Insights from the grassroots: Political ecology of Brazilian environmental justice movements

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Abstract
Latin American political ecology has advanced a rigorous critique of mainstream development models predicated on intensive extraction of natural resources. In Brazil, the diversity of environmental justice movements illustrates the multifaceted ways different actors contest dominant notions of "progress." This article and a related series of lectures published at the *JPE Grassroots* platform present first-hand perspectives of diverse Brazilian environmental justice movements, including indigenous, *quilombola*, traditional forest peoples' and food sovereignty movements. We summarize the key ideas shared in the lectures and systematize their contributions as collective innovations for the environmental agenda and the ongoing making of political ecology. Overall, the speakers critique the commodification of land while promoting models of flourishing rooted in forest economics. They contest colonial legal frameworks and knowledge by encouraging strategic alliances, advancing counter-narratives, and promoting artistic production of the diversity of life on Earth.

Keywords
Latin American political ecology, Brazilian socio-environmental justice movements, critical thought

1. Introduction

Over the last three decades, Latin American[2] political ecology has built a rigorous critique of mainstream development models predicated on the intensive extraction of largely nonrenewable natural resources and the appropriation of territories (Acselrad, 2004; Alimonda, 2011; Alimonda *et al.*, 2017; Escobar, 2008; Gudynas, 2013; Svampa, 2019). Scholars have shown how these extractive models, historically entwined with colonial processes, not only cause ecological degradation but also

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[2] The choice to adopt Latin America as a frame of reference, rather than focusing exclusively on Brazil, reflects the region's shared historical and structural conditions. Dynamics such as extractivism, coloniality, and socio-environmental conflict cut across national contexts and are similarly addressed within Latin American political ecology. Thus, while this article centers on Brazil, it engages broader regional processes, recognizing that locally grounded perspectives can resonate beyond national boundaries and inform the understanding of complex realities elsewhere.

perpetuate socio-environmental injustices, wherein certain groups are able to secure privileges while others are impoverished. Writing against the dominance of frameworks rooted in the Global North, critical responses have emerged through local and regional mobilizations by peasants, Indigenous peoples, and Afro-descendant communities, (re)producing a myriad of rich experiences and ways of knowing (Porto-Gonçalves & Leff, 2015). As emphasized by Alimonda in his seminal work *En clave del sur* (2017), Latin American political ecology is a distinct political-intellectual field, characterized by its unique practices, including the use of "unconventional" methods and sources, inter- and transdisciplinary approaches, strong ties with socio-environmental activism, and a commitment to renewing action and thinking in academia. As a field, it shapes responses to contemporary environmental crises and to the epistemological limitations imposed by dominant knowledge systems. A comprehensive understanding of grassroots movements demands close attention to Latin America's historical formation, where coloniality and authoritarianism have been rooted in the institutionalization of inequality, land conflicts, ecological degradation and social hierarchy, with racism serving as a foundational axis for the reproduction of subordination and violence. Brazil, in particular, offers a unique window into these dynamics.

The diversity of socio-environmental justice movements in Brazil[3] illustrates the breadth of conflicts and the multifaceted ways in which different actors contest dominant notions of "progress" and "development" (Fleury *et al.*, 2017). Following the Latin American political-epistemic project, the authors of this article curated and organized a series of lectures bringing together representatives from diverse environmental justice movements in Brazil, including Indigenous, *quilombola*, traditional forest peoples, and food sovereignty movements, as well as actors from the public and cultural sectors and socio-environmental NGOs.[4] This diverse group encompasses many of the key contemporary Brazilian environmental justice movements; however, we acknowledge that this assemblage does not capture or exhaust the entire mosaic of grassroots struggles for socio-environmental justice across the country. We reached out to our networks to showcase examples that are not intended to provide an exhaustive mapping of the environmental justice landscape, but rather to offer a firsthand view of the perspectives of specific movements of national importance. Invitees were asked to share their contemporary practices and knowledge frameworks with an open audience composed of students and other interested participants. Taken together, these lectures embody what Escobar (2018) describes as the interweaving of three threads of critical thought: leftist thinking, autonomous thought, and thinking with the Earth.

