

# Political landscape: new ways of seeing and acting in Brazilian metropolises

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# Political landscape: new ways of seeing and acting in Brazilian metropolises

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## Abstract

While the concept of landscape has been used by public institutions as an instrument of territorial management, insurgent groups mobilize certain types of landscapes to affect the political agenda and claim their rights. The purpose of this text is to discuss how certain landscapes are transformed into an instrument of contemporary political struggle by citizens underrepresented in traditional political spaces. These groups transform large or small-scale landscapes into political landscapes composed of an intentional set of objects and representations which brings visibility to their demands. From the analysis of the interventions in the statue of Borba Gato and in the region of Pequena África, in the cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro respectively, we argue that political landscapes help explain the interests and desires of groups, since it transforms the way of seeing and acting on space.

**Keywords:** São Paulo; Rio de Janeiro; Borba Gato's statue. Little Africa. Street Art.

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## Paysage politique: nouvelles manières de regarder et d'agir dans les métropoles brésiliennes

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### Resume

Alors que la notion de paysage a été utilisée par les institutions publiques comme instrument de gestion territoriale, des groupes rebelles mobilisent certains paysages pour influencer l'agenda politique et revendiquer leurs droits. Le but de cet article est discuter comment certains paysages sont transformés en instrument d'action politique contemporaine par des citoyens non représentés par les instruments politiques traditionnels. Ces groupes transforment des paysages communs en paysages politiques, c'est-à-dire des paysages guidés par la sélection intentionnelle d'objets et de représentations présents dans l'espace public pour donner visibilité à leurs revendications. Après l'analyse des actions menées sur la statue de Borba Gato, à São Paulo, et dans la région de *Pequena Africa*, à Rio de Janeiro, nous soutenons que le paysage politique rend explicitites les intérêts et les désirs des groupes, transformant les façons de respecter et agir sur l'espace.

**Mots-clés:** São Paulo; Rio de Janeiro; La statue de Borba Gato. Petite Afrique. Art de rue.

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## Paisagem política: novas maneiras de olhar e agir nas metrópoles brasileiras

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### Resumo

Ao mesmo tempo em que o conceito de paisagem tem sido utilizado por instituições públicas como instrumento de gestão territorial, grupos insurgentes mobilizam determinadas paisagens para influenciar a agenda política e reivindicar seus direitos. O objetivo deste texto é discutir como determinadas paisagens são transformadas em instrumento da ação política contemporânea por cidadãos sub-representados nos espaços políticos tradicionais. Esses grupos transformam paisagens da grande ou da pequena escala em paisagens políticas, isto é, paisagens compostas por uma seleção intencional de objetos e representações presentes no espaço público com o objetivo de dar visibilidade a suas demandas. A partir da análise das ações realizadas na estátua de Borba Gato, em São Paulo, e na região da Pequena África, no Rio de Janeiro, argumentamos que a paisagem política explicita interesses e desejos de grupos transformando as maneiras de olhar e agir sobre o espaço.

**Palavras-chave:** São Paulo. Rio de Janeiro. Estátua de Borba Gato. Pequena África. Arte urbana.

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### Introduction

Urban social movements increasingly have used the landscape to influence political agendas. At the same time, the presence of the concept of landscape in heritage preservation, urban spatial planning or environmental management instruments have established different landscape policies (Ribeiro, 2018). Although these new uses suggest a political perception of the landscape, it is still absent in political geography manuals (Agnew; Mitchel; Toal, 2003; Castro, 2005; Gallaher, *et al*, 2009; Trigal; Del Pozo, 1999).

Recent works have analyzed the ideas linked to this concept in different contexts of public management (Caetano and Rosaneli, 2019; Czech-Artasu, 2020; Melo Filho and Silva Filho, 2021; Reis, *et al*, 2022), while others have discussed how new narratives about landscapes have been built to both consolidate citizenships and claim the right to it (Brito, 2019; Barbosa, 2020). These studies seek to understand different uses of landscape in political actions such as the struggle for the right to the city, urban management, and political participation practices.

