

3 **Agrofuel expansion and black resistance in Brazil**

Energy landscapes as materialized unequal power relations

*Martina Neuburger, Rafaela Rau, and Tobias Schmitt*

S. 49–65

aus:

# **Climate Change, Security Risks, and Violent Conflicts**

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in Hamburg

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# Table of Contents

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1	<b>Introduction: Research on climate change and security in Hamburg</b>	1
	<i>Michael Brzoska and Jürgen Scheffran</i>	
2	<b>Climate change and weather extremes as risk multipliers</b>	19
	Tipping points, cascading events, and societal instability	
	<i>Jürgen Scheffran</i>	
3	<b>Agrofuel expansion and black resistance in Brazil</b>	49
	Energy landscapes as materialized unequal power relations	
	<i>Martina Neuburger, Rafaela Rau, and Tobias Schmitt</i>	
4	<b>Interaction between wind energy, climate vulnerability, and violent conflict in Northern Kenya</b>	67
	<i>Janpeter Schilling and Luise Werland</i>	
5	<b>The roadmap to energy security in Egypt</b>	83
	<i>Mostafa Shaaban</i>	
6	<b>Water allocation in transboundary river systems in times of climate change</b>	103
	<i>P. Michael Link</i>	
7	<b>Managing water-related vulnerability and resilience of urban communities in the Pearl River Delta</b>	121
	<i>Liang Emlyn Yang</i>	

- 8 Challenges and opportunities for historical irrigated agricultural systems in Mediterranean regions 143  
 Technical, cultural, and environmental assets for sustainable rural development in Ricote (Murcia, Spain)  
*Andrea L. Balbo, José María García Avilés, Johannes Hunink, Francisco Alcón, Juan Esteban Palenzuela Cruz, Julia Martínez-Fernández, Arnald Puy, Juan Miguel Rodríguez Lopez, Katharina Heider, Rodrigo García Abenza, and Jürgen Scheffran*
- 9 Sustainable access to rural and urban land by integrating local perspectives 163  
 The potential of using Information and Communication Technologies  
*Juan Miguel Rodríguez Lopez, Katharina Heider, Andrea L. Balbo and Jürgen Scheffran*
- 10 Drought, flight, conflict: “climate migration” as a driver for conflict? 175  
*Christiane J. Fröhlich*
- 11 Disrupting the knowledge-power politics of human mobility in the context of climate change 195  
 Questioning established categories  
*Sarah Louise Nash*
- 12 Explaining the diversity of resilience in the climate change and security discourse 209  
 Resilience in translation  
*Delf Rothe*
- 13 Climate change and planning for the military 229  
*Michael Brzoska*
- 14 How does path dependence affect the climate change-conflict nexus? 251  
*Jasmin S. A. Link*

15	Critical evaluation of the implementation of the concept of environmental security	263
	Case study of the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC)	
	<i>Judith Nora Hardt</i>	
16	The Anthropocene: an opportunity for transdisciplinary and inclusive science?	287
	<i>Andrea L. Balbo, Delf Rothe, and Jürgen Scheffran</i>	
	About the authors	297



# 3 Agrofuel expansion and black resistance in Brazil

## Energy landscapes as materialized unequal power relations

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Martina Neuburger, Rafaela Rau, and Tobias Schmitt

### Abstract

*In recent years, energy crops have become one of the most important strategies towards a sustainable economy in order to avoid the use of fossil fuels. In a way, Brazil can be seen as a pioneer since already during the oil crisis of the 1970s sugarcane ethanol was promoted there through extensive state programs. The associated expansion of sugarcane and other energy crops, though, is largely driven by large-scale agro-industrial enterprises, with the result that indigenous groups and quilombos are increasingly displaced. Understanding landscape as a materialization of power relations, we analyze socioeconomic dynamics in the municipality of Pompéu in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais as case study region.*

