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REGULAR PAPER

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Landscape semaphore: Seeing mud and mangroves in the Brazilian Northeast

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This paper explores how the amphibious landscapes of mangroves and mudflats of Northeast Brazil have been seen and re-seen. The spatial and political ecologies of mangroves and mud interact with political aesthetics in specific ways. Reading landscapes as aesthetic encounters] with nature means recognising that ways of seeing are as historically and geographically specific as what they represent and produce. Thinking through the history of landscape from the Northeast exposes the coloniality of landscape thought but can also show how landscape has been reinvented and reconceptualised. Using Marilena Chauí's concept of semaphore, we can place landscape's symbolic force within the colonial encounter. This opens up not only the intellectual history of how geographers use landscape, but the relationship between aesthetics and nature, and between perception and territory, in a specific place. Putting these creative and intellectual practices together can draw out the rich specificity of responses to a singular, changing landscape, and multiply geographical ways of interpreting, representing, and conceptualising landscape. Seeing amphibiously allows us to revel in landscape's flexibility and stickiness. In this paper I pursue this argument through an analysis of cultural representations of the coastal landscape of the Brazilian Northeast. The Northeast's place within the emergence of European landscape histories reminds us of the under-emphasised coloniality of landscape. More importantly, in 20th-century representations of the territory of the estuarine Atlantic coast we find a re-calibration of perspective that is foreshortened, embodied, and muddied. They unsettle the fixities of colonial ways of seeing space, nature, and territory and amount to a regionally specific, counter-hegemonic political aesthetics of nature.

KEYWORDS
Brazil, coloniality, cultural geography, landscape, mangrove, Recife

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Tem que seguir o leito [You've got to follow the riverbed] (Chico Science, 1995)

European representations of landscape as legible, fixed, distanciated, and indivisible territory emerged alongside colonial claims to space. Landscapes are aesthetic encounters with nature, functioning as what Marilena Chauí has called a semaphore: they connect the seen and the unseen. Landscape freights nature and space with meaning. It is vital, therefore, to insist on the contingency of colonial ways of seeing by juxtaposing them with other ways of representing nature and territory that contest colonial understandings of what nature means, and how space is experienced. Here I develop this argument through an analysis of cultural representations of the coastal landscape of the Brazilian Northeast. The Northeast's place within European landscape histories reminds us of the under-emphasised coloniality of landscape, and in 20th-century representations of the territory of the estuarine Atlantic coast we find a re-calibration of perspective that is foreshortened, embodied, and muddied. This unsettles the "cartographic, positivist, imperialist" fixities of colonial ways of seeing space, nature, and territory (McKittrick, 2006, p. xiii) and amounts to a counter-hegemonic political aesthetics of nature.

In this paper I consider influential geographical approaches to landscape, and suggest that 20th-century Northeastern Brazilian aesthetic encounters with the amphibious territory of the Atlantic coast can bring new things into the foreground. Seeing this work *as landscape* opens up the aesthetic encounter of nature, without pre-determining the terms of that encounter. Landscape thinking was to be found not just in disciplinary geography or art history, but in various discursive and artistic fields in the urban Northeast across the 20th century. These innovative aesthetic encounters with nature reconceptualise the relationship between perception and territory and reimagine the acquisitive perspectivity of landscape's colonial inheritance. Together, these creative and intellectual practices show the rich specificity of responses to a singular, changing landscape, and add to geographical ways of interpreting, representing, and conceptualising landscape. Using Marilena Chauí's philosophical work we can see that the problematique of landscape as a mode of aesthetics is not just what Jacques Ranciére calls the "distribution of the sensible" (Rancière, 2004), but that which delimits the visible from the invisible, that which links what is seen and what is not.

2 | LANDSCAPE AND COLONIAL AND RACIAL ORDERS

Just as the Dutch were establishing a colony in the north-east of Brazil (1630–54) the term landscape was emerging in relation to *landschap* paintings (Cosgrove, 2004). The Dutch period has exaggerated importance in histories of Northeastern, and Brazilian, identity (Albuquerque, 1999, p. 44). Their colony was centred on Recife, a port city on a flat coastal plain at the mouths of the mangrove-lined rivers Capibaribe and Beberibe. Along with naturalists and scientists, the painters Albert Eckhout and Frans Post travelled in the employ of the Dutch governor Johan Maurits. Eckhout was tasked with painting ethnographic "Brazilian" characters and Post with depicting the new city of Mauritstaad, at Recife (Oliver, 2013, pp. 198–200). Through the aesthetic practice and form of landscape, Post was part of an unsuccessful Dutch attempt to "prepare the ground of colony" (Dubow, 2000, p. 96) (Figure 1). Post's topographical aesthetic (Driver & Martins, 2005, pp. 4–7) is part of Dutch landscapes' "mapping impulse" (Alpers, 1983). The paintings likely hung in Maurits' new palace (Brienen, 2001) and reinforced colonial possession through the distanced, acquisitive perspectivity of European landscape forms (Cosgrove, 2004). As landscape is the "aesthetic encounter with nature" (Gandy, 2016, p. 434) we can read these tropical landscape paintings into the political aesthetics that laced the visual encounter with the Americas in Europe. These political aesthetics remain important to how we conceptualise landscape today.