The purpose of this text is to discuss how insurgent groups transform these landscapes into political instruments<sup>1</sup>. We seek to understand strategies of social movements to constitute political landscapes and influence public debate. These groups carry this initiative through intentional captures of material objects and symbolic representations consolidated in the space of Brazilian metropolises.

We consider that the formation of political landscapes by insurgent groups manifests an expansion of political action beyond traditional practices based on discourse and representative democracy. In this sense, we argue that the landscape has been transformed into another instrument available to insurgent groups, in line with the discussion on the political importance of bodies in the exercise of social protests (Butler, 2018). Material forms and symbolic narratives of the landscapes, when used as instruments for political action, do not produce distortions of reality, but make explicit such different interests of groups and their particular attributes, enabling new issues to be included in the political agenda.

This process has been recurrent in Brazilian metropolises, where insurgent groups organize to claim varied rights. As will be discussed when analyzing the cases of Borba Gato's statue, in São Paulo (SP) and graffiti in Pedra do Sal, in Rio de Janeiro (RJ), certain groups mobilized specific features of the landscapes to transform historical representations and deep-rooted memories in public space. Thus, both in large- and small-scale landscapes, insurgent groups triggered material forms and symbolic narratives that can be found in urban space to claim new ways of looking and acting in space.

## The expansion of the concept of landscape

Traditionally, the invention of the word landscape has been related to the emergence of perspective, around the 16th century in the region of Netherlands, when *the* term *Landschaft* began to indicate the pictorial representation of a framed nature (Cauquelin, 2007). This idea was associated with a panoramic visual capture of a neutral observer and, as an artistic representation, it meant a modern use of the concept that replaced past insights related to territory management and the citizenship of specific groups (Olwig, 2002).

For Cosgrove (1998), this modern understanding of the concept served to hide historical inequalities and legitimize forms of control related to the capitalist bourgeoisie. Despite giving the landscape a neutral and harmonious sense of relations between man and nature, these new ways of understanding the world were used to consolidate modern states and national identities (Thièsse, 2014; Schwarcz, 2003).

And the fact that landscapes were seen as a harmonic and neutral type of representation produced a general understanding in modern geography that it would be disconnected from conflicts and political phenomena. Within the scope of the German school of Humboldtian influence, the landscape conception served to move beyond the society-nature dichotomy

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<sup>1</sup> We apply the concept of insurgent groups inspired by Holston's (2013) elaboration of insurgent citizenship, that is, manifestations of urban citizenship that make Brazilian metropolises a place of right-claiming and where destabilizations are produced. Insurgent groups, in this sense, are movements to demand rights, make visible injustices and use varied strategies to challenge objects and representations of dominant groups present in the public space.

(Capel, 1983), while for the French school the concept highlighted its visual character when understanding the physiognomy of phenomena (Ribeiro, 2012).

In the first half of the twentieth century, the morphological approach of Carl Sauer helped consolidate the detachment between landscape and politics by not considering the State as a producer of forms of the cultural landscape (Sauer, 1998). From the 1950s, the Marxist influence on geography would reinforce this distance by assuming the study of forms as insufficient to understand social processes that take place in space, lowering the analytical capacity of the concept of landscape to the point that it cannot explain political actions (Ribeiro, 2020).

From the 1980s, the idea of landscape began to be incorporated into the analysis of political phenomena. Jackson's work (1984) understands the landscape as a shared material reality, that is, an area on the Earth's surface that is produced and experienced by the community. Close to a morphological approach, this author considers political landscapes as those formed by walls and borders, roads, monuments, and public squares, that is, objects built by central powers that "[...] exist to guarantee order, security, and continuity, giving citizens a discernible *status*. They serve to remind us of our rights and obligations, and of our history" (Jackson, 1984, p. 12).

For Jackson (1984, p.42), "the political landscape is intentionally created to make it possible for men to live in a fair society", and it is complemented by vernacular landscapes, those organically created by human beings in trying to live in harmony with nature. It would be then through building institutionalized landscapes, that is, those generated by recognized powers, that collective life could be established.

