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Beatriz Nascimento and the Erotics of the Quilombo in Times of Peril

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Abstract: In October 2018, the election of an extreme right-wing politician as president of Brazil laid bare the histories of antidemocratic practices that guided the policies and rhetoric of the newly elected government. Black, poor, Indigenous, Northeastern, and LGBTQIA+ people were positioned as threats to the stability of the nuclear family and public safety that the government claimed it would protect. The subsequent COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 also put into stark view the antidemocratic practices and the blatant disregard for life in Brazil, which was particularly acute for people who had been marked as a threat. "Beatriz Nascimento and the Erotics of the Quilombo in Times of Peril" revisits the work of Beatriz Nascimento, a Black Brazilian thinker and scholar who lived through the repressive and antidemocratic period of the military dictatorship (1964–1985). Nascimento's work offers perspective to the current extreme right-wing project and underscores the significance of Black scholars' interventions when the lives of marginalized people are at stake. Specifically, her concept of the quilombo (maroon communities) uncovers the histories, relations of power, and the possibilities of social relations for Brazilians living in precarity that antidemocratic governments have attempted to diminish and erase.

Keywords: extreme politics; civil rights; democracy

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1. Introduction

In the essay "For a (New) Existential and Physical Territory," Black Brazilian scholar Beatriz Nascimento levels the imperative for the responsibility of storytelling to dismantle structures of power and to make life more beautiful and happier. Nascimento contends,

> What use do we have for History? If I am powerless, I have no need of it. History serves those who tell it. Over time, it becomes one with power. In this country, my life is not power, but that is not the end of it. A Rock cannot dismantle the structure of power. The task is not merely to exist, but to make life more beautiful, and happier. History is the field and territory of the victors, but it would be futile to replace it with a history of the defeated—we have not yet been defeated. Those who have been called beaten are individuals, full of stories. Their stories may be small, but they are rich and captivating.[1]

The power of the call in this essay by Nascimento should not be read as naive or as willful ignorance but instead as a historically rooted methodology and approach to confronting the powers that would otherwise name people and their histories as defeated. Beatriz Nascimento, born half a century after the abolition of slavery and politically and intellectually active throughout the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964–1985), centered the long history of antidemocratic practices through her work on the quilombo (maroon communities).[2] Quilombos were consistently marked as a threat to the state and enemies of the colonial project from the first record of a quilombo in Brazil in 1575, located in Bahia.[3] Most of the existing documents on quilombos and their histories were written by and from the perspective of the state. Thus, according to Beatriz Nascimento, "[any] investigation of the quilombo is based on the question of power".[4] Nascimento's interrogation of the

relations of power through the quilombo, as reflected in the epigraph above, is instructive for uncovering the stories of people whom the continuities of colonial violence and antidemocratic practices in Brazil have not yet defeated. The egregious response to the COVID-19 pandemic, attacks on LGBTQIA+ people, quilombos, quilombo residents, and the spread of misinformation during the presidency of the far-right politician Jair Messias Bolsonaro made visible the continuities of antidemocratic practices in Brazil.

2. The Project of the Extreme Right under Bolsonaro

The Brazilian Ministry of Health released a report in April 2020 on the increasing number of deaths related to the COVID-19 virus. When asked to comment, the then extreme-right president responded, "So what? I lament it. What do you want me to do? I am Messiah (Messias), but I do not perform miracles".[5] Several months later, during another rise in cases from what the president had referred to as the "little flu", Bolsonaro stated, "There is no way of avoiding it, avoiding reality. We have to stop being a country of sissies".[6] By March 2021, less than a year later, the number of deaths in Brazil came second to the United States with more than 260,000 deaths, and a new variant emerged, and was linked to the increase in cases within 24 h. Regarding the rise in cases and deaths, the president commented, "Stop whining. How long are you going to keep crying about it? How much longer will you stay at home and close everything? No one can stand it anymore. We regret the deaths, again, but we need a solution".[7] The president doubled down on his stance from the start of the pandemic, and the news came to light soon thereafter that he had ignored numerous emails from Pfizer sent from August to November 2020 to supply the COVID-19 vaccine to Brazil.[8]

In June 2021, the executive director of Amnesty International Brazil and a representative of Movimento Alerta, Jurema Werneck, presented part of an early study on the negligence of the federal government to the congressional investigative committee (Comissão Parlamentar de Inquérito) on the response to COVID-19. At the hearing, Werneck cited data from a report by Movimento Alerta entitled "Avoidable Deaths by COVID-19 in Brazil (*Mortes Evitáveis por COVID-19 no Brasil*)," which estimated that 120,000 deaths could have been avoided by March 2021 had Brazil implemented the scientifically and internationally recognized measures to control the transmission of the virus.[9] The report also stated that quilombo residents and Indigenous people were among vulnerable populations who should have been a priority for prevention measures against COVID-19.[10] The deaths of Indigenous elders, Bernaldina José Pedro and Chief Aruká Juma, from COVID-19 were among the irreparable losses to communities whose language and customs they held. Bernaldina José Pedro was a speaker of the Macuxi language, and Chief Aruká Juma was the last surviving man of the Juma people.[11]