Dutch colonialism was part of the development of landscape painting (Larsen, 1964). This encourages us to consider the colonial dimensions of this emerging discourse of the visible, and starting from the Brazilian Northeast offers a novel route through European histories of landscape (Farinelli, 1998; Minca, 2013). Imperial and Atlantic space, and the histories of colonial and racial thought, are deep within the historical rootstock of the landscape way of seeing. The landscape techniques of European art, developed in relation to processes of enclosure and state formation, when transferred into the colonial territory, helped configure territory as a subject for colonial domination. "Tropical" visions emphasise how the landscape way of seeing was bound up with the erection of colonial and racial orders. As Kenneth Olwig argued, "ideas of race and national development were made to seem natural by being incorporated into the idea of landscape as nature" (2002, p. 149), and approaches to landscape in critical geography have put the "groundwork of empire" in the foreground of analysis (Mitchell, 2003). Olwig noted that though "imperial motives" were important in the emergence of landscape painting, local attachments to land and "the substantive nature of landscape" were more significant (Olwig, 1996, p. 634).

FIGURE 1 "Mauritiopolis," Frans Post, 1645.
Source: https://www.brasilianaiconografica.art.br/obras/18325/mauritiopolis (accessed March 2021)

Yet the "substantive nature" of European "places" was in part constituted by colonial modes of extraction. Olwig writes that Ben Johnson's *Masque of Blackness* (1605) was "one of the earliest English uses of the term *landscape*" and it turned "the idea of the country" into a "theater landscape" (1996, p. 637). However, more than the Italianate landscape that Olwig emphasises, the spatial bounds of the masque are distinctly Atlantic. It uses blackface to portray a subjugated, racialised tropics. Johnson lists the masque's performers at court. They include the queen, and women whose families were foundational to British colonialism and slavery. Olwig argues that:

> "landscape in The Queen's Masque of Blackness [was …] was an expression of a neo-Platonic conception of a higher, harmonious, and universal natural principle of proportion behind the surface of external temporal reality [… and] a celebration of the physical nature of royal Britannia." (Olwig, 1996, p. 638; see also 2002, pp. 81–82)

More precisely, though, the point of this hierarchical perspective is a celebration of whiteness, an elaborate construction of anti-blackness, and a spatial imaginary of British maritime domination of an aquatic world naturally destined to subjugation. Olwig suggests that its anti-blackness is "only skin deep" (Olwig, 2002, pp. 155–156), but this too easily splits the theatrical performance from its geopolitical context. It overlooks how the production of both colonial and national space was intimately connected to ideas of race, and the production of racial hierarchy. Johnson's masque performs the

geographical displacement of black princesses becoming white under Albion's gaze. But this was precisely not the effect of the actual displacement of black bodies in the emerging trans-Atlantic slave trade, whose protagonists were both on stage and in the audience of the masque. Olwig argues that we "cannot … distinguish the iconographic meaning of this scenery from its aesthetic form" (1996, p. 638). But no more can we decontextualise this aesthetic form from its political space. The spatial dimensions of the masque's iconography and political aesthetics – the distribution of the visible – produce racial hierarchy. The landscape of *Masque of Blackness* is aquatic and amphibious not least because the oceanic – the Atlantic – was the pivotal territory of imperialism. The masque demonstrates less a place-bound substance of landscape than the imperial and racial dimensions of a European will to power which was co-extensive with the emergence of a landscape way of seeing.

For Brazilian philosopher Marilena Chauí, the colonial project was intrinsically visual. It sought to "exten[d] the frontiers of the visible world and displac[e] the frontiers of the invisible world" (Chauí, 2011, p. 114). The visual extension of frontiers "produced the New World as a semaphore" (2011, p. 114):

> From the Greek *semeion* (sign), and *phoros* (to state, charge, issue), [a semaphore is] something or someone, or a place or an event whose value is not measured by its materiality but rather by its symbolic force, by its power to establish a link between the visible and the invisible, the sacred and the profane, the dead and the undead, ordained for contemplation. (2011, p. 243)

Chauí is, in part, a philosopher of phenomenology, and her use of "semiophore" draws on Krzysztof Pomian and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Deploying her idea of semaphore/semiophore as a way of reading landscape, then, could open onto debates about landscape in phenomenology and post-phenomenology (e.g., Kinkaid, 2020). However, here I turn to Chauí not just as a phenomenologist, but as a philosopher of the post-colonial condition. Her interpretation of Brazil as a semaphore – a matrix of the symbolic, the meaningful, and the aesthetic that connects the visible and the invisible – is premised on a reading of the colonial encounter and offers a new way into the question of the colonial in landscape aesthetics.

Jacques Rancière defines aesthetics as the:

> Delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible [… that] determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time. (2004, p. 13)

Chauí's concept helps us go beyond Rancière to see not just the "delimitation" of the visible versus the invisible, but the link between them. For Chauí, the colonial encounter was necessarily an aesthetic project, a new distribution of the sensible and a new set of links between the visible and the invisible, the sacred and the profane, and the dead and the undead. It was also necessarily about the aesthetic encounter with nature. The colonial project relied on producing Brazil as nation-garden, which "throws [Brazil] into the bosom of nature and, in doing so, … out of the world of history" (2011, p. 117). Imperial expansion required a re-interpretation of natural law to justify the enslavement of African and indigenous peoples in the Americas, and the "aesthetic encounter with nature" was a central part of this puzzle. Olwig explores how the emergence of landscape was bound up with natural law, but Chauí demonstrates that imperialist debates over natural law[1] – theories of objective and subjective natural right – were constitutive of racial hierarchy and what Latin American scholars have called "the coloniality of power" (Lugones, 2020; Quijano, 2000; see also Wynter, 2003). The aesthetic practice of landscape – and its relationship to space, property, the natural, the paradisical – was part of this project; it "ordained" the space and nature of the New World "for contemplation."