In Jackson's perspective, unlike vernacular landscapes, related to the spontaneous and organic qualities of human life, political landscapes would be in charge of guiding social movements and indicating spatial and legal limits of the political community. The contractualism present in his reflection allows us to recognize specific powers that produce landscapes, but it also hampers the analysis of actions questioning these powers. Thus, insurgent groups could not build political landscapes, since they would be restricted to the central powers that manage the territory through the large-scale production of objects.

Sanguin (1984, p.24) considers political landscapes as "the impact or mark of authority and ideology on the landscape", which can be perceived through borders, public squares and parks, monuments, and public service buildings, that is, through its material condition. We consider Sanguin's conceptual development deeply rooted in the French context, where the centralized form of state organization enables a significant inclusion of objects in local communities. Despite the author recognizing the existence of a three-level political landscape -national, regional, and local- his considerations underline objects inserted by central powers, such as national borders or major engineering works.

The influence of superorganic understanding on the concept of Culture elaborated by Sauer was remarkable in the aforementioned works to the point that Sanguin quotes the founder of North American cultural geography in the following terms: "[...] If politics is the agent and natural space the means, so the political landscape is the result" (Sanguin, 1984, p.30). For both authors, politics would act as an autonomous entity creating spatial forms in line with the ideologies and interests of the State.

In addition to the adoption of this understanding of politics and the recognition of the same typology of objects, another common thread in Jackson and Sanguin's approaches is the scale bound with political landscapes. As Besse (2014, p.118) comments on Jackson's approach, "the political landscape, is first and foremost a large-scale landscape, which clearly manifests the major projects of power and extends itself throughout a space perceived as homogeneous and in direct contact with the regions controlled by it". Sanguin's dimension of political landscapes is also related to large-scale objects. When remarking on border areas as places where "[...] the political impact of landscapes is more visible" (1984, p.27), he considers that "the importance of politics in border areas lies in the emergence of a large-scale landscape" (p.28).

In our view, the extension of large-scale contexts to the concept of political landscape is problematic, since it hinders the analysis of political actions of marginalized groups of State decisions. If landscapes seen on a large scale usually correspond to a large-scope view, it can contribute to the analysis of various institutional interventions in space such as towers and border fencing, monuments and public squares, or even engineering works aimed at regional integration. On this account, the analysis of large-scale landscapes tends to make political manifestations of not-include groups invisible, since they often express themselves in short-lived practices and on small scales.

Some works that consider the symbolic nature of landscapes have been producing thoughts on small-scale political actions, that is, those landscapes conceived at the very place of phenomena and shaped by senses other than only vision. By recognizing the political landscape as an everyday practice, Till (2004) emphasizes the role of artistic interventions as discursive and contestation tools. Baird (2014), in turn, analyzes how political landscapes are established from the memories of those individuals affected by decisions made by instituted powers, regardless of the material base of these resolutions. Both authors draw attention to the individual and small-scale movements carried out by political and cultural minorities as a strategy aimed at giving new meaning to the landscape. Thus, it differs from symbolic approaches focused on State, such as Duncan (1990) and Cosgrove (1998).

These proposals analyze small-scale political landscapes demonstrating the actions performed by those actors excluded from state institutions and consequently approaching politics from an individualist perspective. As Hannah Arendt (1998) indicates, political action is constituted in places that enable encounters, debates, and deliberation among different groups. In this sense, the policy requires a collective and articulated action aimed to modify decisions taken by institutions and change political agendas. In classical antiquity, the primary instrument for the exercise of political action was the discourse made in the public space to convince different people to perform certain actions. It was through the right to speak, guaranteed to citizens of the *polis* by the principles of isonomy and isegoria, that the political practice was conducted (Arendt, 1995; Bobbio; Metteucci, 2004).

In the contemporary period, however, political representations of mass democracies seem to be insufficient to produce transformations that take into account different interests. In mass societies, where differences increasingly occupy the public space and institutions aimed at social participation, the plurality of groups is insufficient and other instruments need to be mobilized for political action. In

this sense, Butler (2018) states that collectively organized groups such as the “*Occupy*” movements, often banned from political decision-making and facing precarious health and housing structure, use their bodies to protest.<sup>2</sup> For the author, the exercise of contemporary politics occurs from the collective organization that mobilizes available instruments put governing elites under the pressure, and the body itself occupies a pivotal role in this process.