The social and environmental justice movements under discussion operate at multiple levels, challenging conventional political arenas by redefining what is at stake, who is allowed to participate, and how. In doing so, they act not only on a material level (e.g., contesting extractivist policies or fighting for land rights) but also in the symbolic realm[5], generating new meanings and reshaping dominant discourses on sustainability and development (Escobar, 1995; Porto-Gonçalves, 2006). Furthermore, their struggles are not just reactions to injustices: they are generative processes that

[3] Many of these movements are connected to the Brazilian Environmental Justice Network (Rede Brasileira de Justiça Ambiental – RBJA), a coalition that brings together a variety of actors who experience, expose, and actively confront the environmental inequalities produced by the Brazilian development model.

[4] All the lectures are at https://grassrootsjpe.org/categories-series/political-ecology-of-brazils-environmental-justice-movements/

[5] It is important to highlight that even when mobilizations appear modest and actions are localized; their impact can be significant. Their symbolic reach frequently exceeds their immediate scale, inducing regional and global shifts in public debate and prompting institutional transformations.

continuously produce and reconfigure alternative forms of life and organization, forging new political subjects (Candiotto, 2021). Far from offering localized solutions framed within dominant understandings, these movements represent insightful ways of conceiving, protecting, and promoting the diversity of life as the very condition of existence on Earth. Through creative articulation of ancestral and contemporary knowledge and practices, they expand the parameters of what is deemed possible and imaginable (Krenak, 2020; Jasanoff & Simmet, 2021).

This article, along with the related series of lectures published on the *Grassroots* website, seeks to contribute to Latin American political ecology's ongoing efforts to foreground first-person voices and to place socio-environmental justice movement leaders at the forefront of theoretical academic discussions and the global environmental agenda. The article and the lecture series aim to:

1) situate Brazilian environmental justice movements within (Latin American) political ecology;
2) promote first-hand access to perspectives from grassroots environmental justice movements;
3) highlight cross-cutting insights that contribute to broader discussions on more sustainable paths forward.

To achieve these objectives, we first recognize the importance of foregrounding grassroots voices and how this relates to political ecology's commitment to epistemic diversity and decolonial thinking. We then offer a summary of each lecture.[6] Finally, we highlight cross-cutting arguments that emerge from a systemic overview of the eight lectures: land is not a commodity; Indigenous epistemologies must be at the center; critique of colonial legal frameworks is necessary; challenge green capitalism discourses in favor of forest economies; build strategic alliances and power-knowledge relations; counter-narratives and artistic production are grounded in the Earth; and anti-racist and community-led policies must be affirmed. In the conclusion, we advocate for dialogues that expand the predominant environmentalist rhetoric—often based on technocratic approaches to socioenvironmental problems—through direct engagement with grassroots movements.

Furthermore, by bringing first-person accounts from Brazilian grassroots movements into English, we aim to broaden the audience for these discourses and provide educators and researchers with valuable materials offering direct access to perspectives from socio-environmental struggles in Latin America.[7] At the same time, the cross-cutting analysis of these discourses systematizes their contributions as collective innovations for an environmental agenda and the ongoing development of political ecology. We also hope that this work provides fertile ground for grassroots-led pathways that extend beyond formal educational institutions and academic conventions, strengthening non-elite contributions to policymaking, autonomous research, and the movements themselves.

2. Knowledge from the grassroots

Extensive literature advocates for transdisciplinary perspectives to generate a new shared scientific standpoint for sustainability (Lang *et al.*, 2012). Nevertheless, a significant portion of

[6] A complete description of each lecture can be found at the *Grassroots* portal: https://grassrootsjpe.org/categories-series/political-ecology-of-brazils-environmental-justice-movements/

[7] The lectures can be accessed individually through the website, or read collectively.

research remains limited to the technocratic realm, or stays close to knowledge systems that have the same epistemological background as modern science, such as state policy and technological innovation (Scoones *et al.*, 2020). In this sense, the co-production of knowledge is often restricted to scientists, managers and a specific kind of organized civil society, without properly questioning the power struggles surrounding the use of and access to natural resources, especially in post-colonial contexts.

We argue that any knowledge committed to the defense and deepening of democracy must be grounded in the recognition that reality is historically produced and a socially shared construction, continually constituted through situated practices, embodied relations, and ongoing frictions. Democratic knowledge, therefore, must assume a dynamic, critical, and reflexive character, constantly interrogating power structures that shape inclusion, exclusion, and their modulations. Within this horizon, a crucial political-epistemological strategy to confront enduring forms of domination historically rooted in the Americas is sustained dialogue between scholars and activists, marked by alliances and tensions (Lugones, 2018). There are legacies of coloniality and authoritarianism that, far from being overcome, continue to gain strength today (Alimonda, 2011).

