territory, and space—is a political manifestation as well as an embodied and metaphysical search for freedom. This conceptual background provides the mapping necessary to understand the conceptual impetus behind much of Nascimento’s work.

Beatriz Nascimento’s interest in the body as a political site is deeply connected with her interpretation of the practices of trance in *candomblé*. The transcendental possibilities of trance and Black spirituality, and their concrete transoceanic histories, are vital for her poetic/political vision of liberation.³⁷ In the Afro-Atlantic experience of trance, emerging from African religious practices across the Americas, the Black body can exceed its geographic and territorial boundaries.³⁸ In elaborating these ideas, Nascimento draws on *candomblé* cosmology. The *orixás*, *minkisi*, and *voduns* (African gods from different African religious traditions variously practiced in Brazil today in *candomblé*) traveled with enslaved people across the Atlantic—rooting displaced Africans to both American and African earth. Thus, the body, as flesh, is a space of relative freedom tied to an ancestral home-space mediated through the natural world, and the *orixás*, *voduns*, and *minkisi* of *candomblé* spirituality. Across Nascimento’s work—and in particular in her later, exploratory thinking on sound and the cosmic (see figure 0.5)—these spiritual practices are also linked to the spatial history of quilombo. She

notes, for instance, that African religions were practiced in quilombos in Brazil (see, for instance, “Black People, Seen by Themselves” and “Kilombo and Community Memory: A Case Study”). This means that, in Nascimento’s hands, Black geographies are anchored in both liberated territory and spiritual embodiment—an embodiment located within a history of oppression but also a history of flight (*fuga*) in pursuit of freedom.

Nascimento was not a trained geographer, and her work has not, with the vital exception of Alex Ratts’s framing of her as a cultural geographer in *Eu sou Atlântica* (2006), been systematically engaged by geographers, whether Brazilian or otherwise. She framed her work, in academic terms, generally in relation to the discipline of history, and as a critique of its methods, conclusions, and politics in Brazil. Yet her writing is profoundly spatial, from the scale of the body to the scale of the ocean. When read alongside her political practice, and the history of the Black Movement in Brazil, her work offers another string to the bow of the analysis of diverse Black spatial imaginaries.³⁹ Her writing on territory, quilombo, and land can contribute, for instance, to the burgeoning field of work that addresses what Sharlene Mollett calls “land-body entanglements in the Americas.”⁴⁰ Considering Beatriz Nascimento as part of an open, global, always expanding tradition of thinking about space and nature aims to suggest that her writing offers a great deal to movements to challenge and reassess the history of geographical thought. More open (multilingual, transnational) intellectual histories can be important tools for critical engagements with the history of disciplines such as geography. Powerful new forms of anti-colonial, anti-racist geographies are emerging, under banners including the decolonial,⁴¹ Black geographies,⁴² and abolition geographies.⁴³ We hope that Nascimento’s work finds readerships in these fields. That said, this is not to try to fit Nascimento into these categories, and we should be very cautious about co-opting her radical voice into confected schools, which can gather enormous variety under anaesthetizing categories.⁴⁴ Rather, her work challenges categorization while offering new points of reference, new coordinates, and new ideas, to geographical thinking about space and liberation.

CURRICULUM VITAE AND
PERSONAL APPEARANCE

NAME: MARIA BEATRIZ NASCIMENTO

DATE OF BIRTH: 17/07/1942

NATIONALITY: BRAZILIAN

- I - Professor attached to The Secretary of Education - RJ - 1984 until now
- II - Post-Graduate in Social Communication and Information in Brazil, ECC/UFRJ - Communication School/Federal University Rio de Janeiro, 1992.
- III - Post-Graduate and Specialist in History of Brazil - ICHÉ/UFF (Federal University Fluminense) 1979-1981
- IV - Graduated and Licensed in Universal History - IFCS/UFRJ, 1971
- V - Itinerary, Long Text and Narrative on Long Documentary Film, ORI of Raquel Gerber Director:
 - Costa Azul Prize (The Man and the Nature section) 5^o Cine Tróia Festival - Portugal. 15 Best Documentaries in the World-Centennial of the City of Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival, 89. - Japan. Honorable Mention for Documentary - Prized Pieces 89 - National Black Programming Consortium, Columbus - Ohio - USA. Special Jury Award Film and Video Sociology Category in the Gold Gate Awards Competition - San Francisco International Film Festival - California, USA. 11^o Paul Robenson Prix in the Pan African Festival Cine and Television, Ougadougou, Burkinafaso - Africa. 1989
- VI - Research on the Theatrical Play "THE LIBERTY CAUSE" - Black movement from Slavery Abolition, 1988.
- VII - Speaker in meetings concerning Afro-american culture and the Hero Zumbi de Palmares - since 1974 until now.