*Doing so, we show that landscapes in general and energy landscapes more specifically represent the arena of socio-political negotiation on development pathways and models in their specific regional and historical context. Unequal power relations result in practical, symbolic, and discursive dominance of the most powerful land use, economic logic, and social life by delegitimizing, marginalizing, and disregarding alternative ideas. These processes are embedded in postcolonial entanglements and constitute (energy) landscapes within a globalizing world.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Energy landscapes, agrofuels, black resistance, power relations, Brazil.*

## Introduction

In recent years, energy crops have become one of the most important strategies towards a sustainable economy in order to avoid the use of fossil fuels. In a way, Brazil can be regarded as a pioneer, since already during the oil crisis of the 1970s sugarcane ethanol was promoted there through extensive state programs – at that time, however, in order to reduce dependence on expensive oil imports. The associated expansion of sugarcane and other energy crops, though, is largely driven by large-scale agro-industrial enterprises, with the result that population groups that are not integrated into these forms of production are increasingly displaced. Especially indigenous groups and *quilombos* suffer from these developments. That means that the expansion of energy crops not only stands in conflict with food production and livelihoods of these people but jeopardize their food security and sovereignty as well.

In the following, these conflict constellations and displacement processes will be the focus of our interest as they are clearly reflected in the landscape of the region in question. Here, we understand landscape as a materialization of power relations, as they were already structured in the colonial period in Brazil and are still relevant in political, economic, and social processes (Mitchell 2003, Crosgrove 2017). Using the Pompéu region in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais as an example, it becomes clear how colonial and global power relations are being inscribed into the landscape at the local level through practices, discourses, and symbols.

After a brief outline of the main political, institutional, and socio-economic conditions in Brazil (section 2) and a presentation of the case-study region (section 3), we analyze the efficacy of power relationships that were already established in colonial times and their materialization in the Pompéu landscape to show the underlying dynamics (section 4). This finally serves as the basis for a new look at energy landscapes in Brazil (section 5).

## Colonial power relations in the Brazilian present

Even before the conquest there were already indigenous groups inhabiting the northeastern coastline of the present Brazilian territory. They practiced a production system similar to peasant agriculture. With the onset of the colonial era in Brazil – dating back to the arrival of the Portuguese in 1500 – the systematic displacement of the indigenous groups and the destruction of any evidence of their presence began (Dean 1996). Portuguese landowners, who received large estates from the Portuguese crown, cultivated sugarcane at a large scale, as the “white gold” brought about substantial revenues in Europe. The “sugar barons” thus established themselves not only as economic but also as political elite. These so-called *coronéis* had extensive power in



the region and controlled not only the fortunes of all humans on their sugarcane plantations – most of whom were enslaved and abducted from Africa – but also the events in the Portuguese colony from the former capital, Salvador. Neither the later economic cycles in which cocoa, cotton, and coffee had become the dominant export products, nor the attainment of Brazilian independence from the Portuguese crown in 1822 brought about any fundamental change in the unequal power relations, in which landlords had the controlling power due to shared interests and personal unions with government bodies (Schmalz 2012, Dietz 2016).

This is reflected to this day by the fact that the interests of sugar producers are directly or indirectly protected by the state. During the Great Depression in the 1920s, sugar prices fell dramatically but the state subsidized sugar production. In the early 1970s, the state set up the ProÁlcool program, which was designed to reduce dependence on expensive oil imports (Kohlhepp 2008, Chilcote 2006, Prado Jr 2017). These subsidies essentially benefited the large-scale sugarcane producers as well as the sugar or rather ethanol factories. Thus, they contributed to the preservation of power of the former sugar barons. These subsidies were reduced in the context of the neoliberal economic reforms of the 1990s. However, the global and national bio-energy debate has given rise to new opportunities to legitimize subsidies for sugarcane (Amman et al. 2011). Therefore, the agricultural oligarchy was able to maintain its dominance and power over many centuries based on a discourse on progress, growth, and – more recently – climate protection.