We consider that the landscape assumes a political sense when its material or immaterial elements are mobilized to influence states’ political agendas. These groups want to throw open their desires and ensure their demands are heard. They often produce interventions in large-scale landscapes, such as monuments, public squares or buildings of a certain locality, and in small-scale landscapes, such as alleys and streets of symbolic neighborhoods.

We do not understand politics as a superior or autonomous entity that inserts forms into space and reproduces itself without opposition. Both the large-scale political landscape, often shaped by instituted powers, or the small-scale political landscape, often constituted by insurgent movements, derives from conflict and negotiation among different parties collectively organized in public space aiming at interfering in the political agenda. Thus, political landscapes are not solely produced by large-scale State interventions, morphologically manifested in major works, nor only the landscape shaped by activists targeting consolidated elements. By all means, we understand the political landscape as a result of intentional actions that gathers both material and symbolic components that enable groups to mobilize and influence political decisions.

This capture of the landscape by the insurgent people has been held in diverse contexts and in different ways, from the installation of posters and banners, through painting graffiti and *pichação*, artistic body interventions, civil marches, and the toppling of monuments and statues. Considering insurgent groups, these actions through the landscape are usually provocative, to the extent that their presence is at odds with official discourse. It has a defiant character that runs counter to established rules and is ephemeral, since these groups are promptly expelled, and their previous actions are removed from the landscape by disciplinary agents of public management.

Thus, we consider the landscape as a way of seeing that suggests interpretations based both on established representations and concrete forms of space (Maciel, 2005). In today’s societies, this set of objects and representations simultaneously expresses and causes disputes between different groups, becoming an instrument of political action. The way of seeing that produces the landscape does not create any distortion of reality waiting for geographers to decipher it. On the contrary, it institutes new ways of seeing and acting in space. When the landscape becomes political, it depicts the interests and desires of the groups producing it through the transformation of past objects or building new kinds of representations.

We have already discussed how the landscape was used by state institutions and by highly influential actors in the institutional decision-making spaces (Brito, 2019; Melo Filho, 2021). Now, we intend to discuss how groups interested in changing the political agenda disturb established

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2 *Occupy Wall Street* was a protest movement that began in Zuccotti Park, in 2011, located in New York City’s financial district, with a broad agenda against economic and social inequality in the US. Organized mainly from social networks, it gave rise to the wider Occupy movements worldwide, and it has been analyzed by several authors, such as Castells (2017) and Gerbaudo (2017).

ways of seeing landscapes. Thus, it is important to understand how under-represented groups mobilize the landscape as an instrument of action in placing new marks and representations aimed at confronting the ruling elite.

## **Large-scale landscape: Bandeirantismo, political space and new representations for São Paulo**

In the context of the political and economic consolidation of São Paulo's major coffee planters, different institutions controlling the official narrative of São Paulo's history and geography were built. To challenge the narratives produced by the country's former imperial court in the city of Rio de Janeiro, these institutions developed a regional identity-building project in the early twentieth century, where the Bandeirantes became symbols of Brazil's territorial expansion.

The Brazilian Historic and Geographic Institute and the Museu Paulista were the main institutions responsible for the build-up of Bandeirantismo, that is, the set of discourses on the movements, glories, and bonds of the Bandeirantes with the population of São Paulo and Brazil (Schwarcz, 1993 and Abud, 1986). From the exaltation of the Bandeirante, produced by historians such as Afonso Taunay and Alfredo Ellis Júnior, the uniqueness of São Paulo's inhabitants and their significance on nation-building were highlighted (Raimundo, 2004). Along with these representations, several material objects of Bandeirantes' glorious past were placed in public places in São Paulo. Thus, the construction of the Bandeirante myth generated idealized representations and the building of material objects throughout the city.