Tariq Jazeel has argued that "if we are not attentive to the ways that theory must translate, mutate, and yield as it travels" then "we risk producing a dissimulated landscape" (Jazeel, 2013, p. 64). However, considering landscape in the urban Northeast reinforces less the "untranslatability" that Jazeel emphasises, than how Euro-North American landscape concepts were produced out of a colonial modern gaze that was translational and transatlantic in inception, and in continuing encounter with Euro-North American aesthetics. The mangroves and mudflats on the Atlantic coast interact with political aesthetics in specific ways. The story of Recife's landscape is one of translations, relations, negotiations, and interconnections with European landscapes and ways of seeing. Its infrastructural landscape was made in relation to extractive Atlantic circuits of trade, imperialism, and dependency. The very ground on which the city is built was made by European

technologies of land reclamation (Castilho, 2014). To avoid "dissimulation," therefore, means moving beyond both hermetically distinct epistemic histories of landscape and beyond hermetically distinct material histories of landscapes.

3 | SEEING MUD AND MANGROVES: STRUGGLING ON THE HORIZONTAL

This brings me to one of the Brazilian Northeast's most important landscape thinkers, the geographer, diplomat, writer, and politician Josué de Castro (1908–73), now the focus of expanding research in Anglophone geography (Davies, 2019; Ferretti, 2018), as well as long-standing Brazilian scholarship (Magalhães, 1997; Silva et al., 2003). Castro has mainly been known as a scholar and activist against hunger. But he was a multi-faceted geographical thinker. He actively intervened in the epistemic history of landscape. His writing on landscape almost always came back to Recife, the "amphibious" city.

In 1930 he wrote a series of reports from Mexico: revolutionary history was:

> Like a bloodstain on that enchanted landscape. The testimony of the crime of this lascivious tropical landscape that sucked the blood of its heroes. The earth that seemed full of a strange pleasure, its meaty vegetation clinging to the sides of gullies. (Castro, 1930a, n.p.)

Castro's biography colours his sight: the "vegetation with fleshy leaves" prefigures his descriptions of the mangroves of Recife. In this early writing, landscape is linked to political transformation and functions as a set of visual signs to be read (Minca, 2013): "the best history is that which is written on the face of the earth … in the soul of a people. In the physiognomy of its cities" (Castro, 1930b, n.p.). Castro is drawing on the French tradition of regional geography, in which landscape became "the visible expression of the *genre de vie*: a reflection free of ambiguities or shadows; an expression of the cartographic "truth" of the territory, a truth without (and beyond) theory" (Minca, 2007, p. 189). Yet Castro came to exceed the regionalist mode and associate landscape with place, identity, memory, pedagogy, and epistemology.

His novel *Of men and crabs* was a kind of autobiography, of a "poor boy just opening his eyes to the spectacle the world afforded him of a landscape that was no more than a narrow inlet of the sea, a narrow inlet of miseries" (Castro, 1970, p. xi). There is something uneasy and ambivalent in the oscillation between mis-seeing the river as an "inlet of the sea" and seeing it, as he does below, as semaphore for the backlands. This aesthetic bifurcation of space will return in this paper. It is a distinctive quality of the Northeastern littoral, drawn out between continental and oceanic spatialities. Castro deploys landscape as both lived experience and intellectual inheritance; both from his reading of French geography, and from his unique biographical perspective as a child of the Northeast, what Ferretti has called his "geopoetics" (2020). Landscape was both a way of knowing the world and of being in it. His position in this landscape is intimate, and names "the materialities and sensibilities with which we see," the "perception-with, the creative tension of self and world" (Rose & Wylie, 2006, p. 478).

Not incidentally, Castro lifted the term "amphibious" from Ramalho Ortigão's description of Holland as an "amphibious region." The imperial qualities of Recife's urban landscape are crucial to his analysis of the city. He notes how Portuguese colonialism replicated hilly port cities across the Atlantic and Indian Ocean world from Salvador to Goa, and Dutch urban colonialism adopted watery landscapes and exported urban morphology and drainage technologies from Amsterdam to Batavia and Recife and back again (Castro, 1954). Recife's metropolitan region is unique as a site where these two historical urban colonial landscapes exist alongside one another: Portuguese Olinda and Dutch Recife. The plates in Josué de Castro's monograph on Recife reproduce paintings by Frans Post. As with many Dutch landscape paintings, in his Pernambucan paintings the subject is not just land and water, but land drawn out of the water: the centre of Recife was built on "reclaimed" land (Castilho, 2014). Making land out of water was a key technology of nation-building in the European low-countries, and colonisation across the Atlantic (Adams, 1994, p. 41). Post's point of perspective has its feet in the mud, reflecting the aesthetic and material pertinence of the water level (on *waterschap*, see Mels, 2006, pp. 719–20). Water-territory is the subject, and the gaze itself is terraqueous.

As a mode of thought, landscape came before geography for Castro. As a child, he sat and watched the Capibaribe:

> The river whispered to me in its sweet language as it timorously passed through the green-gray backlands: voluminous when it flowed through the sea of the unending cane plantations, and peaceful through the miry sea of marshes, till it fell into the bosom of the sea itself. (1970, p. xviii)

In his writing on the mangroves and the amphibious landscape, Castro drew on one of his key inspirations, Euclides da Cunha, who also learnt from a riverine landscape. In Euclides' case, it was the Amazon: "I went up to the deck and there, with my eyes burning with insomnia, I saw the Amazon for the first time … How singular seemed that smooth and muddy surface" (Hecht, 2013, p. 223). They shared an approach to writing amphibious landscapes as dynamic, shifting, and emergent. Castro describes mangrove trees as "like animals," "curiously able to live in salt water on loose and constantly submerged earth" (1970, p. xiii). They are uncanny and unsettling. Their "clawlike" roots dig into the mud. "Resisting the force of the tide currents and the strong trade winds that tousled their green hair," they found the very ground of the city, a "Cyclopean task" that they achieve "laboriously," through "constant battle," "as occupation troops" (1970, p. xiv). This recalls Euclides in the Amazon:

> The creative faculties of the river come astonishingly into view … the island that this generates grows under one's very eyes, studded with spits that lengthen and twist like the tentacles of a prodigious beast unbound for the unfolding evolutionary battle, so vibrant and dramatic; containing all the convulsive movement of a momentous noiseless campaign in the shuffling of stalks, the twisting stems and branches, which weave, enlace, and confound themselves. The Aroids consolidate the inconsistent ooze with the webby fibers of their extensive rhizomes, which are in turn supplanted and expelled to the water's edge by the mangroves in violent and tumultuous graspings. (Hecht, 2013, p. 244)

There is much more to be said about the mangrove's creative tenacity, the wider Caribbean and Atlantic cultural geographies that the mangrove opens onto, and the connection between the Brazilian landscape explored here and, for instance, the landscape aesthetics of Wilson Harris, Derek Walcott, Walter Rodney, Jamaica Kincaid, and Frank Bowling around the Anglophone Black Atlantic. But here it is the river and the mud that I want to emphasise. For Castro, the Capibaribe tells the story of the geography of hunger; of the Northeast's socially produced landscape of underdevelopment (Castro, 1946, 1966). For Euclides, the Amazon tells a history of insurgent occupation that bears directly on geopolitics and global space. He sees the rivers' sediments as mobile and transnational, taking soil across oceanic currents and into the southern coasts of the USA:

> In those places the Brazilian is a stranger, a foreigner. Yet he is treading upon Brazilian soil. … The irony of a country without land counterposes itself to another irony, more rudely physical, a 'land' without land. It is the marvelous consequence of a kind of telluric disintegration. The land abandons man. (Hecht, 2013, p. 243)

As much as Susanna Hecht has demonstrated how Euclides' writing on the Amazon is a project of natural history, geopolitics, and nation building, it is also, like Castro's, a project of articulating a new way of seeing the amphibious landscape.

Like in Euclides's "insurgent Amazonia," in Recife, amphibious space is both outside and inside colonial modernity. Castro characterises Recife as the "society of the marshes," socially, ecologically, politically, and economically amphibious (1970, p. xv). Thanks to extensive migration and periodic droughts in the arid backlands, the society of the Northeast "flows as a social mud into the vat of the marshes of Recife, blending with the viscous mud of the swamps" (1970, p. xvi). From his earliest work the mangrove's living landscape is linked to hunger. *Condições de Vida das classes operárias do Recife* [Conditions of Life of the Working Classes of Recife] (1932) showed that people struggled to supply their metabolic needs. He wrote of "the cycle of the crab": people caught crabs for survival, crabs lived off the detritus of the people. The crab diet left people malnourished in a multi-species cycle of poverty. Categories blur, they become *homem-caranguejo* [man-crab]: "humans fashioned of crab meat, thinking and feeling like crabs; amphibians, at home on land and in water, half-man, half-animal … humans who began life as foster brothers to the crab" (1970, p. xii). The *homem-caranguejo* overcomes nature–culture and human–environment binaries (see also Ferretti, 2020; Nogueira, 2012). Catching crabs is a mechanism of survival, but also a modality of identity and defiance.

This vision of an amphibious, peopled landscape of the city is found in Castro's friend João Cabral de Melo Neto's poem, *O cão sem plumas* [The dog without feathers]:

Entre a paisagem
(fluía)
de homens plantados na lama
de casas de lama
plantadas em ilhas
coaguladas na lama
paisagem de anfíbios
de lama e lama
[Between the landscape / (it flowed) / of men planted in the mud; / of mud houses / planted on islands / stuck in the mud; / landscape of amphibians / of mud and mud]

The insistent linguistic return to mud – *lama* – enacts a verbal mimetic stickiness; the mud cannot be washed off. The repetition of *lama*, its interrupted, paratactic tautology, traps the poetic eye in the foreground. As the landscape is mud, so the way of seeing it (here, the poetic voice) gets stuck in the mud. Perspective is foreshortened, and resists clean, long, and directional lines of vision. Mangroves are a landscape that defies perspective. This recalls Euclides in the Amazon:

> It is as though the place lacks vertical lines. The excess of the landscape is such that in a few hours the observer gives in to the fatigue of the unnatural monotony and feels that his gaze is inexplicably foreshortened in that world of endless horizons, as empty and indefinite as those of oceans. (Hecht, 2013, p. 239)

Euclides overcomes and overturns this unnatural monotony to see the landscape through new eyes, inspired by the botanical, biological investigations of natural science and natural history, as well as by his own deep immersion in the social ecologies of Amazonia. Yet the initial visual representation is paradoxical: both endless horizons and total foreshortening.

The mangrove landscape's foreshortened quality has been reimagined by Roberto Burle Marx, the foremost Brazilian landscape architect in the 20th century, and one of the most globally significant proponents of tropical modernism in landscape architecture and garden design (Bardi, 1964). Through his ecological, artistic, and design practice, he was also one of the key landscape thinkers of the Northeast. I will discuss his early work designing Recife's parks below, but he was also a painter. His evocative paintings of mangroves proffer a distinctive aesthetic interpretation of the amphibious landscape, which captures the paradoxical problem of perspective laid out through Euclides, Castro, and Melo Neto.

Frans Post may have painted "the first unambiguous depiction of [mangroves] in the history of (European) art" (Koedam et al., 2017, p. 251), but Burle Marx painted perhaps the most beautiful. The title of *mangue azul* [blue mangrove] (Figure 2) plays on the ecological denominations of mangrove trees, whose species are referred to as "black" and "red." The painting captures the visual foreclosure of the amphibious forest landscape, and its interstitial quality between land, sea, and river. The deep blues evoke long marine trajectories; the orange flashes crab symbiots (as an ecologist, Burle Marx would likely have known that crabs and mangroves are symbiotic; crabs' tunnels help aerate mud around mangrove roots (Carson, 1955, pp. 242–243)).