This development is closely linked to the history of Afro-Brazilian groups in Brazil who have been affected by discrimination and racism since their enslavement on the sugarcane plantations (Zeuske 2013, Ribeiro 2015). The inhumane working and living conditions on the plantations led to escape attempts by many slaves. Some succeeded in escaping and thus settlements of escaped (former) slaves emerged in remote and inaccessible areas. Despite the expansion of the Portuguese and later colonist settlements into the hinterland, some of these settlements, now called *quilombos*, have been able to survive even though the living conditions there are mostly poor (Reis 1996). Even with the end of their persecution with the abolition of slavery in 1888, racist worldviews and discrimination continue to exist so that the Afro-Brazilian population is disadvantaged in almost all sectors of society – education, health, income, etc. (Telles 2004; Da Costa 2016). It was only 100 years after the abolition of slavery – which can be seen as a success of long-standing struggles by black social movements in Brazil – that Article 68 of the Brazilian Constitution established the right to land and self-determined life for *quilombolas* and thereby allowed for their recognition as a distinct category of “traditional” communities (Farfán-Santos 2016). In order to carry out the recognition and award procedures, the Fundação Cultural Palmares was founded in 1988, which is subordinate to the

Brazilian Ministry of Culture (Boaventura Leite 2015). To be recognized, the communities must demonstrate their traditions, how they are linked with their past, and their relationship with the land. Additionally, they must show that their lifestyle differs from that of the majority (Boaventura Leite 2015: 1227). Nevertheless, the continuity of structural racism remains evident to date, with over 3000 communities recognized as *quilombolas*, while only 248 of the territories were officially ascribed (CPISP 2015, Ventura 2018).

The dynamics presented below, which are relevant to the present expansion of sugarcane cultivation and the formation of energy landscapes, must be considered in the context of these historical processes. Sugarcane cultivation was and is still dominated by large-scale production, while the history and current situation of *quilombolas* were and remain closely related to it.

### The region of Pompéu as a place of negotiation of different development models

Located in the heart of the state of Minas Gerais, the Pompéu region forms an interface between colonial precursors and current dynamic processes. It was not until the 18th century that Portuguese exploration troops expelled the indigenous population to establish extensive cattle-pasture farming, using the natural pastures of Cerrado vegetation to supply the southern gold-mining areas with leather, meat, and livestock (López and Vértiz 2015, Garcia de Almeida 2014). With industrialization in the early 20th century, Minas Gerais became the most important heavy industry site in Brazil. The small- and medium-scale agriculture had specialized in milk production so that particularly the central region of the state was considered the milk basin of Brazil. However, the mostly cooperatively organized dairy-cattle-industry experienced a severe crisis in the 1990s due to neoliberal agricultural policies. The subsequent land concentration was accompanied by the expansion of sugarcane cultivation and the displacement of dairy-cattle-farming. Today, Minas Gerais is considered one of the states, in which the (neo-) extractivist model with the exploitation of raw materials as well as the expansion of sugarcane cultivation and focus on export is spreading the fastest.

The municipality of Pompéu, with about 30 000 inhabitants (Prefeitura Municipal de Pompéu 2011, p. 16), is located in the current northern expansion zone of the sugarcane cultivation area. Accordingly, dairy producers continue to be an important group of players, even though they have become less important over the past twenty years as large-scale resident farms either enter sugarcane production themselves or lease their land to interested investors for the same purpose. Since the

2000s, sugarcane cultivation has been promoted through national bioenergy funding programs. Correspondingly, the area used for sugarcane cultivation in the Municipality Pompéu has expanded dramatically since the 1990s (Schmitt 2007).

The expansion of sugarcane has led to competition with other agricultural sectors – especially cattle farming for dairy products and beef – which also depend on access to land and water. At the same time, these dynamics deprive subsistence-based production and forms of life organization in rural areas of their living conditions. Thus, different players following specific logics compete for the same natural resources in Pompéu:

#### Modern sugarcane cultivation

The large-scale sugarcane producers are integrated into a neo-liberal growth- and market-oriented economic model, which follows profit maximization and exploitation of the natural resources of land and water. This model also includes various agro-industrial companies. Agropéu, founded in 1981 as part of the second phase of the ProÁlcool program, is based in Pompéu and grows its own sugarcane or buys from large landowners.