The approach taken by the extreme-right-wing government throughout the pandemic was consistent with the political project laid out in the campaign for the election that marked Black, poor, Indigenous, houseless, Northeastern, and LGBTQIA+ people as threats to the status quo of the nuclear family and public safety. For example, Bolsonaro latched onto the School without Homophobia program (Escola Sem Homofobia) that was designed to teach students about sexuality, sexual identity and homophobia, and the human rights of LGBTQIA+ people. The president linked "gay kit"—a term employed by extreme-right political actors meant to depict the School without Homophobia program as a seminar to turn children gay—to the Worker's Party Presidential Candidate Fernando Haddad.[12] Haddad was part of the Ministry of Education in 2010, which evaluated the project that was never implemented in schools. Bolsonaro resuscitated the "gay kit" in the 2018 campaign, and Haddad was falsely accused of distributing baby bottle nipples in the shape of a phallus to daycare centers.[13]

At an event held in Rio de Janeiro in 2017 that was recorded on video, Bolsonaro indicated his plans for the presidency. One of the objectives of Bolsonaro was to integrate quilombo communities and "to put an end to the history of the quilombos [pej.] who receive resources from the state and are not productive".[14] He took the same position on

Indigenous people and their right to land. The discourse on quilombos from the 2017 event came into practice as deforestation and fires surged in the northeast and the state abandoned quilombos.[15]

Bolsonaro's objective for the quilombos was not solely to dismantle them by the force of the state but to end and discredit a longer history of communities that he deemed unproductive. During the same event, Bolsonaro stated he had visited a quilombo and that the "lightest afro-descendant weighed seven arrobas", which is a measurement commonly used to weigh cattle and is the rough equivalent of 230 pounds.[16] The word for a resident of a quilombo is "quilombola", whereas "afro-descendant" refers to all people of African descent. The president's desire to exterminate the quilombo and the way he dehumanized and collapsed African descendants and quilombolas do not deviate from the long durée of colonial and antidemocratic practices in Brazil.

In Beatriz Nascimento's 1981 incomplete essay entitled "Alternative Social Systems Organized by Black People From Quilombos to Favelas (b)", she contends that the colonial state consistently overlooked the differences between Black-led social movements and social systems, loosely defined. By the eighteenth century, the quilombo became a general term used by the state to denote groups of fugitives of five or more.[17] Nascimento argues that this "concept of the quilombo was fixed in legislation in Brazilian captaincies, through the Portuguese Overseas Council, [and] demonstrates above all that quilombos, or, more accurately, black people—whether enslaved, fugitive or free–constituted a concrete danger to the maintenance of control over the Colony. . .".[18] The colonial authorities lumped quilombos and groups of five or more Black individuals into a single category as a tactic of repression and to protect the state.[19] According to Nascimento, traditional historiography was responsive to the concept of the quilombo established by the colonial government. In other words, the broad definition of the quilombo determined by the state captures its inability to see the nuances of Black social movements, social systems, and, effectively, Black life. Moreover, the general definition also exhibits the power of naming to facilitate repression that becomes fixed for repetition politically and historically. Nascimento's interrogation of the quilombo uncovers the ways in which the state has employed a colonizing mentality and antidemocratic practices to repress and protect itself from the people marked as a threat.

By following Beatriz Nascimento's intervention on state power and the quilombo, the extreme-right playbook for repression collapses diverse groups of people into short, simple phrases borrowing from the tactics of the colonial government against quilombos and the Black & African Diaspora. Bolsonaro's "gay kit" was a shorthand for the attack on LGBTQIA+ people and their rights that could also be used against the Worker's Party. Bolsonaro's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, at the cost of thousands of lives, was weaponized to antagonize Brazilians, particularly those who were most vulnerable to the virus.[20] Responses and public health initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic guided by the state apparatus in Brazil threatened to set into motion a process "whereby the bonds of human interdependence change and lead to new arrangements" and "thus breeds not only public power but also human collectivities."[21] In other words, mobilizing state institutions during the pandemic had the potential to bring people together in ways that the state could not fully control and could threaten the project of the extreme right. Taken together, the attacks on Black, poor, Indigenous, Northeastern, and LGBTQIA+ people during the Bolsonaro era laid bare the project of the extreme right as well as the vulnerability of the state.