The Statue of Borba Gato, built-in 1963 by Júlio Guerra to celebrate the 4th Centenary of Santo Amaro, portrayed another chapter of the exaltation of the Bandeiras' myth. The inauguration of this full-of-symbolism<sup>3</sup> monument has established a large-scale political landscape and has been targeted with aesthetic criticism since it was placed. This 13-meters-high statue in Augusto Tortorelo de Araújo square created a very visible public space, conducive to many political manifestations due to its spaciousness and monumentality.

The mobilization of the landscape of Borba Gato's statue that enables different groups to achieve their goals has been consistent, especially since the 1980s when the return to the democratic model made it possible to build open political spaces (Castro, 2018).

As we can see in the following images (Figure 1), different groups made use of the monument to draw attention to its agendas. In the first (A) image, the monument was used by the 1984's pro-democracy protest named Diretas Já. The second (B) shows a group in opposition to the political emancipation of the Santo Amaro neighborhood placing a plaque during a political act held in 1985. In the third image (C), a photo taken in 2008, the statue was wrapped with a lifejacket to draw attention to São Paulo's artwork preservation.

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3 Costa's work (2017) discusses how the statue is intentionally positioned to give its back to Serra do Mar, where Bandeirantes came from, and with its face oriented towards sertões, that is, to inland paths these mercenaries used to penetrate. In addition, the author highlights that the materials used for the statue's coating were collected in Minas Gerais and Paraná, initial places of expansion.

**Figure 1 – the political landscape of the Statue of Borba Gato at three different moments.**



Source: organized by the authors. Image A, available at <http://santoamaroonline.com.br/>; Image B, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 13 set. 1985, p. 38; Image C, available at <https://www.eduardosrur.com.br/intervencoes/sobrevivencia>

The above examples indicate how the large-scale landscape was mobilized by distinct groups. Taking advantage of the monument's visibility, these different groups drew attention to their claims and established open political spaces around the statue. Thus, the large-scale landscape built by the state was altered into a political landscape aiming to enhance the purposes of these organized groups, drawing attention to conflicting interests in society.

From the 2000s, the landscape of the statue of Borba Gato began to be mobilized with growing intensity for the construction of new representations involving indigenous' rights and demands. A series of interventions were executed to critique the celebration of the Bandeiras, emphatically affirming the violent character of these characters in the history of São Paulo. The successive attempts to uncover the real history of violence perpetrated by the Bandeirantes using the statue of Borba Gato was quite similar to what is happening with the Monument to the Bandeiras from the 1990s on (Valverde, 2018),

Each of the diverse methods that have been applied is associated with different national political contexts,<sup>4</sup> and they are primely related to land demarcation or violence against indigenous peoples. In September 2015, the statue was covered with the words “bandeirante ruralista assassino” (“murderous ranchers”, loosely translated) painted on its base and it “[...] blood-stained celebrated the anniversary of

4 Waldman's text (2018) analyzes distinct manifestations carried out in works discussing Bandeirantes' life in the city of São Paulo that occurred until 2018. On the placement of skulls at the foot of the statue, in 2020, you can consult Vieira (2020).

Brazil's independence" (Waldam, 2018, p. 184). In 2016, following the growing wave of attacks against Brazil's indigenous group Guarani-Kaiowa, Borba Gato's statue and the Monument to the Bandeiras dawned covered by blood-red graffiti. Four years later, skulls had been laid at the feet of this statue to question the presence of this type of monument in the city's public space.

But within the limits of this work, we will not address the debate on the need to topple or replace, or even re-significate statues and monuments to consolidate alternative affective memories<sup>5</sup>. We wanted to understand how these short-lived actions sought to establish new representations based on the material and symbolic value of landscapes.

In 2021, the statue of Borba Gato was one more time the target of protests by insurgent groups interested in producing new representations for São Paulo. Once again, the spaciousness and visibility of that landscape were mobilized by subordinate groups. In this new context, the insurgent groups tracked the global actions to confront heritage and attack statues following the death of George Floyd in the USA. Perhaps the most direct action took place in July 2021, when the *Revolução Periférica* group set fire to the monument to "open the debate [...] and people can now decide if they want a thirteen-meter-high statue honoring a genocidal and rapist"<sup>6</sup>.