#### Territorially rooted *quilombola*

During the colonial era, enslaved people fled from the southern gold mines to the Pompéu region to settle in mainly inaccessible terrain. As a result of the expansion of agricultural holdings, these settlements now lie in the middle of the area of land that large landowners have acquired over the centuries. As an example, the Comunidade *Quilombola do Saco Barreiro* is mentioned. Forty-eight families belong to it. The community has received its official status as *quilombo* in 2007 but has not yet been awarded the demanded land (see Fig. 1). The *quilombola* operate a diversified form of agroforestry for subsistence but due to the extremely small areas, they have to earn additional income through wage labor working for the neighboring large-scale landowners or through occasional jobs in the town of Pompéu. At present, only 17 families live in the comunidade itself. The remaining families moved to the city because they had school-age children or to the nearby settlements of Assentamento Paulista due to the availability of larger areas of land there.

Hence, in the Pompéu Municipality various actors are spatially and socially in direct contact and in competition for access to natural resources, land, and water, as well as for the social recognition of their ways of life and economic organization. The



Figure 1: Territory of the *Comunidade Quilombola do Saco Barreiro* surrounded by sugarcane and eucalyptus plantations. Source: Carolina Panzera and Christiano Sena 2014.

corresponding struggles and strategies can be analyzed based on the respective specific practices, discourses, and symbols, which are integrated into a variety of power relations and inscribed in the landscape in their historical entanglements.

The following statements are based on empirical research carried out in September 2014 in the municipality of Pompéu. In total, three expert interviews were conducted with representatives of relevant state institutions and companies. In the Assentamento Paulista, there were eight guideline interviews with settler families, which were supplemented by observations and use- and resource mappings to adequately describe the peasant model. In the *Comunidade Quilombola*, the explanations are based on participatory observations and on five narrative, biographical, and go-along interviews, as well as on a collective mapping process and GPS mapping of the claimed territory. All interviews were transcribed and a critical discourse analysis was developed to identify and extract relevant data.

### Strategies of domination and resistance: practices, discourses, symbols

The following actors are embedded in specific contexts of economy, society, and state. They follow corresponding ideas of development, which in turn require a certain way of appropriating nature. The form of appropriation is directly reflected in

the landscape through the application of practices in agriculture, in farm-sized structures, and in the use of technology and cultivation methods. Discourses legitimize such practices, establish social recognition, and facilitate political support. Finally, material and immaterial symbols such as built structures, statues, museums, history books, and narratives form representations of the respective specific development model and make it visible and comprehensible to all. The different practices, discourses, and symbols, however, are not based on an equal footing. Rather, prevailing power relations determine which logics prevail and become dominant elements in the landscape. At the same time, existing acts of resistance by various actors mean that these dominant relationships are subject to a continuous process of social negotiation and that the landscape of a region thus merely reflects a snapshot of current debates. On the one hand, this conceals numerous processes through spatial displacements. On the other hand, however, it clarifies the direct entanglement of the different development models in their spatial constitution.

### Practices as a powerful strategy of dominance and resistance

The specific practices of certain actors, individuals, and groups are embedded in historical and social contexts that are in competition with one another. At the same time they produce manifold overlaps and entanglements, contradictions and conflicts, which in turn are permeated by hierarchies and power relations.

#### *Practices of modern agriculture in sugarcane cultivation*

Sugarcane cultivation is one of the most important economic sectors in the Pompéu region. It is cultivated in monocultures in large agricultural enterprises and is integrated into market- or export-oriented processing and marketing structures. For example, Agropéu, which was founded at the beginning of the 1980s by two large-scale landowners in the region, produces more than 1 million tons of sugarcane in a largely mechanized process on its own 20 000 hectares of land. Depending on the respective world market prices, the sugarcane is processed into either sugar or ethanol in the company's own industrial plants. In addition, land is leased from neighboring large landowners in order to flexibly increase production depending on the expected price development. Land use, cultivation methods, the use of technology, and labor are all oriented towards maximum profit and economic efficiency. Thus, above all, mechanizable arable land that provides available water from springs or streams is used for sugarcane cultivation; machines are used to cultivate the plantations, which yield