3. Counterinsurgent Historiography and Erotics of the Quilombo

In addition to making clear the project of the state, Nascimento's work on the quilombo also sheds light on the people and histories who have not yet been defeated that "Counterinsurgent historiography" has attempted to silence.[22] Through Nascimento's work, Counterinsurgent historiography can be understood as the stories, (archival) documents, and practices that render some powerless and defeated while reserving power only for the

supposed victors. Nascimento's interrogation of history emerged from her training as a historian and how she understood her position in a society that "always sought to reject Black people".[23] Throughout her education, she observed that Black Brazilians were absent in important historical events, which did not correspond with her lived reality.[24] Beatriz Nascimento developed a practice of reading between the lines in the History of Brazil for "a massive participation, oftentimes independent, and strong participation of Black people in Brazil".[25] Nascimento's approach to history provides a method and model to address the long durée of Counterinsurgent historiography and the constant impetus to reject Black people and their histories from the colonial period to the twenty-first century. Through her work, Beatriz Nascimento made connections between the strategic misrepresentation of the role of quilombolas and quilombos in the History of Brazil and anti-Blackness in Brazilian society.

Bolsonaro's declaration during his presidential campaign that he would "put an end to that history of the quilombo" borrows from Counterinsurgent historiography and exemplifies how it can be operationalized in the twenty-first century. Under the Bolsonaro government, the state would ostensibly have the power to erase people and histories marked as a threat to the state. Counterinsurgent historiography can be employed as the basis for policy and through institutions that position residents and citizens as the key sources of harm to the state while legitimizing the neglect of these populations who continuously fight for the right to exist. In the instances where the state adopted policies specific to Black Brazilians, they were rooted in a "change in discourse of state institutions as a transformation of the way that citizenship was defined".[26] The policies on their own, however, have not guaranteed changes in the lives of everyday people, and activists have struggled for their implementation.[27] The Bolsonaro government leaned into the long-standing discourse of Counterinsurgent historiography in Brazil to dismantle policy that Black people navigated to work toward their benefit and revised definitions of citizenship to exclude anyone designated as a threat. Bolsonaro's perception of quilombos reinforced Counterinsurgent historiography and was emblematic of his approach to those deemed outside of the qualifications of citizenship for his vision of Brazil.

Beatriz Nascimento's approach to historiography through the quilombo opens paths to dismantle discourse underpinned by Counterinsurgent historiography. It also provides a model for recognizing the histories of marginalized people's lives beyond the state. Nascimento grounds the history of the quilombo in the Portuguese occupation of Brazil and Angola (Kongo) in the 1500s and the transatlantic slave trade that brought these territories into further interrelation. All that the quilombo encompassed on the African continent—cosmologies, technology, and community-building—crossed the Atlantic with African captives and was put into practice throughout the Americas. In the Brazilian case, Palmares became the most well-known quilombo, which was located in the captaincy of Pernambuco and first referenced in archival documents in 1597.[28] Palmares constituted many quilombos with thousands of inhabitants and a strong economy and military, enabling them to protect themselves from Portuguese and Dutch attacks throughout the seventeenth century.[29] Much of the archival material and the information known about Palmares come from the documentation of the attacks meant to destroy it. By official accounts, Palmares was destroyed in 1695 under the leadership of Zumbi, who was killed on November 20 of the same year.[30] However, there is evidence that thousands of quilombolas remained near the site of Palmares, and the attacks on these residents by the state persisted until at least 1725.[31]

Palmares, the largest known quilombo, and Zumbi, the last recognized leader, have been symbols of resistance for the Black movement since the 1970s. The date of his death, November 20th, was chosen to commemorate Black Consciousness Day (Dia da Consciência Negra) and remains a symbol of cultural resistance that has continued to "nourish yearnings for freedom in the national conscience" in the twentieth century.[32] Nascimento frequently references Zumbi in her conception of the quilombo, but she does not necessarily follow the traditional top-down, masculinist narrative. In her writing, Nascimento emphasizes that Zumbi was part of Palmares, and neither Zumbi nor the quilombolas would have survived

in the woods alone.[33] The ecosphere in the Serra da Barriga in the northeastern state of Alagoas, where Palmares was situated, was a co-constitutive and sustaining element of the quilombo.

In the essay "For a (New) Existential and Physical Territory", Nascimento identifies the power of the quilombo and quilombolas in an African "world-sense" that decenters Western epistemology and conceptualization of society.[34] World-sense, rather than a worldview, "is a more inclusive way of describing the conception of the world by different cultural groups" and best accounts for Nascimento's articulation of the Vital Force (força vital) as a type of power.[35] Vital Force, according to Nascimento, is a Bantu principle contained in the phoneme "ntu" and is part of the word "muntu", which translates to human being.[36] The muntu "exists as a reflection, and in animals, minerals, plants, and human beings (both living and dead)", and the ntu only has force in recognition, or mirroring, of the other.[37] Vital Force does not weaken or die with an individual, but instead comes in contact with the "*Earth*" to be restored and reconstitute "*Life*".[38] Vital Force is part of a Bantu world-sense that conceives of power and being (ontology) different from a Western worldview. Through Nascimento's application of world-sense in her interrogation of the quilombo, she displaces the supposed powerlessness of quilombolas and marginalized people in the Counterinsurgent historiography that follows the Western worldview.