As Rachel Carson writes of the Florida mangroves, it is only by flying above them that the mangrove forests can be seen with perspective. So too in Recife. Castro compared viewing cities with viewing art and wrote that each city had its "ideal perspective." Recife was best seen from a plane, a "vertical perspective," from where to see the "urban poetry" of the light glinting off its waters, and the complex urban landscape of islands, peninsulas, marshes, mangroves, and woods. "It is impossible to see this from the perspective of the ground or the sea" (Castro, undated, n.p.). Burle Marx revels in this impossibility. Glinting waters shine among the branches of his blue mangrove. Far from the colonial landscapes of Post, with their distant mangroves, the painting is only foreground, but nevertheless a landscape. Burle Marx's "gardens offer the viewer a larger visual vocabulary or grammar of the tropics than is offered by the historical idea of the tropical jungle" (Stepan, 2000, p. 86). His work offers a "larger visual vocabulary" for the mangrove landscape, too.

4 | THE BACKLANDS AND THE ATLANTIC

Landscape is deeply associated with memory (Della Dora, 2013). For Castro, like for Melo Neto (Brandellero, 2014), the riverine landscape throbbed with personal, biographic, and intellectual associations. It was a key modality through which he understood the wider Northeast:

FIGURE 2 "Mangue Azul" [Blue Mangrove] oil on canvas, Roberto Burle Marx, 1963.
Credit: Coleção Sítio Robert Burle Marx/IPHAN/MinC/Governo Federal-Rio de Janeiro. Fotografia de Sítio Roberto Burle Marx/IPHAN/MinC/Governo Federal. Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International.

> My father had brought to Recife the entire living landscape of his home, its animals and its birds. In the garden, I breathed this landscape transplanted from those remote and arid plains. And from the front of the house I contemplated another landscape: the dark landscape of the marsh. (1970, p. xvii)

The idea that the coastal city's landscape stands in – semaphore-like – for the meanings of the vast Northeastern "*sertão*" is common to the work of Melo Neto, Rachel de Queiroz, and Graciliano Ramos as well as, *mutatis mutandis*, in social scientific terms that of Celso Furtado, Chico de Oliveira, and others. The intersections and movements between the backlands and the city define the social and political landscape of the Northeast. What Castro called the "geography of hunger" manifested not only in rural poverty and drought, but urban informality and subsistence. The relationship between city and backlands defined Northeastern politics: was an alliance between peasants and the urban working class possible? How could it be achieved (Arraes, 1972; Fischer, 2014; Julião, 1972)? Such questions animated Castro's political practice, as well as his vision of landscape. There is a political charge in seeing the Capibaribe as bringing the deeply sedimented injustice of the *sertão* into the city.

Here we can identify the politics of Burle Marx's landscapes. His international reputation rests on his iconic pavement landscapes in Rio de Janeiro. Yet it was in the Northeast that he established himself. Having trained in Germany he became head of the Parks and Gardens directorate in Recife between 1934 and 1937 and designed important public gardens and parks, including the Cactus Garden in what is now (appropriately) Praça Euclides da Cunha, and the gardens at Praça de Casa Forte. Form, colour, and structure created his distinctive tropical modernist style (Stepan, 2000), central to which was an ecological perspective, using autochthonous plants as a mode of expression (Fraser, 2000; Montero & Marx, 2001). His

regional ecological sensibility was crucial. An early proponent of combining environmental politics with landscape design (Gandy, 2013, pp. 265–266), his was not a parochial regionalism, but a political aesthetics that put Northeastern ecologies in dialogue with global movements in design and ecology, using plants from the *caatinga* within a style at once international and modernist (Carneiro, 2014; Tabacow, 2011). Castro, researching nutrition, also turned to the *sertão* not as blank or primitive, but as fertile and under-appreciated (1954; Castro et al., 1947). In different ways, for both there was a politics to promoting the underdeveloped, oppressed, drought-ridden Northeast as a site of beauty, diversity, and modernity.

Putting the dry, bright landscapes of the backlands into his urban design, Burle Marx brought the backlands to the coast. This ecological intimacy recasts the prophecy of the famous millenarian *sertanejo* religious leader Antônio Conselheiro that "the backlands will become the sea and the sea will become the backlands" (Cunha, 2010, p. 135). The *cinema novo* movement picked up on these messianic traditions. One of its protagonists, Glauber Rocha, drew on Castro's geography of hunger (Siega, 2017) in his famous manifesto on the "aesthetics of hunger" (Rocha, 2004). This cinematic style relied heavily on a hallmark landscape aesthetics (see, for instance, Andermann, 2017, pp. 134–135): blunt, bright, over-exposed, out-door filming in the Brazilian Northeast. Perhaps the most striking version is Nelson Pereira dos Santos' *Vidas Secas* [Barren Lives], an adaptation of Graciliano Ramos' novel. It tells the tale of migrants attempting to survive a brutal drought. It offers an unflinching, almost mute gaze on the *sertão*'s thorny landscape, and its dry, harsh light (Johnson, 1984). *Cinema novo* refused to glamorise poverty, while representing the *sertão* as a site of potential upheaval and transformation (Bentes, 2003). To see hungrily is to see landscape as politically produced – the dry hills codify the socio-natural production of underdevelopment, as Castro and Celso Furtado argued. The relationship between landscape and subjectivity in Brazilian film has been an enduring concern since the beginning of the 20th century (da Silva & Cunha, 2017). As Mariana Cunha has shown, more recent Northeastern film has returned to the landscape of the *sertão* as a space of mobility and flux, often inverting the relationship between the urban and the rural in representing the contemporary Northeast (Cunha, 2013). In the 1960s, though, *Cinema novo*'s political aesthetics of the stripped-back, the bare bones, and the over-exposed told tales of a kind of absurdist realism. They embodied a direct challenge not only to domestic political failure and corruption, but also constituted a politics of cinematic form, promoting an autochthonous, Third World cinema in opposition to an imperialist, homogenising Hollywood cinema (Rocha, 2004; see also, e.g., Stam & Johnson, 1979). The aesthetics of hunger is not an aesthetics of transparency, but of codification, using landscape as a semaphore.