Figure 2: Sugarcane cultivation directly adjacent to the gardens of the *quilombolas*, Photo: Langer 2014.

approximately 75 % of the harvest. Besides a few permanent workers, almost exclusively seasonal workers are contracted for the period of the harvest. The owners, managers, and large part of the workforce live in the small town of Pompéu in order to maintain a relatively urban and modern lifestyle. In addition to sugarcane producers, sugar and ethanol producers, intermediate-product companies, and upstream and downstream service providers, these growth- and market-oriented logics also involve state agencies that support the interests of the relevant actors through support programs (e. g. ProÁlcool), the provision of infrastructure (e. g. transport routes, agriculturally oriented educational institutions), and advisory services (e. g. state agricultural advisory agency Emater).

Continuous spatial and economic expansion is a constitutive element of this capitalist-neoliberal growth logic. On the one hand, the expansion of the cultivated areas takes place through the appropriation of apparently unused areas, which, however, serve so-called traditional groups for collecting, hunting, and cultivation purposes, though without their formalized title of ownership. In Pompéu, for example, large-scale landowners extend their sugarcane cultivation areas into the territory of the *Comunidade Quilombola do Saco Barreiro* and plant sugarcane up to the border of the *quilombo* gardens (see Fig. 2). They intimidate and threaten the *quilombolas* or

spread agricultural poisons by air over their gardens in order to push them to abandon their land. On the other hand, *quilombolas* are offered jobs in the harvest or contract cultivation of sugarcane in order to integrate them into the neoliberal economy and thus subtly break down their resistance.

The power of market-oriented actors lies in their ability to penetrate the regional economy via the size of the land area they farm, their technological dominance, and their economic potential – due to broad business networks and jobs – to align their processes with their logic. With the support of government agencies, companies and large-scale landowners can thus secure the most agriculturally attractive areas with sufficient water availability. Furthermore, jobs and production contracts create dependencies that make it difficult for *quilombolas* to evade the growth-oriented logic. However, these practices remain socially contested because, on the one hand, the local dairy industry insists on its economic performance and competes with sugarcane cultivation for the same agricultural land. On the other hand, the legally guaranteed land rights of *quilombolas* face unrestricted expansion.

*Practices of the quilombolas in the Comunidade Quilombola de Saco Barreiro*

In the practices of the *quilombola*, agricultural production and small-scale livestock farming are carried out on very small garden-like plots and in subsistence farming, with the sale of the surplus at the weekly market in Pompéu. The cultivation takes place on common land. Additionally, part of the food consists of game, fish, and collected berries and fruits. The work is organized collectively and regular meetings, activities, and celebrations in the community house structure the life in the comunidade. The families of the *quilombos* live in clay buildings made of local materials that are surrounded by gardens. The long settlement history of the *quilombos* in this area, the diverse use of the ecosystem, the close interlinkage of the place of living and working, and the emphasis on collective associations have embedded both the relationships between humans and nature and the territorial references to identity in holistic perceptions.

The logics of life and economy of the *quilombolas* are essentially based on securing their survival, in which collectivity, territoriality, and their related identity form central elements. However, the expansion of sugarcane plantations and pastures threatens their way of life as these industries reach closer to their gardens and houses due to the lack of demarcation of their respective territories. This goes hand in hand with the pollution of river water, the destruction of the gardens, and serious health damage to both humans and animals due to the application of agricultural chemicals by air. In addition, the banks of the streams on which the *quilombolas* live are to be declared a nature reserve. This would criminalize their traditional way of life and

make the forced resettlement of the families likely. Numerous *quilombos* families already live in the Assentamento Paulista or in the town of Pompéu due to this difficult situation, to enable their children to have access to schooling, and to make healthcare facilities accessible to their families.