Even though she embraces the figure of Zumbi dos Palmares as symbolic of the quilombo at Palmares, she does not maintain a masculinist narrative that equates men with Vital Force. Nascimento does not establish a history that places solely Black and African men as the center of narratives of power. Instead, she argues that Vital Force was central to the survival of the quilombo and quilombolas, and the source of their power did not derive from Western notions of power that sought to destroy them. The relations of power and Vital Force held by quilombolas differed from the colonial counterinsurgency that read the quilombo as a threat to their power. The power of the quilombo did not hinge on state power, as the counterinsurgency derived its power from the attacks and destruction of the quilombo.

Counterinsurgent historiography casts the quilombo within the logic of the state and creates a limited space to envision the histories of quilombos in Brazil. Nascimento argues,

> Se o quilombo, como a historiografia trata, foi um movimento político que não logrou êxito político totalmente, ele não pode ser entendido só dessa maneira porque o logro da tomada do poder do quilombo, no meu entender, porque o quilombo não se preocupava especificamente com a tomada de poder, mas sim com a organização em si e a manutenção da estrutura original. . .[A] gente só conhece o quilombo através da documentação oficial, justamente a documentação da repressão, quer dizer, só o registro da história branca é que nos diz o que é o quilombo. . .[39]
>
> [Translation: If the quilombo, as historiography treats it, was a political movement that did not reach complete political success, it cannot be understood only in this way because the attainment of power of the quilombo, in my understanding. . .was not a specific concern, but it was concerned with organizing itself and the maintenance of its original structure. . .[W]e only know the quilombo through official documentation, precisely documentation of repression, that is, only the record of white history that tells us what the quilombo is. . .]

Counterinsurgent historiography obscured the histories of the organization and structure of the quilombo, which could have provided different understandings of the quilombo. In the epigraph, when Nascimento states, "What use do we have for History? If I am powerless, I have no need of it", it is not a dismissal of the significance of histories but, instead, an indictment of the failures of a History that does not recognize the power in everything and everyone.[40]

Nascimento's intervention and critique of the history of the quilombo offers a historiographical method that I read as the "erotics of the quilombo", which sees Counterinsurgent historiography and the richness of the histories it denies. The erotics of the quilombo

borrows from Audre Lorde's exploration of the erotic that closely resembles the potential for the lifeforce (força vital) of the quilombo in Nascimento's work. On the erotic, Lorde contends,

> The very word erotic comes from the Greek word eros, the personification of love in all its aspects—born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony. When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the lifeforce of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives.[41]

Lorde and Nascimento's use of the word lifeforce and the overlapping examples of how and where they understand lifeforce in practice enables us to see a shared world-sense in Black feminist thought in the Americas. An erotics of the quilombo places emphasis on the use of lifeforce as a way to make our lives more beautiful and happier, which also dislocates the notion of power from a Eurocentric worldview. Lorde's concept of the erotic and Nascimento's quilombo were generated in a "historical process of intense cultural dynamic (adaptation, resistance, reinterpretation, and creation of new models)" born out of the legacies of slavery and European colonization.[42]

In the film, Nascimento reads her poetry with the video of landscapes and Black cultural events interspersed with Afro-Brazilian syncretic religious rituals and ceremonies, samba performances, and newsreels. Nascimento's voiceover of her writing on the quilombo, paired with the footage of Afro-Brazilian culture and practices, invites the viewer into the erotics of the quilombo by demonstrating the materiality of the continuities of the quilombo from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. Among the lessons on what we must understand about the erotic, Audre Lorde argues that it should "not be misconstrued as demanding the impossible from ourselves nor others. Such a demand incapacitates everyone in the process".[43] Even though the tone of Nascimento's film, *Ori*, is dreamlike, it is paired with the lived experiences of Black Brazilians and the African Diaspora. The history, present, and future of the quilombo are explored through candomblé, samba, Black soul, and the landscape of the Serra da Barriga. Nascimento's erotics of the quilombo are grounded in the multiplicities of Black life that are neither distant nor intangible possibilities for the African Diaspora in Brazil.

In the final minutes of *Ori*, Nascimento draws connections between Zumbi and Palmares, Afro-syncretic religious practices, and Black women through a compilation of footage of Black Brazilian women with Nascimento's narration. She states, "I saw you Zumbi, in many journeys of your descendants. . . I see you Zumbi. I see the woman in you in search of myself".[44] There is no space or distance between Nascimento, Zumbi, and the Black women shown in this scene. Nascimento's use of "I" and "you" does not advance a universal "I" to speak for others, nor does it reach toward an idea of Black unity based on any one individual. "I see you Zumbi. I see the woman in you in search of myself", articulates the ntu and muntu—the necessary mirroring of lifeforce.

