

Waste, racism and environmental injustice in Belém Metropolitan Area

Lixo, racismo e injustiça ambiental na Região Metropolitana de Belém

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Abstract

The rationale of production and disposal of solid waste is among the most destructive and controversial consequences of disproportionate power-division in capitalism. It is associated with “underdevelopment”, “unwanted”, “disposable” individuals and places that receive the waste and its associated risks brought by the consumer society. Based on documentary and bibliographic evidence as well as unstructured interviews with citizens and militants involved in disputes for the discontinuation of the ‘Marituba Landfill’ (as this irregular and contentious Belém Metropolitan Area landfills has been known), this article focus and discuss this case, representative as a colonial scenery in contemporary urban Amazon, from the political ecology perspective and the notions of environmental justice perspective, coloniality, racism, and necropower.

Keywords: Marituba Landfill; urban Amazon; colonialities; necropower; political ecology.

Resumo

A lógica da produção e de descarte de resíduos sólidos é expressão das mais perversas e paradoxais da desigual distribuição de poder no capitalismo. Estigmatiza com a ideia de “atraso”, de “indesejáveis”, indivíduos e lugares “descartáveis”, que recebem os resíduos e os riscos a eles associados que a sociedade de consumo produz. Ancorado em pesquisa documental e bibliográfica e em entrevistas abertas com moradores e ativistas envolvidos na luta pela retirada do Lixão de Marituba, como é conhecido o irregular e polêmico aterro da Região Metropolitana de Belém, este artigo focaliza e discute o caso – emblemático como cena colonial na contemporânea Amazônia urbana – a partir dos marcos da ecologia política e das noções de justiça ambiental, colonialidades, racismo e necropoder.

Palavras-chave: Lixão de Marituba; Amazônia urbana; colonialidades; necropoder; ecologia política.



Introduction

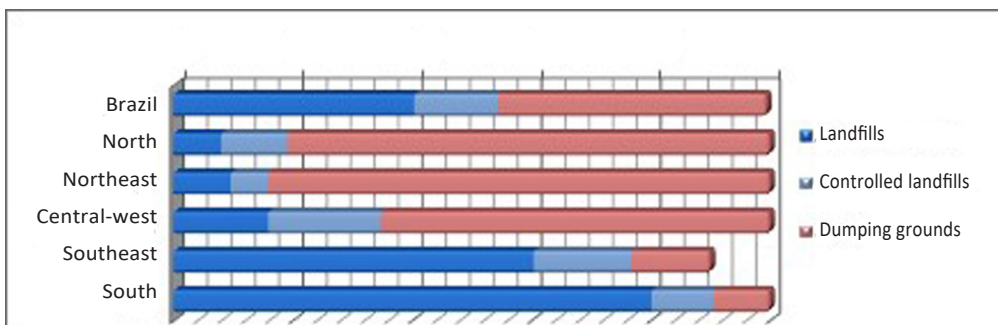
Since the 1970s, an ethical and existential dilemma, accompanied by its socio-environmental impact, has deepened with the expanding conformity of the current society to a model of unequal development, market-based needs, excessive consumption, and disposal, and the wide production of waste.¹ The production and discard of solid residues² come to this scenario as one of the most burning issues of power inequality in capitalism. The wealthiest people not only produce more residues but also shove them to the most underprivileged districts where the historically vulnerable and marginalized populations inhabit, what Acselrad (2002, p. 51) describes as an “unfair environmental order”. Accordingly, states the author, it is impossible “to disconnect environmental issues from how power over political, material and symbolic resources is unfairly distributed”.

It is not surprising, therefore, that half of the global waste, about 1.4 billion tons annually, is produced by OECD³ countries responsible for 20% of the world population that expends 60% of all the raw material on the planet (World Bank, 2012). On the other end of the production of urban solid waste⁴ (RSU) are the Middle East (6%), Southern Asia (5%) and Sub-Saharan Africa (5%), followed by Latin America (12%), where the 50 largest open-air landfills are interestingly located, which is the final destination of irregular disposal and highly pollutant (Unep/ISWA, 2015).

This inequality is reproduced within Brazilian boundaries: while Southeast and Southern regions boast the best conditions of waste management and treatment whereas, on the other hand, Northern and Northeastern regions fall heir to dumping grounds at rates of up to 80% of prevalence (Alvarez, 2014).

Considering that waste is also a cultural construct, its effects are not only factual, of environmental contamination

Figure 1 – Management of solid waste in Brazil and per Region (2014)



Source: adapted by authors from Alvarez (2014).

and public health threat, but equally symbolic (Douglas, 1966). It is stigmatized with the idea of individuals and places that are “impoverishment”, “undervalued”, or “unwanted”, historically “disposable”, which in the current view of colonial occupation of spaces and bodies receive the waste and are exposed to the risks produced by the consumer society.