On the one hand, the practices of the *quilombolas* are protected by state regulations that secure their right to a self-determined life and their territorial claims. However, even after their official recognition as a quilombo has been achieved, the families are still fighting for their territory and are networking with powerful actors such as the state university UFMG (Federal University of Minas Gerais) in Belo Horizonte, which supports them with legal competencies and political actions. On the other hand, local authorities systematically delay the implementation of the legal requirements, and even use nature conservation laws to put further pressure on the *quilombolas*. Despite their emigration and the threats to their way of life, the *quilombos* maintain their community by gathering all member families, regardless of their place of residence, into the comunidade on weekends to exchange information on current developments and new strategies.

#### *Power of practices and practices of power*

In the context of Pompéu, the practices associated with the different models show a variety of degrees of assertiveness. While *quilombolas* can draw on legal rules and support programs, they are hampered in their efforts. The local powerful actors – especially state authorities – in coalitions of interest with market-oriented actors undermine their effective implementation. In the context of these unequal power relations, which can be traced back to (post-) colonial discrimination and racism, the expansive force of neoliberal logics is additionally promoted and lifestyles designed to secure livelihoods are increasingly suppressed. The one-sided dependencies of the *quilombolas* on agro-industrial jobs and urban supply structures also reinforce this dynamic. At the same time, everyday and collective practices of the *quilombolas* develop a resistant force that challenges the unimpeded expansion of sugarcane cultivation.

#### Discursive (de-) legitimization of practices

Discourses that support the respective logics essentially serve to legitimize one's own actions and at the same time attempt to delegitimize all practices attributed to the other. It is not only relevant what and how something is said but also by whom and from what position because through all these criteria hegemony and dominance may be established. Resistant counter-discourses break these dominance relations and question their legitimacy.



### *Discourses on growth and development*

The discourses, which follow neoliberal logics, are primarily supported by agro-industry, large-scale landowners, and sugarcane and eucalyptus producers. They are also supported by state institutions such as Emater, INCRA, and the municipal administration. Representatives of these actors legitimize the expansion of agro-industrial forms of production with reference to ideas of modernity and progress, economic growth, and – through the creation of jobs – associated prosperity for the entire population. Global discourses on climate change and food security for the world's growing population are also incorporated by emphasizing the use of renewable energies for climate protection and the efficiency of modern agricultural production. In addition, concerns about social and ecological costs are alleviated with appropriate compensation measures: the Agropéu Company, for example, has set up a welfare and social assistance department and runs a tree nursery to reforest ecological compensation areas. The local environmental council, which also includes Agropéu and large-scale landowners, approves the clearing of forests for production purposes and determines the scope of the necessary compensation measures.

The logics of production of the *quilombolas* are delegitimized in conversations in which attributions such as poor, underdeveloped, backward, unsustainable, and unviable are used. Thus, the corresponding ways of life and logics are not only denied their right to exist but every form of support is also declared backward looking and meaningless. Accordingly, representatives of Emater, INCRA, and the municipal administration question the respective funding programs and state regulations by not implementing them, or doing so only very hesitantly, and by withdrawing state-funded institutions such as schools, hospitals, public transport etc. from the *Comunidade Quilombola de Saco Barreiro*. Furthermore, the legitimacy of state recognition as a *quilombo* – i. e. as a “traditional” community – is called into question since some families have accepted jobs outside the *quilombos*, are living in the city, in the *Assentamento Paulista*, or in modern stone houses. This form of delegitimization is based on colonial-racist discourses that on the one hand construct extensively used land – by indigenous or *quilombo* groups – as uninhabited and colonizable and on the other hand explicitly declare “traditional” groups to be underdeveloped and, implicitly, uncivilized.

### *Discursive resistance of the comunidades quilombola*

In the discourses of the *quilombolas*, the cultural identity and common history of the *comunidade* members are emphasized as central elements. Collective, quasi-indigenous knowledge of the ecosystem as well as cultural peculiarities are written down in the *comunidade's* book, which was created in the course of the process of their recognition as a *quilombo* by collecting from remembered events and places. The land

used productively and extractively by the comunidade is understood by the *quilombolas* as a territory linked to their own history, traditions, and way of life. Accordingly, country and identity are understood as a unity in the discourse of the *quilombolas* and thus cannot be considered separately. The demand for their previously used land is based on the notion – also supported by state laws – that without that territory their ways of life, traditions, and cultural diversity are endangered.