We build on Latin American decolonial thinking to approach research from a "committed" perspective: to produce alliances with historically excluded voices and perspectives (Quijano, 2000). By "committed research," we mean the production of thought and methodologies that aim to transform unjust social structures that sustain racism, elitism, sexism, and homophobia. This can only be achieved through critical questioning of the role of the researcher and epistemological hierarchies. Committed research strives to confront inequalities and asymmetries of power in the use and production of knowledge, particularly when such knowledge contributes to the perpetuation of domination and subjugation. From this perspective, it is impossible to move beyond the constraints of coloniality in research and political action without engaging with theories that emerge from constellations of movements for environmental justice, social equality, and cultural recognition. We acknowledge and seek to challenge the tensions between academia and community through a methodological shift aimed at building alliances with historically silenced knowledge and perspectives (Lugones, 2018). In short, we argue that the decolonial turn in research and political action in Latin America can foreground power relations in knowledge production through a deeper degree of epistemological framing, and address the need for committed research.

Latin American political ecology has made tremendous advances in promoting spaces that reflect environmental justice knowledge and that foster genuine democratic engagement in knowledge co-production. Since the late 1990s, Arturo Escobar has emphasized the importance of questioning how power-knowledge relations shape the use and access to territories of life (Escobar, 1998). Enrique Leff, in turn, has advocated for an environmental epistemology grounded in "knowledge dialogues" since the early 2000s (Leff, 2012). Political ecology in Latin America has proposed an environmental rationality that emerges when academic knowledge encounters the multiple rationalities and struggles involved in sustaining life in the face of imminent ecocide (Porto-Gonçalvez, 2024).

This tradition has led to many co-production processes across Latin America, encompassing a wide range of struggles and imaginaries for the future, documented primarily in Spanish and Portuguese (Alimonda, 2025; Vasconcelos Pascoal & Zhouri, 2021; Porto, 2019; among others). As part of this movement, we highlight initiatives aimed at decolonizing Brazilian universities, such as the Transversal Training Program in Traditional Knowledge of the Federal University of Minas Gerais and the Professional Master's Program in Sustainability with Traditional Peoples and

Territories (MESPT) at the University of Brasília. We aim to contribute to this diversification of the narratives about Latin America by opening spaces in the anglophone world for direct engagement with these perspectives, promoting a transversal overview based on the trajectories of the authors both within and outside academia.

3. Perspectives from environmental justice movements in Brazil

Writing in the Brazilian context, Acselrad (2010) argues that struggles for environmental justice are related to three central threads:

1) defending the rights to culturally specific environments for traditional communities and Indigenous peoples, often on the frontiers of capitalist expansion;
2) ensuring equitable environmental protection against socio-territorial segregation and market-driven environmental inequality;
3) securing fair access to natural resources by resisting the concentration of fertile land, water, and safe soil in the hands of powerful economic interests.

While promoting environmental justice in specific settings, these movements also produce new spaces for action, policy, and organization. This is particularly important in a nation where alternatives to the mainstream development model, which destroy the environment and deepen oppression, are few and far between (Coates & Sandroni, 2023).

Development policies in Brazil, and elsewhere in Latin America, are bound predominantly to the so-called "extractive imperative", which relies on commodities, plantations, and the extraction of mineral resources as the main drivers of economic growth in rural areas and as generators of global trade benefits (Arsel *et al.*, 2016). But as climate change, for example, becomes a challenge that requires not only environmental but also social and political attention, new political subjects emerge, and with them, new forms of social movements (Lopes & Heredia, 2014). Cultural and political actors such as the *quilombolas*, Indigenous peoples, *seringueiros*[8], landless workers, and many others promote on-the-ground and symbolic alternatives that move beyond the extractive imperative toward creating abundance and care. In this section, we summarize key ideas from each of the eight lectures featuring diverse actors promoting environmental justice, from the southeastern Brazilian voices for food sovereignty to Indigenous struggles in the northeast and *seringueiros* movements in the Amazon.

Family farmers and the food sovereignty movement

The first lecture of the series features Ana Terra Reis and Josiane dos Santos. Ana's work focuses on issues related to agrarian reform in Brazil. She currently leads the National Secretariat of Supply, Cooperativism, and Food Sovereignty at the Ministry of Agricultural Development (MDA). Josiane, the daughter of farmers from a smallholding established through agrarian reform, currently serves in the same secretariat, where she works to strengthen family farming and promote food security in Brazil.