Is important to note that, at about this time, different Bills were proposed contributing to reigniting the debate on the presence of these monuments in public spaces. One of those, presented to the city council, accentuates the need to confront all "the racist symbolic violence that this kind of monuments, statues, plaques or any type of tribute honoring slave hunters and hygienists brings to the surface" (São Paulo, 2021). Another, presented to the state legislative assembly sought to provide reparation to the descendants of slaves and indigenous people inflicted with "the historical damage caused by mistakenly honoring a murders, responsible for physical and symbolic massacres of social segments that have not yet had the opportunity to fully tell their version of the story", by requesting the removal of the Anhanguera monument (São Paulo, 2020).

The presence of these Bills indicates how important are these movements in the political spaces of São Paulo. By using material objects and visual representations, insurgent groups linked to indigenous and black movements sought to change political agendas and establish new representations of the Bandeirantes. Thus, the large-scale landscape was transformed into a tool for exercising the contemporary politics of direct action in public space.

As we discuss below, in the small-scale landscape other strategies are triggered by insurgent groups. In Rio de Janeiro, the political landscape assumes a perennial character through the use of graffiti, practices that modify the forms and representations attributed to the city center.

### **Small-scale landscape: Pequena África, memory and urban art**

The port area of Rio de Janeiro has been transformed into an important place to celebrate the Afro-Brazilian culture and became an itinerary to access the memory of slavery in the Americas. According to Guimarães (2014), since the 2000s this part of the city has been

5 On the question of the toppling of statues, Freitas' (2021) work develops a decolonial reading on the problem. Valverde (2018) presents a brief reflection on the theme from a geographical analysis of Monuments and Bandeiras.

6 The sentence was said by Paulo Roberto da Silva Lima, known as Paulo Galo, a member of this group and arrested for this action, words that were reproduced by various means of communication (Incêndio..., 2021).

re-signified by black movements that dispute the landscape with those proclaiming themselves and that are recognized by the municipal government heirs of the central area.

Now, the patrimonies of those inhabitants who identified themselves with “blacks and “saints” were opposed to the City Hall’s imagery, which symbolically linked the inhabitants of those areas to the Portuguese and Catholic occupation. Elaborating on the notion of Pequena África (literally “Little Africa”), they began to ask for social recognition and permanence on the hill<sup>7</sup>, affirming what they deemed to be the uniqueness of their identities and traditions (Guimarães, 2014. p. 21).

From these disputes, Pequena África was recognized as essential to preserving the history of slavery by the city’s urban planning. This act was articulated by the black movement, universities, and the National Historic and Artistic Heritage Institute (IPHAN, in the Portuguese acronym). At its peak, in 2017, the archaeological site of Cais do Valongo was recognized as a world heritage site. Geographic historical itineraries, scientific articles, museum projects and monuments are currently being produced to reinforce the presence and history of the black population in the place. It is ultimately responsible for producing new conflicts through the construction of black memory (Santos, 2019).

With the realization of Pequena África, a set of material objects was arranged in the landscape to materialize those narratives on the black people’s past history and their role in the city building. These objects connected to slavery attest to forms and processes that have ended over time, becoming “spatial roughness” (Santos, 1996) or dismissed as relics of the past (Chuva, 2020). But the projected landscape does not establish a spatio-temporal continuity, since the black presence is excluded from the city today. In this sense, recognizing Pequena África as a black region in the city of Rio de Janeiro strengthen a narrative that ignores the black population today, putting the memory of slavery in the first place.

On the contrary, different urban art manifestations erupt in the landscape, modifying consolidated narratives. From graffiti to pichações (cryptic-style graffiti), or application techniques such as wheatpasting and the use of stencils, insurgent groups mobilize objects from the landscape to draw attention to the contemporary black memory represented by Pequena África.

These manifestations can be seen more acutely in the heritage-listed areas of Pedra do Sal, in 1984, Largo da Prainha, and around Cais do Valongo.