The delegitimization strategies of *quilombolas* accordingly aim at the fact that both the agro-industry, with its occupation of the *quilombo*-territory, and the state authorities, with their refusal of support, violate legal defaults. In addition, they deplore the endangerment of their health and the destruction of their livelihoods through the application of agrochemicals. By linking their territory directly to the survival of the comunidade, the observable displacement processes are transformed into a question of human rights; they are not limited to only ecological and social issues, and thus gain greater social importance.

The discourses, which are essentially carried by the *quilombolas*, have a very weak political power of assertiveness at the local level since despite legally imposed support the local actors refuse them, which in turn can be traced back to racist structures in Brazilian society. Nevertheless, they are supported in their political demands and in legal proceedings by socially accepted actors such as UFMG scientists.

#### *Consolidation of power relations through discourses*

The combination of discourses on progress and development together with the silence about racism and discrimination make the capitalist-neoliberal discourse extremely effective. It gains power by being represented and propagated by powerful actors such as landowners and agribusinesses, and also by state institutions such as Emater, INCRA, and the municipal administration of Pompéu. Power relations that are based on access to resources, institutional regulations, and practices are thus discursively reproduced and consolidated.

#### Symbols of representation

The presented practices and discourses, which follow their individual logics, are additionally represented in the landscape through specific symbols. The individual material elements not only represent the respective model but also form points of identification for the individual actors. Their size and positioning make them visible or invisible and fill certain places with symbolic meanings.

### *Symbols for development and progress*

The symbols of development and progress are an integral part of agro-industrial forms of production. Large harvesting machines, modern manufacturing plants, company signs, wide and well-maintained streets, and large monocultures dominate the landscape throughout the entire environs of the capital of the municipality (see Fig. 3). These symbols of success and growth form points of identification for all those who are part of the agro-industrial production.

The town of Pompéu is intended as a place of identification for the whole population, and its history is closely linked to that of Joaquina Bernarda da Silva de Abreu Castelo Branco, or Dona Joaquina do Pompéu in short. She was born in 1752 and was the wife of a large-scale landowner who raised livestock on the entire area of the present municipality. From 1784, she ran the business of the “Fazenda do Pompéu” and is considered the founder of the town. A bust of Dona Joaquina in a central square in the city, a main street named after her, a cultural center bearing her name, and a museum in which her life is portrayed as a heroic story represent the dominant narrative about the development and civilization of the area of Pompéu, which until then had been defined as uninhabited. Today, this narrative is associated with the concepts of development and progress by representatives of the agro-industry, large-scale landowners, authorities, and municipal administration. In the narratives of the *quilombolas*, however, Dona Joaquina is remembered as a cruel slave-owner – a narrative not heard in the dominant society.

### *Symbols of quilombolas for oppression and resistance*

The symbols of the *quilombolas* are strongly linked to the history and identity of the community (see Fig. 4). The central identification element is the community book, in which the head of the community wrote down the history of the *Comunidade Quilombola de Saco Barreiro*. This collectively compiled narrative formed the basis for their state recognition as a *quilombo* in 2007 and thus represents the success of their resistance. Clay houses and ovens, gardens, small plots of land used for agroforestry, and a village square with a communal house stand for lifestyle and traditions, while abandoned and dilapidated houses point to the emigration of numerous families. Solitary mango trees, so-called memorial trees, located several kilometers from today’s settlement and in the middle of pasture or sugarcane areas of the neighboring large estates, testify of former living quarters of the *quilombolas*, remind the community of ancestors, and symbolize the displacement processes they suffered in the last decades. The cemetery near the settlement, with its division into a “white” and a “black” area, and the regular desecration of the latter, represents the racism in the region, which is still powerful today. In addition, religious symbols such as the Black Madonna refer to the historical consequences of enslavement and missionary work.



Figure 3: Agropéu factory and machinery – symbols of development and progress.  
Photo: Neuburger 2014.