[8] *Seringueiros* are Brazilian rubber tappers, workers who have historically extracted latex from rubber trees (*seringueiras*) in the Amazon rainforest to produce natural rubber. Their movement has made famous Chico Mendes (1944–1988) the legendary *seringueiro*, union leader, and environmentalist who transformed their struggle for access to the trees into a global movement for sustainability.

In her talk, Ana explores Brazil's agrarian issues in a historical and structural context, urging a critical examination of the plantation-based model and its enduring impact on the country's agricultural landscape and economic structure. She frames her discussion around three key areas: Brazil's agrarian history, the role of family and peasant agriculture, and the challenges to consolidating food sovereignty in the context of global capitalism and the ongoing climate crisis. Her presentation illustrates how addressing these challenges requires policies that promote access to land, sustainable production methods, and the empowerment of rural communities. Josiane's talk builds on these themes by examining the transformative potential of agroecology and public policies aimed at strengthening family farming. She highlights the role of cooperatives, social movements such as the Landless Workers' Movement, and community-based initiatives in fostering sustainable agricultural practices, knowledge exchange, and territorial resilience.

Ancestral territories and Indigenous movements

The second lecture of the series features Juliana Tupinambá, an Indigenous leader of the Tupinambá people of Olivença, Bahia, Northeastern Brazil. Juliana is an educator and geographer. She holds a masters degree in social anthropology from the University of Brasília and is currently a doctoral candidate in the same field at the same university. Her lecture centers on the resilience of the Tupinambá people of Olivença and their struggles for territorial demarcation and recognition. She highlights the historical violence of colonization, including ethnocide and dispossession, and connects these forms of injustice to current challenges, such as land invasions. Juliana emphasizes the cultural significance of Tupinambá traditions, the importance of reclaiming ancestral lands and artifacts, and the broader role that Indigenous territories play in the struggle for climate justice and environmental conservation. She underscores the urgent need for historical reparations and collective efforts to protect Indigenous rights and preserve humanity's future.

The Seringueiros movements and the Chico Mendes legacy

The third lecture of the series features Dione Torquato, the General Secretary of the National Council for Extractivist Populations (CNS), an organization that honors the legacy of Chico Mendes and the *seringueiro* (rubber tapper) struggle in the Amazonian forest. Dione's lecture focuses on territorial conflicts in Brazil and the vital role that local peoples play in conserving the Amazon. He emphasizes the need to protect against land grabbing and environmental degradation and highlights the intrinsic connection between these communities and the forest, advocating for inclusive policies, sustainable development, and respect for traditional ways of life as essential for combating climate change and ensuring socio-environmental justice.

Traditional populations and their living lands

The fourth lecture features Wilson Rocha, a Federal Prosecutor with a masters degree in history and constitutional law. He currently serves as the Executive Director of the Territórios Vivos (Living Lands) Project, a Voluntary Geographic Information System (VGIS) designed to collect self-declared data on the territories of traditional populations in Brazil. Wilson's lecture examines the role of Brazil's Federal Public Ministry in protecting the territorial rights of traditional peoples and communities. He highlights the historical context of colonization, racism, and land dispossession that continues to shape Brazil's legal framework. He also discusses the innovative use of the Traditional Territories Platform, a tool developed to support the self-identification of territories by Indigenous,

quilombola, and other long-standing, sustainable and environmentally conscious communities, often referred to in Brazil as "traditional communities"[9] The platform aims to address the slow pace of official land demarcation and the vulnerabilities it creates in Brazil. By advocating for self-declaration, Wilson emphasizes the connection between ethnicity, culture, and territory while seeking to further public recognition and legal security for these communities.

Brazil is an Indigenous land: Art, culture, and communication

The fifth lecture showcases Caio Dutra and Priscila Tapajowara. Caio Dutra is a cultural producer who initiated an occupation movement in the Setor Comercial Sul in Brasília, Distrito Federal, a stigmatized area in the district's downtown that has recently become an important space for artistic interventions. He currently produces the *Festival Brasil É Terra Indígena*, the largest festival of Indigenous culture and art in Brazil.

Priscila Tapajowara is from the Tapajó people in the Brazilian Amazon. She is a climate activist, photographer, audiovisual producer, and co-coordinator of Mídia Indígena.