FIGURE 0.5. Beatriz Nascimento's resumé, early 1990s. The context of this document is unclear in her archive, but it shows that she was expanding her anglophone intellectual interests at this time. Fundo Maria Beatriz Nascimento, National Archives of Brazil, Rio de Janeiro.

- VIII - Many International Journeys to Africa (RPDE Angola, Senegal, Mali, Nigeria, Côte D'Ivoire) and Caribbean Islands (Martinique, Guadalupe) - 1979, 1987, 1991.
- XIX - Research of the Kilombos movement in History at the Ford Foundation, also at the Leopold Senghor Foundation, 1978 - 1980.
- X - At present doing research on sounds emitted in Holography space by Afro-Brasilian and Afro-Latin entities (Placed in Candomble's Ecological Heap).

Rio de Janeiro, 17 October 1992
Márcia Beatriz Nascimento

FIGURE 0.5. (continued)

Writing, Text, and Style

“African knowledge” is put in museums, libraries, and academic and religious temples. Our knowledge is canonized. What does this mean? The protected archives of the West will guide our future, loaded with stigmas and preconceived marks. In the next generations we will have to live with this, and to live well with it. In the end, these are the true records of the inter-relations between Europeans, Africans, and Americans, and they are preserved by the hegemonic hemisphere.

—“ARUANDA!”

This book, like others in Portuguese publishing Beatriz Nascimento’s work after her death, has to work with an archive of published and unpublished writing that is highly various in form, state of completion, intent, and style. In her lifetime, Beatriz Nascimento published articles in mainstream newspapers including the *Folha de São Paulo* and *Jornal do Brasil*, as well as cultural magazines such as *Revista de Cultura Vozes* and *Revista do Patrimônio Histórico*. She also published in specialist academic journals including *Estudos Afro-Asiáticos* and was a member of

the editorial board of *Boletim do Centenário da Abolição e República*. She coauthored a book, *Negro e cultura no Brasil* (Black people and culture in Brazil) (1987), with José Jorge Siqueiro and Helena Theodoro. In the last two decades, a number of projects have emerged in Brazil to publish her writing. These include three books edited by Alex Ratts—*Eu sou Atlântica* (2007), *Uma história feita por mãos negras* (2021), and *Beatriz Nascimento: O negro visto por ele mesmo* (2022)—and *Beatriz Nascimento: Quilombola e Intelectual* (2018), organized by the Union of Pan-Africanist Collectives and edited by Editora Filhos de Africa with Abisogun Olatunji Oduduwa, Jéferson Jomo, Raquel Barreto, and Lucimara Barbosa. These books have been invaluable to putting together this edition. Two essays, “A mulher negra no mercado de trabalho” and “A mulher negra e o amor,” have been reprinted in the edition *Pensamento feminista brasileira: formação e contexto* (Brazilian feminist thought: Formation and context) (2009), edited by Heloisa Buarque de Hollanda.

The major source for this book, as for those described above, is Nascimento’s archive, which is housed in the Brazilian National Archives in Rio de Janeiro. Following in the steps of Alex Ratts, important intellectual work has recently begun to emerge drawing on this archive—notably two doctoral theses. Wagner Vinhas Batista both offers an interpretation of Beatriz Nascimento’s intellectual trajectory and does vital archeological work on the archive itself, in producing a schematic index;⁴⁵ and Diego de Matos Gondim has combined ethnographic, philosophical, and historical work to develop the relationship between land, meaning, and the notion of quilombo.⁴⁶ More work remains to be done on that rich collection of documents, which offers great insights not only into the development of her thought and practice but also into late-twentieth-century networks of Black and Third Worldist movements in Brazil as well as the wider Atlantic world.