The coexistence of heritage places and expressions of *Street Art* has generated controversy among different groups that work with the preservation of heritage and urban artists, as these collectives are composed of a diversity of people from different social backgrounds. On the one hand, urban art is viewed by public institutions and dominant groups that deal directly with the management of these public goods, as a threat to their heritage values. On the other, artists manifest in heritage sites an ever-changing culture mainly promoted by marginalized groups that are not represented in the official narratives.

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7 The work analyzes the disputes that occurred in Morro da Conceição, an area occupied by Slaves, Portuguese dependents, and, in the 20th century, by people coming from northeast Brazil.

These disputes express the difference between “dead memory” and “living memory” (Gravari-Barbas and Veschambre, 2004). The former results from the privilege of producing a self-image through the materialization of their existence in areas of greater prestige and economic value, such as historical centers, what is only reserved for dominant groups. The location of the monuments and statues and the characters portrayed in panels or murals illustrate this kind of practical-utilitarian appropriation of the landscape. In a panoramic view, these objects get lots of attention due to their magnitude, contributing to demarcating the political and economic power of certain groups and conferring a sense of harmony by disregarding such conflicts.

On the other hand, a living memory has a more ephemeral nature, because it furthers artistic manifestations and gestures that reaffirm the existence of unwanted people. Such interdiction is usually not carried out by legal means, but by social, political, cultural, and economic conditions that impel them to the worst city areas in terms of value and/or degradation. Living memory would then be an upshot of practices of resistance and struggle for the right to the landscape. It exposes an important line of cleavage between those who can access “the conservation of space” and those in which change is the trend.

After fieldwork in the area, it was noticed several links between some themes expressed in the landscapes of Pequena África. Popular black figures, elements of Afro-Brazilian culture, and diverse texts start to be inserted into the landscape to express the desire of these insurgent groups to contribute and compete with instituted narratives.

Pedra do Sal is the focal point of these artistic manifestations, with the image of Zumbi dos Palmares being constantly expressed to build a bridge between the past and present of black memory. Even though graffiti in this place are more fluid and smaller-sized, it establishes a density of representations that overlap from the dialogue with the figure of this quilombo leader. Turn into a symbol of the place and an everlasting artistic manifestation, Zumbi’s graffiti is associated with that of current leaders, such as Marielle Franco (Figure 2).

**Figure 2 – In Pedra do Sal, the graffiti of Zumbi dos Palmares remains in the landscape. It is noted that different artistic manifestations that update the memory of black resistance were added, erased, and superimposed.**



Source: organized by the authors. Image A, available at <https://br.pinterest.com/pin/122300946120754862>; Images B and C took in fieldwork realized in 2020 and 2021.

Both in Cais do Valongo and Largo da Prainha there is a more diffuse presence of artistic manifestations. In Largo da Prainha we find a series of wheatpaste art on a single wall reminding us of the black presence, and stencils and illustrations referring to black Brazilian personalities, such as Tia Lúcia (figure 3). In Cais do Valongo, because it is a large piece of land only delimited by the surrounding buildings, the presence of urban art is scarcer, but two works attract attention: In image A, a huge graffiti refers to Iemanjá, an important deity of African religions. In image B, a wheatpaste poster present in several Brazilian cities articulates two contemporary black personalities (Figure 4).

**Figure 3 – Different mobilizations of the landscape through art in Largo da Prainha. In image A, wheatpaste posters refer to the black presence in the landscape. In image B, some stencils claim to preserve the memory of those socially excluded. In image C, the figure of Tia Lucia is represented to remember her life and work in Pequena África.**



Source: organized by the authors. Images A, B, and C were collected in fieldwork carried out by the authors in 2021.

**Figure 4 – Landscape mobilization articulates black past and present representations in Pequena África.**



Source: organized by the authors. Images A and B were collected in fieldwork carried out by the authors in 2021.

Thus, in the landscape of Pequena África, urban art is based on the integration between past and present. It constantly updates the memory of the region, reveals the past and brings new elements through a fluid, active and provocative landscape. The emergence of new objects and representations establishes the “living memory” of young artists who seek to rewrite black memory and expand the possibilities of interpreting the landscape.