Caio's talk emphasizes the transformative power of culture in addressing contemporary challenges such as climate change and urban marginalization. Drawing from his experience in Brasília, he highlights initiatives like the *Festival*, which connects Indigenous art with environmental advocacy. He underscores the role of cultural expression as a catalyst for social awareness and change, amplifying Indigenous voices and promoting the preservation of Brazilian biomes.

Priscila's talk focuses on the intersection of Indigenous activism, art, and environmental justice. She shares her work at Mídia Índia, a collective empowering Indigenous communities through media training. Priscila discusses the festival as a platform for showcasing Indigenous culture and resistance, blending traditional and contemporary art forms. Her presentation reinforces the importance of preserving the Amazon's ecosystems, linking cultural survival to the defense of ancestral lands and advocating for global solidarity in the fight against climate change.

Quilombola histories and audiovisual production

The sixth lecture features Fábio Martins, a filmmaker and musician from the *Quilombo do Campinho* in Paraty, Rio de Janeiro State, Brazil. Fábio studied cinema and has been involved in independent film groups working in partnership with social movements. He directed the short film "Paraty, Land of Black People," which won a national award from Funarte (National Arts Foundation). Fábio's lecture explores the intersection of Afro-Brazilian identity, cultural resistance, and cinema as a tool for reclaiming ancestral narratives. He recounts the history of *Quilombo do Campinho*, his matriarchal *quilombola* community, and the struggles for land rights faced by *quilombola* and Afro-diasporic peoples in Brazil. Through his films, like *Agudás*, Fábio challenges narratives that begin with slavery, focusing instead on pre-colonial African histories and connections. His work celebrates Afro-Brazilian culture by creating circles of resistance and healing that transform trauma into empowerment. Fábio demonstrates how communication is not merely a means of expression but a vital political strategy for environmental justice.

[9] Traditional Peoples and Communities (PCTs) in Brazil are understood in policy and political arenas as culturally distinct groups—such as Indigenous, *quilombolas*, and rubber tappers—with unique social organizations, ancestral knowledge, and lifestyles deeply connected to nature. Recognized by law (Decree 6,040/2007), they rely on specific territories for cultural and economic survival.

Socioenvironmental NGOs strategic alliances

The seventh lecture features Estevão Senra. He holds a masters degree in human geography and a PhD in Sustainable Development. Since 2013, he has collaborated with the Yanomami Indigenous People and is currently a senior researcher at the NGO Instituto Socioambiental (ISA). Estevão's lecture explores the role of technical cooperation in strengthening Indigenous territorial protection. Drawing from his experience, he emphasizes the importance of supporting local initiatives against illegal mining through tools such as GIS mapping, aerial overflights, drone imaging, radar data, and digital alert systems. Over time, this work has evolved toward a model of collaborative monitoring, led by those who live in the territory, fostering autonomy and strengthening local capacity. He also underscores the strategic use of these technologies to produce evidence supporting legal actions and media engagement, aiming to pressure the government to fulfill its responsibilities. Estevão stresses that such tools must be grounded in local realities and developed through long-term trust and cooperation with Indigenous organizations.

Quilombola territorial rights and environmental protection in Brazil

The eighth and final lecture of the series features Mônica Borges, a *quilombola* leader from the Territory of Itamatatiua/Alcântara, state of Maranhão. She is a lawyer specializing in *quilombola* law and currently serves as Director of *Quilombola* Territories at the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform. Mônica's lecture highlights the struggles for, and contributions of these communities to, environmental and climate justice in Brazil. Mobilizing her experience as a *quilombola* leader and public official, she emphasizes the inseparability of racial and ecological struggles, framing traditional communities as spaces of resistance against colonial legacies and the modernity built upon two fractures: the separation between colonizer and colonized, and between humans and nature. She argues that environmental justice in *quilombola* communities is not merely a theoretical framework, but a lived practice rooted in ancestral relationships with the land and sustainable resource management. Mônica also outlines key strategies employed by *quilombola* movements, including land titling, political participation, and international advocacy, while detailing recent Brazilian government initiatives to strengthen public policies for traditional communities.