Sharing a revolutionary gaze on the Northeastern landscape, though not an aesthetic style, Beatriz Nascimento has not been celebrated as an artist in the same way as the protagonists of *cinema novo*. However, *Ôrí*, the film that captures her work, made by Raquel Gerber, includes as rich a set of connotations and as extraordinary and distinctive a cinematic landscape. Nascimento was an Afro-Brazilian activist, poet, and historian from Sergipe, a few hundred kilometres south of Recife. She was a scholar of the history, sociology, and politics of *quilombos* – communities of escaped, formerly enslaved people – in both African and Brazilian manifestations (Smith et al., 2021). *Ôrí* is a poetic exploration of the profoundly unfinished project of Black liberation in Brazil. The film proposes deep political, aesthetic, social, and environmental connections across Atlantic landscapes. It inverts the direction of Frans Post and Albert Eckhout's gaze, its perspective swaying along the rivers of the Brazilian Atlantic forest, bobbing below the surface of the water and through the mangrove roots and routes (Figure 3). The point of view is aquatic; at times the camera sees from the water itself. The film connects mangrove landscapes with African spirituality, reading amphibious landscapes through trans-Atlantic spiritual spatialities. It shows Afro-Brazilian dance and religious rituals, including the baptism of Black women in the Atlantic (for further on the significance of such practices, see Perry, 2013). This reclaims Atlantic beaches laced with traumatic histories: the 19th-century British scholar and traveller Maria Callcott recounted seeing enslaved people burying their dead in the open below the waterline of Recife's beaches, in a necropolitical cultural gesture to the middle passage (Callcott, 1824). Nascimento's film uses landscape to carve out a set of Black reference points within Brazilian coastal social ecologies. Like Glauber Rocha's *cinema novo* classic *Terra em transe* [Entranced Earth], Nascimento's work uses trance, in reference to candomblé, to choreograph an aesthetic form that geographically multiplies landscape's meanings. In *Ôrí*, when we see Brazil, we see Africa, and when we see Africa, we see Brazil. Trance enables this multiplicity, as the open, comprehensive possibilities of altered states are figured by the camera's transoceanic mobility. The film does not announce its movements across the Atlantic; it slides between West African and Brazilian urban and littoral spaces with the ease of a spiritual form, carried by music that spans and entangles geographies.

Nascimento offers a visual and artistic vocabulary for thinking through landscapes' intersection with liberation projects. In her film, landscape is a simultaneously textural and spiritual phenomenon. Landscape in European painting emerged in intimate association with both bourgeois systems of property ownership and Euclidean conceptions of absolute space. The intersections between these material, scientific, and aesthetic dimensions produced the framed form of linear perspective and the landscape way of seeing in the European renaissance (Cosgrove, 1985). Yet evidently this is only one historically

FIGURE 3 *Ôrí* screenshot, Beatriz Nascimento and Raquel Gerber.
Note: Caetano Veloso's famous song *Terra* – "land," "earth," or "homeland" – plays behind shots of mangroves and waterscapes: "Terra, terra! / Por mais distante / o errante navegante / quem jamais te esqueceria?" [Earth, earth! / However far / the wandering traveller goes / who could ever forget you?].
Source: *Ôrí* screenshot: 1.02.47. Angra filmes, Fundação do Cinema Brasileiro

and geographically specific way of seeing. There are landscapes "before linear perspective" (Della Dora, 2013), and landscape is intimately connected with spiritual ideas of space. The modalities of Beatriz Nascimento's visual and sonic political aesthetics suggest an alternative understanding of space, and a countervailing ontology of landscape. For Nascimento, the Brazilian Atlantic littoral is profoundly connected with the African Atlantic littoral. Throughout *Ôrí* she moves across oceanic space seamlessly: West African market scenes and Brazilian candomblé merge and blend, one feeding the other. Landscapes from one continent and landscapes from another are continuous and interconnected. This is not a representation of geometric space, but spiritual space whose coordinates are traced through histories of Black identity and Black political, cultural, and spiritual praxis. As her research on *quilombos* and her poetry and political praxis attested, her vision of a Black Atlantic spatiality, while spiritual, was not abstract. It was grounded in a politically directed project of liberation. For Nascimento, investigating the *quilombo* was a multi-valent project. It was a site of emancipation to be sought through practical political action, it was a political space that had to be imagined into being through artistic practice, and it was an intellectual political project to be grounded and defended through historical and sociological research. A crucial part of this multi-valent project was a political re-interpretation of Brazilian space, and Brazilian landscapes, both urban and rural, as substantially co-extensive with a global Black sense of place (McKittrick, 2006).