### *Power and visibility of symbols*

The symbols displayed represent their respective models and provide them with everyday presence or absence in the city and landscape. The symbols of the neoliberal logics are visible to all due to the size of the objects and their placement in central locations, thereby developing their dominance in the narratives of the local society. In contrast, the elements and artifacts of the *quilombolas* are found almost exclusively in marginal places, and thereby become invisible and easily negatable. Thus, mechanisms of discrimination that work in practices and discourses are reproduced through symbols. *Quilombolas'* stories about everyday abuse and insults in the city illustrate the racist structures in Brazilian society that are still effective today.

### Energy landscapes of post-colonial conditions

The present landscape of the municipality of Pompéu constituted by power relations and historical dynamics (Mitchell 2003, Gailing and Leibenath 2015) is largely dominated by sugarcane plantations, whose monocultures represent a modern society oriented towards growth and development. Through the size of the areas and machines, the buildings and other artifacts belonging to them, and their placement and

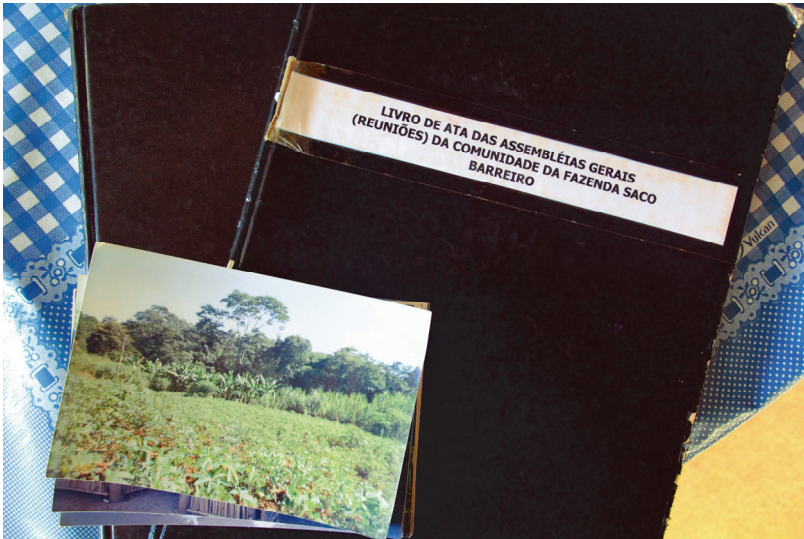


Figure 4: Identification element of the *quilombolas*: Community book on the history of Saco Bar-reiro. Photo: Langer 2014.

symbolic charge, they represent the powerful position of neoliberal logic. Thus, the large plots of energy crops – and thus the entire agro-industrial sector – appear on the satellite images of the region (see Fig. 1) as the only relevant economic sectors. Only with very attentive and detailed observation do other forms of life and economies, such as the *quilombo* with its small plots and mixed cultures, become visible in this energy landscape.

This configuration of the landscape is the result of a long historical process, which is permeated by colonial and post-colonial power relations. The dominance and expansion of latifundia in general and of large-scale sugarcane cultivation in particular goes back to the displacement of indigenous groups and the conquest of today's Brazilian territory by the Portuguese crown in the 16th century. Since then, the economic and political elites have emphasized export-oriented large-scale agriculture as the driving force for the colonial and later national economy. This has created the legitimacy for state support programs and the expansion of cultivation areas. Moreover, the claimed civilizational character of this social and economic model and the associated idea of its development justify not only the displacement of indigenous groups but also the clearing of forests. Following the idea of modernization theory, all other forms of life organization and economic activity are declared traditional or inefficient and, thus, must be modernized and integrated into the market-

oriented sector. By discursively linking these practices to progress, prosperity, and development, their hegemonic position in Brazilian society is strengthened.

Landscapes in general and energy landscapes more specifically represent the arena of socio-political negotiation on development pathways and models in their specific regional and historical contexts. Unequal power relations result in practical, symbolic, and discursive dominance of the most powerful land use, economic logic, and social life by delegitimizing, marginalizing, and invisibilizing alternative ideas. These are embedded in postcolonial entanglements and constitute the foundation of these (energy) landscapes within a globalizing world.

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