4. Insights from the grassroots

Taken together, the lectures offer new perspectives that can inspire scholars and movements elsewhere, working towards just and sustainable futures. In this section, we present the results of a crosscutting analysis of the discourses present in the lectures and discuss their contributions to political ecology as a body of knowledge that comes from, but expands beyond, academia. Here, we trace new discourses that were only possible through the encounters in the contingency of time and space of the series of lectures and the reflections held in the context of the virtual classroom, and afterwards. From the transcription of each lecture, we identified cross-cutting themes. The resulting insights are just one representation of our efforts to produce what we call a 'common ground of knowledge creation' with the variety of views that came to fruition during the lectures.

Land is not a commodity

The challenges regarding food production and the plantation-based model that guided development processes emerged as an overlapping theme in at least four lectures. This perspective advances Latin American political ecology's call to contest universalizing development paradigms

and to build post-extractivist futures. Ana's and Josiane's lectures promote the concept of agroecology not as a mere technical approach to food production, but as a comprehensive political-ecological strategy rooted in territorial autonomy, community self-determination, and culturally grounded practices. This perspective aligns with broader political ecology debates that underscore the centrality of grassroots knowledge and Earth-centered strategies in resisting dominant agrarian models. Institutional programs such as the Food Acquisition Program (PAA) and the National Program for School Meals (PNAE) were presented as critical mechanisms for linking food sovereignty with public policy. Far from being mere market interventions, these initiatives are viewed as tools to support small-scale farmers, who have been historically marginalized by agribusiness.

Ana argues that their transformative potential lies not only in economic inclusion but also in their capacity to articulate food sovereignty as a foundation for social and territorial policy. By highlighting the central role of women and youth in preserving seeds, knowledge, and rural continuity, the lecture advances ongoing efforts to foreground collective innovation emerging from historically marginalized groups. From the perspective of the *seringueiros*, Dione asserts that land should not be treated as a commodity, but as the vital foundation of social, cultural, and ecological relations. His insistence that land is the foundation of collective life resonates with political ecology's call for the decommodification of nature and the pluralization of environmental governance. In turn, Mônica asserts that environmental justice must be anchored in relational understandings of territory as a living entity composed of bodies, memory, and spiritual connections, affirming that all environmental policy is inherently social and political. By presenting *quilombos* not only as spaces of resistance but as living models of alternative modes of inhabiting the world, in explicit opposition to colonial forms of land occupation and environmental management, she reasserts that land cannot be seen as a commodity.

Indigenous epistemologies at the center

The two lectures that foregrounded Indigenous interventions argued that Indigenous epistemologies, grounded in ancestry, spirituality, and territorial relations, are essential to environmental justice. Juliana's speech emphasizes the equal recognition of all Indigenous identities, advancing the cause of epistemic justice. She exemplifies this commitment through the symbolic and political significance she attributes to the *Tupinambá mantle*, or cloak[10], revered as a sacred being rather than an artifact; that is, the mantle is an elder embodying the history, knowledge, and spiritual practices of the *Tupinambá* people. By reclaiming memory as resistance and land as a continuous bond sustained by sacred practices, she affirms that cultural traditions and territorial defense are intrinsically intertwined. Priscila Tapajoara discusses how engagement with communication and information technologies can be combined with ancestral knowledge to foreground the direct perspectives of Indigenous communities. Especially in the context of institutionalized authoritarianism, centralizing Indigenous perspectives is key to confronting persistent threats such as land grabs, illegal logging, and mining. These perspectives engage powerfully with key themes in recent political ecology and global environmental debates, exemplifying how grassroots movements confront climate coloniality, while advancing relational approaches to justice that center Indigenous

[10] The Assojaba Tupinambá (Tupinambá Cloack or Mantle) is a sacred garment used in rituals and made from the feathers of native birds. This rare and sacred object of the Tupinambá people was taken to Europe in 1644 and remained there on display at the Museum of Denmark until July 2024, when it was repatriated. The return of the mantle was a result of several decades of struggle by the Tupinambá de Olivença people, counting on the persistence of many leaders, including the essential engagement of Gliceria Tupinambá.

protagonism in shaping collective futures. Taken together, the lectures emphasize the need for decolonial praxis that challenges and dismantles dominant knowledge systems.

Critique of colonial legal frameworks

Environmental justice movements advance a critical break from colonial paradigms, revealing how current legal frameworks artificially fragment the inseparable relationship between culture, land, and ethnicity, and advocate instead for integrated, situated approaches. Juliana Tupinambá explicitly critiques the persistent colonial frameworks embedded in contemporary Brazilian legislation and socio-political discourse, that work against the struggles of Indigenous populations in Brazil. Juliana and Priscila identify the example of the *marco temporal* (time frame) bill, which seeks to restrict Indigenous land rights by recognizing only territories physically occupied on October 5, 1988, when the current Brazilian Constitution went into effect, thereby undermining historical claims and ongoing struggles for ancestral land rights.