Nascimento's project draws on a visual and aesthetic representation of landscape, as well as a historically and intellectually distinct conception of Black embodiment (Smith, 2016). It might be argued that it is problematic to integrate such landscapes with "the theoretical models and conceptual languages we use within the Euro-American academy," when their "contextual realities and spatial politics" precisely resist them (Jazeel, 2013, p. 63). Certainly, Nascimento's conception of space and landscape cannot be reduced to rationalist, scientific understandings of space, or to the trilogy of "nature," "religion," and "subjectivity" that Jazeel (2013) displaces. Yet landscape is a flexible form of thought that connects the visual, the spatial, the symbolic, the representational, the perspectival, and the ecological. It is for this reason that I have suggested Chauí's notion of semaphore as a fruitful analytic for the power of landscape. Landscape can be "integral to both the

reproduction *and* contestation of political power" (Duncan, 2005, p. 3). If we register landscape as the dialectical relationship between representation and what is represented – the complex, mutually shaping, and iterative movement between aesthetics and nature, perspective and territory – then the dissimulation that Jazeel warns against can be circumvented. In the case of Nascimento, seeing her work *as landscape* allows us to interpret the relationship between embodiment, space, and power without pre-ordaining the terms of embodiment, space, or power. Her landscape imaginaries are in dialogue with, and resistance against, histories of European ways of seeing and claiming space.

To return to Josué de Castro, we can see that in his work, too, the mangrove landscape is freighted with political weight, and with the living and the dead. The child hero of *Men and Crabs*, João Paulo, dies in an abortive revolution, modelled on Recife's 1935 communist-inspired uprising. Both the fictional and the real revolution were, like earlier insurgencies (Callcott, 1824), launched from the muddy edges of the city (Fischer, 2014). Castro's landscape writing is steeped in political struggle. In a pointed 1936 article, he described the urban landscape at dawn: "in this uncertain hour, still soaked with the colour of night, but with just a little breath of morning, Motocolombó Road fades into invisibility amidst the mangroves, with its *mocambos* still sleeping and dark" (1959, p. 21). This "awakening" is political: Motocolombó Road was at the epicentre of the 1935 uprising (Gominho, 2012). The flat mangrove landscape obscures perspective, and in the oscillation between the visible and the visible an uncertain revolutionary potential lingers. This is the other side of Walter Raleigh's "indecipherable landscape" of Guiana (Driver & Martins, 2005, p. 9). As Nascimento and Gerber recall in *Ori*, amphibious landscape is rich with associations with *quilombos*. In Recife, forests were configured as a threat for centuries, with the fear of invisible racialised enemies plaguing the minds of the white elite (Carvalho, 2006; Verardi, 2019). They contain what Wright has called a "morphology of marronage" (Wright, 2019). Castro's novel's last lines connect revolution to landscape and bodies to ecology:

> The landscape of the marshes was now covered by a veil of darkness, a black shroud that extended over all the bodies of the defeated revolutionists. Somewhere among them, buried under the mangroves, lay the body of João Paulo, whose flesh in decay would nourish the mud, which, in turn, feeds the cycle of the crab. (1970, p. 190)

Nascimento goes further, seeing mangrove landscapes as imbued with the possibilities of Black liberation. The visible, the bodily, the more than human, the oppressed and the emancipated are bound together in amphibious landscapes.

In the early 1990s, Chico Science was the charismatic figurehead of a cultural and musical efflorescence emerging from the city of Recife, in the Northeast of Brazil. With his band, Nação Zumbi, through his music, videos, cover art, public persona, and lyrics he reconfigured the cultural landscape of the urban mangroves of Recife. The city's muddy, telluric textures were a central orientating post of *mangue beat*, the musical moment/movement of which Chico Science was the most dynamic individual figure. *Mangue beat*, or *mangue bit*, means the beat of the mangrove or the mangrove bit. In the early 1990s, this pun captured a technological futurism of computer bits, internet messaging, and satellite dishes. *Mangue beat* music irreverently blended the traditions of Northeastern maracatu and North American hip-hop.

Chico Science pulls together the threads this paper has laid out, from the colonial to the perspectival, the emancipatory and the embodied. The body in the mud is a crucial figure in *mangue beat*. They made Castro's "*homem-caranguejo*" into a cultural icon and reference point for a resistive, modern, urban counter-culture. Embracing a more-than-human political aesthetics, they called themselves and their fans *mangue boys* and *mangue girls*, and made their hands into the pincers of crabs, while drawing on the symbolism of the *quilombo* and Zumbi, the pioneer of Black Brazilian liberation and leader of the *quilombo* of Palmares. In their music videos, as Mariana Cunha puts it in her analysis of contemporary Pernambucan film, it is "in the relationship between the body and the landscape that new subjectivities arise" (2017, p. 78).

In the song *Da Lama Ao Caos* [From Mud to Chaos], Recife's mud and chaos get into one another:

> Da lama ao caos, do caos à lama
> Um homem roubado nunca se engana
> [From the mud to chaos, from chaos to the mud /A robbed man is never wrong]

The entangled urban life of Recife and the diverse, scrappy, muddy animal life of the mangrove are bundled together. A crab scrambles out of the mangroves and becomes a rat. The city's multiplicitous, raucous urbanity is political. Punning on the verbs *organizar/desorganizar*, Chico Science imagines getting himself sorted, getting organised, and sowing chaos. Chaos is both the mud and the city as it is, and an anarchic reorganisation to be worked towards.

Chico Science's reconfiguration of landscape was consciously geographical. The angry refrain of the song connects the living landscape to Recife's political and intellectual history:

> Ô Josué, eu nunca vi tamanha desgraça
> Quanto mais miséria tem, mais urubu ameaça
> [Oh Josué I've never seen such misfortune / The more the misery, the more the vulture threatens]

Chico Science is referring to Josué de Castro, who was a key inspiration for the cultural and political intervention of *mangue beat*. In an interview in 1995, Chico Science stands in the mud at the edge of the river in the centre of Recife. The camera roves around the river and the mangroves. The operator's feet are in the mud of the brackish estuary. The backdrop and foreground is the Capibaribe and the Beberibe, the rivers that flow into and meet the Atlantic in Recife. Chico Science connects the landscape, knowledge production, and politics:

> *Tem que se entrenar, tem que se informar, tem que saber para onde corre o rio, não é? Tem que seguir o leito assim, tem que estar informado. Tem que saber quem é Josué de Castro, rapaz.*
> [You've got to educate yourself, you've got to inform yourself, you've got to know where the river runs, right? You've got to follow the river bed, you've got to be informed. You've got to know who Josué de Castro is, man.]