Nascimento’s poetry was largely unpublished in her lifetime, though in the early 1990s she was seeking funding to organize and publish this body of work.⁴⁷ This work has now been completed, with the publication in Portuguese in *Todas (as) distâncias: poemas, aforismos e ensaios de Beatriz Nascimento* (2015), edited by Bethânia Gomes and Alex Ratts.

We have included a single poem to introduce each section of texts, but a full English edition of her verse will have to wait for another book.

Her prose style has at least three modes. These are, first, an academic and studious mode, which conforms to Brazilian norms of scholarly writing, with quite careful referencing and a social scientific tenor in the construction of argument. This style predominates in, for instance, part III of this book, in her writing on quilombos. The second mode is more hawkish, but still academic and social scientific. This style is found in public texts that intervene into debates about Brazilian politics, society, and historiography, such as those in part I, like “For a History of Black People” and “Our Racial Democracy.” Here, her writing often adopts a sardonic texture, in particular when dealing with mainstream white and Luso-tropicalist Brazilian social science, and with co-optations and distortions of Black culture and politics. This style is always tightly bound to her political projects of the moment; these texts, interviews, and reflections, and Nascimento’s modulations of her voice within them, are fruitfully read alongside the development of the Black Movement in the moment of their publication. The final mode is more personal, private, and existential. This tone is steeped in her poetic and artistic vision and practice. It often predominates in texts that were not published in her lifetime, such as “The First Great Loss” and “An Aside to Feminism.” Here, her style is allusive and spiritual.

The most intricate and enduring moments of Beatriz Nascimento’s style, perhaps, emerge when these two latter modes coincide. We can find this in texts like “For a (New) Existential and Physical Territory” and “Toward Racial Consciousness.” These pieces combine the confessional, personal, forthright writing of her poetic side with the trenchant, uncompromising clarity of her political demands for justice and truth.

There are different difficulties associated with translating these three modes. The academic prose presents relatively familiar challenges for translating Brazilian academic discourse: what to do with the long sentences that are a hallmark of Brazilian scholarly style but lose their focus in English. Transposing those sentences into English requires a disaggregation of singular, complex arguments, whose grammar and syntax face inward, into a series of phases and phrases of an argument that are

separate from one another at the level of the sentence, but whose interaction is marked by conjunction and explicit interconnection. This is one practical way in which translation is interpretation: the building blocks of arguments are often implicit to the Portuguese syntax but made explicit in the English translation. In the second mode, in which the sardonic is a political tool, an attentive ear for tone is necessary, and here the collaborative process of our translation, discussed further below, was vital, as we each picked up on particular cues of humor and irony. Translating these moments of critique is always delicate, but we have tried to be clear without being heavy-handed. It is worth noting, too, that of the translation collective members, one is British (Archie), another is US American (Christen), and another is Brazilian and has also mainly lived in the United States since her teenage years (Bethânia). For each of us the sound of irony is slightly different, so we might each translate it slightly differently. It's not just a cliché that British humor is dry; it's also a translation challenge. The third, more personal mode raises other questions of translation and editing. Here, in particular, Bethânia's role has been vital, not only in terms of her intimacy with her mother but also through her detailed knowledge of her mother's poetry.

In a project like this, translation involves any number of difficult choices. Terminology for race and ethnicity in Brazil poses a particular problem, however. There are two main words for *Black* in Portuguese: *preto* and *negro*. Both of these terms have historically been used since the slavery era to describe people of African descent in Brazil, and each term has had a different political charge at different social and political moments in Brazilian history. For example, the Black Movement in Brazil is known as *o movimento negro*, whereas Black people in Brazil have been denoted by the term *pretos* on the census, in demographic studies and on official government documents (like birth certificates).⁴⁸ We have translated *negro* throughout as either “black people,” “black,” or “black man.” This decision follows the colloquial toggling between these multiple definitions in everyday parlance. At times, the masculine form (*negro*) means a collective, ungendered reference to a Black person or Black people (as in the case of *o negro*). At other times, however, *negro*