Other examples raised in the lectures include colonial legal frameworks that impede Indigenous land recognition, such as the criminalization of and violence against Indigenous leaders; the repeated licensing of destructive enterprises like timber logging and mining inside Indigenous lands; and the slowness of the state in land recognition, among others. According to Dione, in the Amazon, the unjust character of legal frameworks is also evident in the systematic violation of free, prior, and informed consent consultation for development projects that directly and indirectly affect traditional territories. This doubles the injustice faced by traditional communities, who suffer both on-the-ground violence and the denial of legal and institutional recognition.

On the other hand, Wilson's lecture advances the conception of new legal-political frameworks by rejecting colonial paradigms based on fragmentation and proposing integrated approaches grounded in the lived experiences and worldviews of Traditional Peoples and Communities. As a Federal Prosecutor and Executive Director of the Living Lands Platform, he situates the legal recognition of traditional territories in the acknowledgment of pre-existing, collective claims. His work illustrates how grassroots knowledge and institutional frameworks can converge: the Living Lands Platform enables communities to self-demarcate their land in the context of delayed state demarcation and persistent threats. From the *quilombola* perspective, Mônica also illustrates how these communities combine legal advocacy with everyday practices of territorial care that the Brazilian state should better recognize. Her perspective resonates with Wilson's advocacy for an integrated, participatory approach, highlighting how legal tools alone are insufficient without mutual respect and political engagement with those most affected. The collaboration between the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office and grassroots movements thus emerges as a strategic alliance to reconfigure Brazil's environmental policy.

Taking down green capitalism discourses towards forest economies

Dione warns that predatory greenwashing practices are disconnected from community consultation and territorial rights. In his lecture, he discusses how defending traditional forest territories is central to climate justice and critiques mainstream bioeconomy and green capitalism discourses. His vision of local forest economies, rooted in solidarity, intergenerational care, and sustainability, embodies the pluralization of environmental futures and the rejection of top-down development models. Additionally, his defense of consultation rights and territorial self-

determination reflects an urgent call to protect life, not only in the Amazon but also in our collective global home.

His vision resonates with Wilson's argument that territorial struggles are not merely bureaucratic matters, but processes of democratic and civilizational transformation. Mônica also echoes this view when she emphasizes that the best-preserved regions of Brazil's biomes are those on traditional lands, where long-standing governance practices have proved more effective than state interventions in preventing environmental degradation. Therefore, alternatives for sustainable income generation should comply with and remain attentive to the on-the-ground practices of Indigenous and traditional populations, instead of dictating what a sustainable future looks like from above.

Strategic alliances and power-knowledge relations

Estevão's lecture demonstrates how strategic alliances between Indigenous organizations and technical collaborators generate situated knowledge through participatory monitoring, thereby strengthening data sovereignty. He highlights the effectiveness of interdisciplinary methodologies that combine satellite and drone imagery, real-time alert systems, and ethnographic fieldwork to produce robust evidence linking environmental degradation to health emergencies. These processes challenge conventional models of environmental governance, showing that Indigenous-led monitoring is not merely a technical process but a political practice of defending life, building trust, and resisting historical and ongoing violence. For example, the impact of Indigenous-led publications, such as *Yanomami Under Attack* and *Yanomami's Diaries*, can be seen in their influence on public policy, their pressure on authorities, and their reshaping of media narratives at national and international levels. Similarly, Dione defends strategic alliances between academia and grassroots movements as essential to legitimizing community-based knowledge and building solidarities that scale up environmental justice. In his turn, Wilson advocates for strategic alliances among public institutions, social movements, and community-based knowledge production, insisting that only politically engaged, horizontal cooperation can address colonial residues in Brazilian institutional structures.