Brazilian scholar Dora Santana has also drawn attention to this scene in the film to argue that Nascimento's "black womanhood is tied to the refusal to accept that blackness needs to be imagined through a masculine figure". Through this move, she trans-es the quilombo.[45] Nascimento's articulation of Black womanhood, the quilombo through Zumbi, and Afro-syncretic religious practitioners in this film sequence untethers gender normativity from the quilombo and pursues a deep and shared connection with others.[46] As Nascimento argues earlier in *Ori*, "[t]he face of one is a reflection of another, one's body is a reflection of another, and each body is a reflection of everybody."[47] The quilombo is for everybody. The erotics of the quilombo as a methodology is a mirror to the past, present, and future to pay attention to the power of the small and captivating stories of those who have not yet been defeated and of whom History (with a capital H) has deemed to be powerless. Moreover, it highlights the power everybody possesses and the necessity of seeing each other as Counterinsurgent historiographies make various ways of being invisible and limit what we envision as possible.

Beatriz Nascimento's work, similar to that of Black feminist scholars Audre Lorde and Lélia Gonzalez, frequently centered on the perspectives and experiences of Black women in society.[48] The trans-ing of the quilombo was grounded in a Black feminist approach that highlighted the constant erasure of Black women in history and society and the imperative to listen to the perspectives of Black women. Nascimento does not place the burden solely on the backs of Black women to work against Counterinsurgent historiographies and politics but demonstrates that it must occur through the collective effort of all human beings. Trans-ing the quilombo is the insistence on seeing each other and all of our histories outside of the confines of a gender binary imposed through the same Western worldview that informed the dominant historiography of the quilombo against which Nascimento writes. Her articulation of the quilombo pushes us to see everybody in a context where counterinsurgent historiographies and politics work to make invisible those who are marked as a threat.

Brazilian geographer Alex Ratts, who has been critical to the recent recognition and publication of Beatriz Nascimento's work, has pointed to a "geopoetics of the quilombo" in Nascimento's texts. Ratts's geopoetics of the quilombo makes clear the resignification of territory as spaces of and for community and social organization in Nascimento's work. Ratts argues, "the Black body can extend itself symbolically to the maximum, to the point that it may be confused with the landscape, with the territory of quilombolas, sites where candomblé is practiced, with parts of Africa and with the entire planet".[49] The geopoetics of the quilombo underscores a reorientation and communion with the land even as the state attempts to enforce the spatial logic of slavery through marginalization and segregation.[50] The power of an individual does not end within the physical body, nor can borders and boundaries of the state hem it in because the power is intertwined with the earth.

Ratts has also demonstrated that Nascimento's interrogation of race, gender, class, and identity places her work in conversation with Black feminist scholars in the Americas–Lélia Gonzalez, Angela Davis, and Audre Lorde—whose work anticipated the concept of intersectionality. Nascimento's examination of the history of the quilombo paired with an intersectional approach and the geopoetics of the quilombo are part of a tradition of the "Black feminist spatial imagination" among Black women thinkers and scholars in the Americas. Black feminist spatial imagination, according to Kishi Animashaun Ducre, "is an orientation that accounts for the merger of frames around race, gender, and ecology; it serves as a unique departure from conventional Black feminist analysis by its particular attention to the construct of space in Black feminist epistemology".[51] Similar to Ducre's approach to intersectionality, Nascimento's work engages "a visual understanding of spatial intersections and interlocking oppressions. . .and with the distance within and between social identities in the relationship to yet a second spatial dimension: power."[52] The Vital Force (força vital), geopoetics, and erotics of the quilombo address the histories of oppression from the colonial period through the twentieth century and highlight the spatial dimension of power.

Nascimento's Black feminist spatial imagination takes seriously the stories and lives of those who have not yet been defeated—including, but not limited to, Black Brazilians—who have been the targets of the project of the extreme right and erased in History. Her approach interrogates power and reconfigures classificatory spatial practices, as enacted through longstanding practices of oppression that "rewards us for consuming, claiming, and owning things. . . for wanting and demarcating "our place" in the same way that those in power do (often through the displacement of others)".[53] Beatriz Nascimento's approach to the quilombo demonstrates the histories and everyday realities that can survive alongside and within different forms of power in any space without seeking ownership over territory or the imperative to displace other people to establish itself.