We can observe that Pedra do Sal concentrates a greater number of urban manifestations due to its small-scale spatial configuration, which gives little monumentality to the landscape, allowing insurgent artistic practices with more recurrence. Unlike the landscape of Borba Gato’s statue, a representation of dominant groups, in Pedra do Sal we have an organic small-scale landscape.

The fact that Pedra do Sal was listed by the National Heritage, a milestone in heritage policy and for black memory in Rio de Janeiro (Ferraz, 1997), does not configure a “dead memory”, since it contradicts the ruling preservation model in Brazil, since it favors only the political and economic elites (Fonseca, 2005). It is in this type of landscape, with no spaciousness and rather insignificant for the dominant groups, where insurgent groups mobilize objects and narratives to expose their memories and give new meanings to the place.

We can affirm that there is a growing interest in the landscape by insurgent groups that are willing to suggest alternatives to dead memory. Throughout the small-scale landscape, one can observe more easily a weakening in the authorized discourse<sup>8</sup>. Thus, it is “near the surface” that<sup>9</sup> this contentious landscape can be verified. It is on this scale that we see contradictions, juxtapositions, contrasts, and interdependence between instituted and insurgent groups.

Urban art and direct actions of social movements claiming the black memory of Pequena África to be recognized show the reinforcement of insurgent groups in the political scene, forwarding the process of forming small-scale political landscapes as a resistance tool of contemporary politics. The landscape then becomes a pathway for obtaining and fulfilling the rights when mobilized by articulated groups aimed at changing the political agenda or manifest their views.

## Concluding remarks

With this research, we sought to understand how new ways of seeing and acting are established in Brazilian metropolises from the landscape. We consider that different mobilizations of forms and representations into the public space constitute political landscapes. By that we mean that there are intentional selections of material and symbolic elements to influence political agendas, from the establishment of new representations or the questioning of consolidated

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8 We borrow the term applied by Smith (2006) when referring to the creation of a worldview focused on the production of national identities and based on a set of elements selected by the State within the framework of a heritage policy. A restricted and top-down worldview, based on universal aesthetics of tastes and values widely determined by “the experts.”

9 The term suggested by Veras (2017) seeks to categorize small-scale landscapes, that is, very limited spatial cutouts, such as alleys, small neighborhood streets and popular trade places of everyday practices and that oppose the large and monumental geographic scale.

spatial order. We discuss how the landscape ceases to be understood as a neutral framework to constitute itself as a tool of contemporary political action for insurgent groups.

This work demonstrated how political landscapes were established by insurgent groups through the example of the mobilizations targeting the statue of Borba Gato, in São Paulo, and the insertion of urban art elements in Pequena África, in Rio de Janeiro. These two movements invite us to rethink a recurring understanding, usual since the 1980s, that restricted the concept to large-scale landscapes connected to the State and how it acts in geographic space.

If this large-scale landscape approach made the concept close to a political conception, it neglected insurgent groups and small-scale landscapes. In the contemporary period, where political representation is not enough to the exercise of full citizenship, original forms of understanding how these new marks and meanings produced by insurgent groups alter the ways of seeing and acting on certain spaces are emerging.

In the case of Borba Gato's statue, insurgent groups built political spaces and mobilized a large-scale landscape to attract visibility to its agenda and demonstrate their disapproval with the meanings produced by the instituted power. Different actions more than sought to remove a material object fixed in the public space, it wanted to transform the consolidated representation in relation to the Bandeirantismo.

In the case of Pequena África, where a narrative Brazil's slave past is consolidated through objects considered as heritage, insurgent groups use urban art to reissue the black presence in the city, valuing the living memory. Urban interventions are imposed in the institutionalized landscape breaking with authorized discourses that led people's collective memory further away from the history of slavery. The mobilization of the landscape through art indicates the will of insurgent groups to intervene and create landscape alternatives that value the today's black presence in the center of Rio de Janeiro.

Finally, breaking with the old conception of landscape as a result of the actions of the instituted powers, the concept of the political landscape can be used to analyze the actions of insurgent groups, where it becomes an active tool for demonstrations, struggles and protests.

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