Counter-narratives and artistic production from the Earth

Caio's and Priscila's lecture underscores the power of grassroots cultural and media production to shift dominant narratives and mobilize environmental justice movements through aesthetic, affective, and narrative strategies that expand the boundaries of the politically imaginable. They show how cultural production and Indigenous communication are central to the defense of life, territory, and democracy in Brazil. The festival *Brasil é Terra Indígena* is part of a much broader Indigenous contemporary art movement in Brazil, a dynamic field of aesthetic and intellectual practices that articulate experience, memory, and territoriality, drawing on visual and material repertoires rooted in collective histories. The festival aims to 'reforest minds', reshaping the collective environmental imagination in Brazil and beyond. Against the backdrop of climate collapse, disinformation, and legislative threats, they contend that festivals, photography, and community media are not merely forms of expression but are, in fact, strategic tools of resistance and education. Priscila highlights the role of grassroots media in denouncing environmental injustice. Through *Mídia Indígena,* young communicators trained in audiovisual tools document their communities' realities and struggles, exposing environmental violations and affirming Indigenous worldviews. Their work reclaims narrative sovereignty, offering alternatives to development models based on the overexploitation of resources.

In his lecture, the *quilombola* filmmaker Fabio Martins demonstrates how storytelling can work as a political and therapeutic practice for healing historical wounds, presenting cinema as a restorative act of inhabiting and defending territory through Black cultural practices. Fabio rejects dominant representations that reduce Afro-Brazilian histories to slavery and a lack of agency. Instead, he affirms *quilombola* life as a practice of re-existence, where ancestral knowledge, communal care, and land-based belonging shape alternative modes of living and coexisting. His audiovisual production, rooted in Afro-diasporic aesthetics and oral tradition, reclaims narrative sovereignty and responds to environmental threats driven by state and market interests. Through his work, Fabio challenges colonial temporalities, state-centered models of justice, and developmentalist framings of land.

5. Affirmation of anti-racist and community-led policies

Mônica's lecture reinforces how anti-racist, community-led governance produces effective environmental outcomes. Speaking as both a grassroots leader and public official, she challenges dominant conservation paradigms and territorial public policies by placing *quilombola* knowledge, governance practices, and lived experience at the center of environmental and political debate in Brazil. Framed by a commitment to anti-racism, her intervention emphasizes the inseparability of environmental and racial justice. She affirms *quilombos* as models for alternative ways of inhabiting the world, opposing colonial forms of habitation.

For Mônica, territory is a living entity composed of bodies, memory, and spiritual forces, and environmental justice must be rooted in and take into account these relational understandings. Fabio also relates to this view and seeks to represent these memories and lives in his movies. Mônica further echoes Dione and Chico Mendes in insisting that there is no neutral ecology: all environmental policy is also social and political. Policies such as the National Policy for *Quilombola* Territorial and Environmental Management (PGTAQ), which emphasizes participatory planning and the integration of traditional knowledge into policy design, demonstrate how grassroots perspectives can inform and guide environmental governance. Her lecture shows how *quilombola* communities offer grounded, forward-looking alternatives to extractive and exclusionary environmental and territorial governance models. She advocates for intersectionality and racial justice in ecological frameworks.

6. Concluding remarks

The series of open lectures entitled 'Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLC) in Brazil: Transcultural Dialogues for Environmental Justice' adopts a transdisciplinary approach, promoting arenas where multiple perspectives can engage, giving rise to common spaces beyond their original contexts. The dialogues aim to expand a predominant environmentalist rhetoric through reflection and social critique based on grassroots movements' perspectives. This series of lectures is founded on the principle that environmental justice movements are "living labs" for mitigating and adapting to the adverse effects of climate change and the dramatic loss of biodiversity, which could promote new pathways for research and policy practices. We emphasize awareness and self-reflexivity instead of a professional monopoly on knowledge based solely in universities, thus leading to more nuanced engagement with different cultural contexts. By promoting these encounters, we intend to showcase initiatives related to IPLCs grounded in Brazil, ranging from the arts to policy and movements, that can inspire innovative solutions for tackling the current climate and biodiversity crisis.

We acknowledge that grassroots forms of knowledge contribute partial yet indispensable pieces to a much larger and unfinished puzzle that depicts a sustainable world for all forms of life. Their relevance is intensified in Latin America, where processes of fragmentation and lack of continuity shape multiple arenas, including public policy, research funding, and long-term social and institutional support for collective action. These conditions do not render the analysis developed here inconsequential; on the contrary, they underscore the urgency of foregrounding movements that persist despite structural instability on multiple fronts. Attending to these movements allows us to not only recognize their political significance but also learn from their practices of resilience, which offer critical lessons for imagining more just and sustainable futures in the region.

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