The erotics of the quilombo in Nascimento's work highlight the amalgamation of ungendered creative power, lifeforce, empowered knowledge, and sustained power that is available to us at any time (histories) and in any space (geographies). The erotics of the quilombo lays bare a kind of power that can be responsive to, but not dependent on,

the state or oppressive forces as a crucial source of power. As Nascimento argues in the documentary *Ori*, "However much a social system may dominate, one can create a different system within it. . .Each individual holds the power [is the power]. Each person is the quilombo".[54] The power of the quilombo is sustained through the power of each individual, yet not specific to any one person, and can exist independently of social systems.

Nascimento's work demonstrates ways in which the space of the quilombo is a location of racial domination and resistance that "maps the ties and tensions between material and ideological dominations and oppositional spatial practices".[55] Furthermore, Nascimento's concept of the quilombo does the work of Black (women's) geographies to signal "alternative patterns that work alongside and across traditional geographies".[56] The Black feminist spatial imagination of the quilombo can be employed to uncover the tensions between material and ideological practices and oppositional space from the Brazilian colonial period to the present. It also underlies the always-present alternatives to traditional geographies, historiographies, and sources of power.

Nascimento's work and approach to the quilombo insists on finding other ways to envision space and how we inhabit it. Regarding the space of the quilombo, Nascimento states in the film *Ori*, "The world is my quilombo. My space is the quilombo. Where I am, I am. When I am, I am".[57] Beatriz Nascimento's Black feminist spatial imaginary of the quilombo positions Black women as always in place regardless of space and time, rather than a claim of ownership over territory. Moreover, Nascimento's declaration of always being in place challenges colonial logic and Counterinsurgent historiography that has rendered Black women as placeless.[58] The quilombo and Nascimento's place in it is not limited to the boundaries of the state, to her specific body, nor is it confined to a historical period. In this way, Nascimento shows how anybody can be in communion and reorient their relationship with the land. The quilombo as history, geography, and a method rethink and disrupt the classificatory, traditional spatial practices and logic that seek to contain marginalized people by simultaneously containing them and making them placeless.

4. Placelessness, Order, Progress, and Power

The creation and maintenance of placelessness have been vital to the project and power of the state and elite from the colonial period to the present. Among the ways that placelessness is established is through the nineteenth-century positivist notion of "order and progress" that remains affixed to the Brazilian flag as a national tagline. The significance of order and progress emerged out of widespread anxiety on the part of the elite and state that Brazil would not be able to secure a "dignified" position among nations that were part of a white, Christian, and Western civilization in the years after the abolition of slavery.[59] Order, meted out by the elite and state actors, was the path toward the progress of the nation they desired, placing those who threatened the path of order and progress at the margins of society. Order and progress are both the measures of political success and the organizing structure of the state to attain power through repression and counterinsurgency.

In the case of the Bolsonaro government, the ideal of "order and progress" was articulated through "public safety", which was used to criminalize and attack social and cultural movements of which Black, poor, Indigenous, Northeastern, and LGBTQIA+ people who tend to be the most expressive and visible. Under the guise of protecting "public safety", state actors on the extreme right attempted to pass legislation to ensure a "sensation of security" meant to be accessible and impact some, but not all, Brazilians.[60] The sensation of security does not guarantee safety. Instead, it is the idea or feeling of safety, order, and distance from peril meant to secure the environment for some against potential danger, which has historically been put into praxis through anti-Blackness.[61] The sensation of security is represented through the police and private security to guard the environment—such as shopping malls, condominiums, and grocery stores—meant for upper-middle-class white people. However, the sensation of safety is not exclusive to this demographic, and the narratives about crime since the 1990s have been embedded in Brazilians' public consciousness and social relations.[62] Bolsonaro's presidential campaign tapped into the

sensation of safety for the nation of which Black, poor, Indigenous, Northeastern, and LGBTQIA+ people were positioned as the danger.

As part of the same political project on the campaign trail, Bolsonaro centered on dismantling the Ministry of Culture that oversees and implements the Lei Rouanet (1991). The law facilitates funding art and culture as part of Brazilian patrimony from businesses as an investment and tax write-off distributed through the federal government. Bolsonaro argued that the Ministry of Culture was "just a business center for the Lei Rouanet"[63]. As president in 2019, Bolsonaro terminated the Ministry of Culture and replaced it with the Special Secretary of Culture as part of the Ministry of Tourism.[64] Bolsonaro also vetoed two bills that would have supported artists and cultural programs impacted by the pandemic. The second vetoed bill passed in March 2022 would have allocated BRL 3 billion per year for five years.[65] Furthermore, in 2023, the subsequent government announced measures to release the funds for more than 1900 artistic projects whose funds, nearly BRL 1 billion, had been blocked by the Bolsonaro government since the beginning of 2022.[66]