literally refers to a Black man or *the* Black man. This usage parallels similar uses of the term *man* in English during the same time period. The most acute instance of this problem is the title of “For a History of Black People.” The original title, “Por uma História do Homem Negro,” translates literally as “For a History of the Black Man,” and the text directly confronts the universalizing project of the History of Man. In the text itself, she predominately uses the phrase “uma História do negro,” omitting the word *Homem* but using a capital *H* and a lowercase *N*, while making the argument that Black history must be part of universal History. Although it would be a legitimate translation to retain the gendered term *Man* in the title, we have decided that in this case her underpinning project is more accurately translated by a shift toward the gender-neutral term in the title. Such translation choices remain hard, and open to interpretation.

In our own texts, we have chosen to capitalize *Black* when referring to Black people. This is a deliberate, collective, political decision that also follows a widespread paradigm shift in the capitalization of the term in North America in the wake of the murder of George Floyd by police officers in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 2020.⁴⁹ To capitalize the term *Black* is to recognize that this color term also has social and political significance when it is associated with people of African descent who have historically been racialized by the term. Capitalization acknowledges that Black is not simply a color marker but also an ethnic classification that indicates the shared culture and history of people of African descent globally and locally within specific geographic zones, like Brazil.⁵⁰ It is clear that as an outspoken political voice in Brazil’s Black Movement, Beatriz Nascimento uses the term *Black* in a diasporic, political, and sociocultural sense. However, we have decided to use the term in lowercase in our translations, to reflect her own usage of the lowercase, and to avoid anachronism. Her use of the term *black* moves between the color term and the racial marker—a slippage that she intentionally reflects on and plays with. Imposing a capitalization would risk losing her nuance in the use of the term. She uses the word *negro*, *also*, to refer to the unique cultural experiences and perspectives of people of African descent with brown⁵¹ skin is also a consistent

reminder of the political convictions of her diasporic politics. In addition, she consistently and deliberately inserted herself into the diasporic discourses of Blackness bubbling across the hemisphere during her time. We can see this in her references to Black Brazilians as a people with a collective past, present, and experiences. It also comes out in her theorization of the Atlantic and quilombo.

The vocabulary of racial classification, racism, anti-Blackness, and ethnicity in Brazil is manifold. Some of these terms translate more easily than others. Terms that are more difficult include *preto*, *pardo*, *mestiço*, *caboclo*, *sertanejo*, and others. Within the colorist logics of Brazilian racial hierarchy, these terms operate in various ways: *preto* refers to dark-skinned people, *pardo* to lighter, brown-skinned people; *mestiço* is a more general (though highly contested) term for *mixed* that tends to refer to someone who is of white and Indigenous heritage and corresponds with the word *mestizo* in Spanish, but can also refer to someone who may have remote African heritage that is barely perceptible. *Caboclo* refers to people of mixed Indigenous ancestry whose Indigenous heritage is clearly identifiable, but it is also used at times as a general term to refer to any brown or Black person, particularly a man of brown skin (as in “hey, man”—in this way *caboclo* corresponds with a term like *dude* in North American English). *Sertanejo* is another ambiguous, racialized term that refers to people from the *sertão*, or the backlands of the northeast and the center of Brazil. These terms have differently loaded discriminatory and offensive weight depending on their context and their speaker; *preto* can be a racial slur but can also be (historically, not unrelatedly, of course) a general reference to a Black person (used widely in southern Brazil specifically) or a demographic, census category.

Beatriz Nascimento uses terms of race and ethnicity in a variety of ways, whether by ventriloquizing racism in society, citing demographic research, or conducting her own historical and sociological critique of racial politics and ethnic groups. This is further complicated by the fact that she also discusses ethnic differentiations in the United States and sub-Saharan Africa, and their interconnection with forms of racial and ethnic identification in Brazil. All of this means that we have taken a contextual approach to translating these terms. We have chosen to leave

(continued...)

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