Apart from noting the local radical geographical inheritance, we can hear Chico Science showing us how landscape becomes a source of intellectual emancipation. Seventy years before, Castro wrote of his childhood in Recife as a coming to consciousness in landscape:

> For hours I would sit motionless at the quay, listening to the story of the river, watching its waters flow as if it were a motion picture. It was the river that first taught me the history of the northeast, the history of this land that almost lacks a history. (1970, p. xviii)

For him, the rivers' meeting with the Atlantic constructs a visual knowledge, an aesthetic intellectual heritage, unique to the Northeast. This way of seeing emerges from physical subsumption in the landscape. Chico Science's landscape aesthetics are physical, becoming mud, becoming crab. And so too are Castro's:

> The house where I was born had next to it a large fishpond with fish, crabs, and other similar crustaceans. If I was not born inside the fishpond with the crabs, at two I was already in it. (1970, p. xvi)

This seeing-from-being-in marks out a landscape way of seeing in the Brazilian Northeast.

One of Chico Science and Nação Zumbi's biggest hits was "Maracatu Atômico." Its technicolour, telluric video features the band crawling and weaving through the mud, and among the mangroves (Figure 4). The video blocks perspective, gets in the way of a clear view of the city, favours the up-close and the claustrophobic, and revels in the diverse and sticky amphibiousness of the mudflats. The mud-men remind us of Beatriz Nascimento's vision of Black space and nature in Brazil. In *Ôrí*, over film of mangroves, she speaks of a Black Brazilian relationship to the earth, and of Blackness as "*cor da lama … cor da terra*" [the colour of mud … the colour of the earth]. Black Brazilian culture imbues *Mangue beat* and its representation of men in the mud of Recife. The theoretically fertile work of *mangue beat* – its referentialism, lyricism, and genius loci – are a rich *massapé* for thinking about the politics and textures of urban nature in Brazil. Their cultural politics of animal embodiment offers a distinctive take on the late 20th-century cyborg technosphere (Haraway, 1985; Sneed, 2019). *Mangue beat* makes an aesthetic intervention into the landscape of Recife. Under bright blue skies, Castro's amphibious vision of the city is re-imagined for the millennium, and its political aesthetics re-invented for new injustices. The "manifesto" of the movement, "*caranguejos com cérebro*" [crabs with brains], by Fred 04 and DJ Renato L., draws a straight line from Dutch colonial history to contemporary inequality, blaming "the irresistible madness of a cynical notion of progress" for this "picture of misery and of urban chaos" (translated in Galinsky, 2002, p.128). The landscape artists of *mangue beat* see the city up close; unlike Frans Post, who only had his feet in the mud, *mangue beat* is the mud. Or in João Cabral de Melo Neto's terms, *lama e lama*: mud and mud.

FIGURE 4 "Maracatu Atômico" screenshot, Chico Science and Nação Zumbi.
Source: https://youtube.com/watch?v=_G63uF288T4 (accessed March 2021).

5 | CONCLUSION: MUDDYING LANDSCAPE, EMBODYING MUD

Through Castro, Burle Marx, Nascimento, and *mangue beat*, the Brazilian urban Northeast has been a site of deep innovation in ways of seeing landscapes. Specifically, in ways of seeing the mangroves, mudflats, backlands, and Atlantic. The textures of Recife's landscape have elicited historically and geographically specific ways of seeing that can challenge colonial perspective and multiply our histories of landscape thought. Landscape explores the relationships between perspective and territory, between the sensed and the real. Thinking amphibiously bridges terrains between self and nature, and places seeing bodies inside seen landscapes. These are ways of seeing landscape that are "about all manner of *other things* than just the landscape itself" (Mitchell, 2003, p. 790). The landscapes here all re-configure the relationship between space and perception. They don't just delimit the visible from the invisible, but the links between them. They configure the landscape as a "semaphore," in Chauí's terms, ordaining the amphibious landscape as a site of contemplation, a place and ecology "whose value is not measured by its materiality but rather by its symbolic force, by its power to establish a link between the visible and the invisible, the sacred and the profane, the dead and the undead" (2011, p. 243). Whether in *mangue beat*, where men are crabs and mud is life, or in the strange bifocalism of *cinema novo*, in which the ocean becomes the backlands, and the backlands the ocean, or in Beatriz Nascimento's folding cinematic landscapes of the Black Atlantic, the sacred and profane, the visible and the invisible are held together in unresolved tension, in opposition to the "stable vantage points" of colonial perspective (McKittrick, 2006, p. xviii). All of their relations to landscape are active and transformative, not descriptive or simply analytic.

John Berger said of the landscape of the Haute Savoie: "I loved it not because it was a view – but because I participated in it" (Kellaway, 2016, n.p.). Chico Science was working the landscape for its creative possibilities. Josué de Castro spent his life struggling against hunger, beginning from the hunger of Recife's margins; Burle Marx re-made the landscape as a designer; and Beatriz Nascimento's aesthetic interpretation of the Brazilian landscape was always in pursuit of racial justice. Landscape, for all of them, was part of a broader commitment, in which the possibility of transformation was necessarily at stake. The ground covered here does not suggest a need to dispense with the notion of landscape, but to revel in its

flexibility and stickiness. Landscape, like mud, is fertile. It retains possibilities for reckoning with the relations between politics, nature, and aesthetics, as well as between perspective and territory.

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No new data were created for this article.

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ENDNOTE

[1] Olwig is discussing North Europe, and Chauí counter-reformation scholars in Coimbra, but both deal with natural law.

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