In addition to dismantling the Ministry of Culture and attacking the Lei Rouanet, Bolsonaro appointed a Black right-wing journalist as the head of the Palmares Cultural Foundation (Fundação Cultural Palmares). The foundation, created in 1988, was named after the quilombo and leader Zumbi dos Palmares and is tied to the Ministry of Culture. The then president of the Palmares Cultural Foundation, Sérgio Camargo, called Zumbi dos Palmares a 'son of a bitch' and reposted a tweet that read 'LAW & ORDER' by former president U.S. Donald J. Trump as a response to the murder of George Floyd in the United States.[67] Camargo's comments on the legacy of Zumbi and the murder of Floyd were borrowed from and reinforced the narratives of Counterinsurgent historiography that were significant to the project of the extreme right. The Fundação Cultural Palmares was created to preserve Black Brazilian culture—including the recognition and support of existing quilombos—and promote racial equality. The choice to appoint a president whose values ran counter to the mission of the Palmares Cultural Foundation and the decades of work from Black Brazilians toward racial equality and the recognition of quilombos echoed Bolsonaro's campaign platform on his commitments to "put an end to the history of the quilombos".[68]

The Bolsonaro government advanced the projects of the extreme right and was explicit as to who and what they perceived as a threat to the state. The sound bites from the Bolsonaro government posted on social media, the news, or distributed via WhatsApp enabled a steady stream of the project of the extreme right to remain a constant in day-to-day life. Bolsonaro ensured that Brazilians were "bombarded daily by a colonizing mentality. . ., one that not only shapes consciousness and actions but also provides material rewards for submission and acquiescence that far exceed any material gains for resistance, so we must be constantly engaging new ways of thinking and being. We must be critically vigilant".[69] Some of the bombardment of daily messages that reinforced a colonizing mentality came from an organized effort to disseminate information that was attributed to the moniker of the "Hate Cabinet" (Gabinete do Ódio), which operated in a room in the Planalto Presidential Palace during the Bolsonaro government. The Hate Office distributed disinformation on the "gay kit", COVID-19, and attacks on political actors and human rights.[70] WhatsApp, used by approximately 75% of Brazilians and a resource where 41% percent of Brazilians receive their news, was a powerful tool to reach most of the country with disinformation.[71] Between the news cycles that featured soundbites from the Bolsonaro government and the dissemination of disinformation generated by the Hate Cabinet, the project of the extreme right was challenging to avoid daily.

5. Conclusions

Reading Nascimento's work alongside the stream of disinformation and consistent messaging during the Bolsonaro government and against the project of the extreme right enables a path and the tools to be "critically vigilant".[72] Beatriz Nascimento's work highlights the project of imposed placelessness of space, culture, and everyday life, such as

Bolsonaro's effort to eradicate quilombos and the Lei Rouanet. The ties that Nascimento draws between the quilombo, samba, and Black music indicate that culture and its expressions are more profound than state projects as they are rooted in everyday life and ways to sustain ourselves. The attacks on Lei Rouanet were not devasting because of the harm done to the state, but because they limited one of the ways that Black and other marginalized people have funded and supported projects that sustain and preserve life, art, and culture. The extreme-right project against culture and cultural expressions was aimed at destabilizing the places that marginalized people had established for themselves.

The erotics of the quilombo evidence a type of power, whether individual or collective, that cannot be measured by its political success or the attainment of power. For Nascimento, the quilombo was most concerned with organizing itself rather than amassing power that anyone could replicate anywhere and time.[73] In her writing and documentary, Nascimento was cautious not to essentialize the quilombo and its organizing structure but instead show the reflections of the quilombo through multiple sources of everyday life in Brazil, such as samba schools or concerts featuring Black musicians and audiences. These reflections point to the erotics of the quilombo that are "born of Chaos and personifying creative power and harmony".[74] The reflections of chaos in the documentary of everyday life run counter to the ideals of the positivist tagline on the Brazilian flag, "Order and Progress", which has been the guiding ideal and praxis for different modes of oppression by state actors and the elite since the late nineteenth century. The erotics of the quilombo make visible the modes of oppression by the state as well as the people and communities whose creative power was meant to be stifled.

The erotics of the quilombo also calls for not only the recognition of the histories of marginalized people but points to the task to "make life more beautiful and happier".[75] Through Nascimento's work, the history of the quilombo at Palmares is a living history of marginalized people. It is an open invitation for everyone to rethink the spaces we inhabit and how we inhabit them. The possibility and responsibility of rethinking the world through the quilombo equips us with a world-sense to sustain ourselves and guides us toward the ways we make life more beautiful and happier. Though History and traditional geographies are co-constitutive of the project of the extreme right from colonialism through the Bolsonaro government's attempt to dampen these realities, there is an imperative to make an effort to expose the beauty of our creative power. The erotics of the quilombo call on us to move differently from the logic of Counterinsurgent historiography, colonialism, and traditional geographies.

The erotics of the quilombo offers a way to read for the lives of Black, poor, Indigenous, Northeastern, and LGBTQIA+ people whose lives and everyday ways became a target of misinformation and the perceived problem and project for extreme-right state actors to resolve. Though the project of the extreme right fails to recognize the rich and captivating stories and diversity of the individuals in the groups they seek to oppress, the fact of being pushed into a small space together highlights the necessity not to reinforce discriminatory models enacted by the state and what is at stake in seeing the richness in each other. The erotics of the quilombo calls on us to see and sense the power that resides in all of us and the possibilities for collective power regardless of the project of the state and its attempts to diminish the power of our lives.

The Bolsonaro government, like other projects of the extreme right from the sixteenth to the twenty-first centuries, caused harm to millions of people living in Brazil. For as long as colonial logics continue to guide state projects and the project of the extreme right, Nascimento's work on the quilombo provides a model to see each other and to read for communities and systems that exist alongside and within a state without being defined by or dependent on it to exist. The example of the quilombo at Palmares by Nascimento offers a way of seeing the possibilities of existence in Brazil that is neither singular nor specific to the sixteenth-century maroon community. Nascimento's work on the quilombo signals a way of being in the present as much as it does a history in the distant past.

Similar to how the quilombo could not be extracted from the dynamics of slavery and the colonial state, the lives of marginalized people in the present cannot be separated from the project of the extreme right and colonial legacies. However, the erotics of the quilombo reaffirms our task to sustain ourselves in such a way that does not reinforce discriminatory models found in Counterinsurgent historiography, but instead moves us toward a fairer society. The quilombo and erotics of the quilombo as a methodology may not take us to new or unknown places but instead might ground us in the already existing spaces and ways of being that make life more beautiful and happier.

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Notes

1 (Smith et al. 2021, p. 305).
2 (Nascimento 2023, p. 3).
3 (F. d. S. Gomes 2015, p. 12).
4 (Gerber 1989).
5 (Garcia and Hamanda 2020; my translation).
6 (P. H. Gomes 2020; Walsh et al. 2020; my translation).
7 (BBC 2021).
8 (Boadle and Marcello 2021).
9 (Loureiro Werneck et al. 2021, p. 34).
10 Ibid.
11 (Mori 2020; Ferrante et al. 2021, p. 444).
12 (Vega 2021).
13 Ibid.
14 (Bresciani 2018; my translation).
15 (Darian-Smith 2022, pp. 13–14; Nunes 2023).
16 (Bresciani 2018; my translation).
17 (Nascimento 2023, p. 198).
18 (Nascimento 2023, p. 199).
19 Ibid.
20 (Hallal 2021, p. 374).
21 (Hochman 2016, p. 5).
22 (Sodré 2023, pp. 365–69).
23 (Nascimento 2018a, pp. 125–65, 127; my translation).
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 (Paschel 2016, p. 189).
27 Ibid.
28 Gomes, *Mocambos e Quilombos*, 78. Palmares was called Angola Janga (Little Angola) by the quilombolas who were mostly from Congo and Angola during the formation of the quilombo (Ibid., pp. 79–80).
29 Ibid., pp. 79–92.

30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., pp. 92–93.
32 (Smith et al. 2021, p. 303).
33 (Gerber 1989).
34 (Oyěwùmí 2005, p. 4).
35 Ibid.
36 (Smith et al. 2021, p. 313).
37 (Nascimento 2018b, p. 428).
38 (Smith et al. 2021, p. 316).
39 (Nascimento 2018a, p. 130; my translation).
40 (Smith et al. 2021, p. 305).
41 (Lorde 2007, pp. 53–59).
42 (Gonzalez 1988, pp. 69–82; my translation).
43 (Lorde 2007, p. 54).
44 (Gerber 1989).
45 (Santana 2019, pp. 216–17).
46 (Lorde 2007, p. 56).
47 (Gerber 1989).
48 (Ratts and Nascimento 2007, p. 54).
49 Ibid., p. 69; my translation.
50 (Carneiro 2007, p. 11).
51 (Ducre 2018, p. 22).
52 Ibid., p. 23.
53 (McKittrick and Woods 2007, p. 5).
54 (Gerber 1989).
55 (McKittrick 2006, p. xiv).
56 Ibid.
57 (Gerber 1989).
58 (McKittrick 2006, p. 133).
59 (Koguruma 2001, p. 97).
60 (Larkins 2023, p. 3).
61 Ibid., pp. 3–4.
62 Ibid., p. 5.
63 (Boreki 2018; my translation).
64 (Caldas 2021).
65 (France 24 2022).
66 (Tortella and Moliterno 2023).
67 (Phillips 2020).
68 (Bresciani 2018).
69 (Hooks 2010, p. 26).
70 (Ozawa et al. 2023, p. 3).
71 Ibid.
72 (Hooks 2010, p. 26).
73 (Nascimento 2018a, p. 130).
74 (Lorde 2007, p. 55).
75 (Smith et al. 2021, p. 305).

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