This is a clear manifestation of *environmental racism*, an expression coined in the late 1980s in the United States during the fights for civil rights, and found in the scholarship on the absence of geographic equity concerning the distribution of environmental risks (Acserald et al., 2009, p. 20), which pointed to the cloudless intersection between race and income, despite disproportionate exposure to “dangerous debris by color’s communities”.

In the peripheral and most needed regions of global and local spaces – known as hyperperipheries (Torres and Marques, 2001), due to superposed and cumulative segregations, life is precariously inscribed in clearly visible boundaries and defined historically by racialized hierarchization of knowledge distribution, as suggested by Achille Mbembe (2016), which determines who is to be protected and who is to perish or be exposed to life risks.

From the political ecology perspective, the present article posits a remarkable case of urban socioenvironmental asymmetry in the Marituba Landfill, how is known as the only dumping ground of the Belém Metropolitan Area (BMA),⁵ a major metropolis in Eastern Brazilian Amazon. It is a private disposal area with government – but not community – an authorization that operates irregularly in

the most socially deprived favela zone of the country (Nadali et al., 2014) near suburbs, rivers, creeks, and next to an environmental protection area as well as a centennial quilombola community. An existing scenario of a complex, invisible urban Amazon that reveals the rationale of capitalist, modern, colonial relations of power (Wallerstein, 1999) in which enlarged reproduction is entrenched on the racialized classification of individuals and the anthropocentric view of dominance over nature (Porto-Gonçalves, 2012; Quijano, 2005, 2009).

Supported by documentary and bibliographic evidence as well as unstructured interviews with citizens and militants involved in collective disputes for the discontinuation of the landfill, the purpose here is to discuss and illuminate, in its daily and silent dimensions, notions of environmental injustice and racism as addressed by Acserald (2002; Acserald, Mello and Bezerra, 2009), dialoguing with Fanon (2008), Boaventura de Souza Santos (2019) and the coloniality of power concepts by Quijano (2005), necropolitics by Mbembe (2011, 2016) and biopower by Foucault (1999, 2008). This approach intends to delineate a conceptual discussion around dissensions and disproportions concerning the final destination of solid waste in the Belém Metropolitan Area and ultimately contribute to the current understanding of an existing socioenvironmental situation in the metropolis and its suburbs.

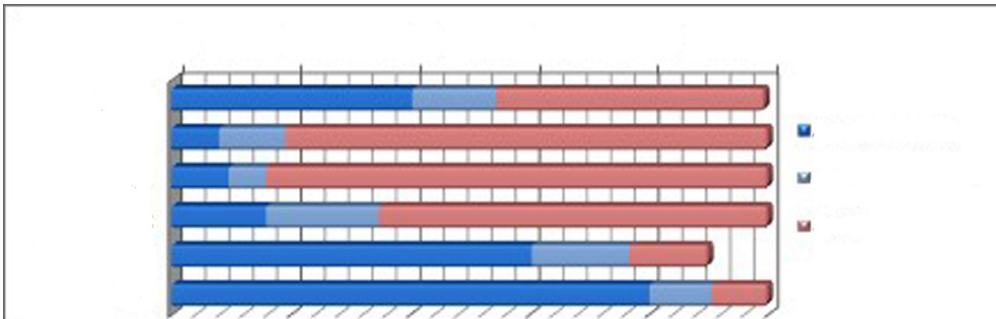
To begin with, the case of the Marituba Landfill will be situated next, focusing on its background, and institutional context, as well as the ongoing community reaction to its establishment and permanence in the location. This discussion will be based

on demographic and geographic data in addition to social and economic indicators (IBGE, 2010, 2018; Ipea, 2010, 2015, 2017). This study additionally – however not extensively – includes the particular conditions of the metropolisation development of Belem concerning the developmental process imposed on the Amazon (Trindade Junior, 2000, 2019; Becker, 2013; Castro, 2006).

The Marituba Landfill case

The case of the Marituba Landfill, as the only dumping ground in Belem Metropolitan Area (BMA), is known, maybe better portrayed in a nonlinear timeline, especially because it seems far from the end. A few remarkable facts throughout the narrative restate what Polanyi (2000) suggested, that inequality

Figure 2 – Location of the Marituba Landfill in the Belem Metropolitan Area (BMA)



Source: Vasconcelos Junior and Corrêa (2017).

would become the greatest political battle in the present time and that, under the market economy, freedom disintegrates into a mere defense of enterprise freedom. This is the crux of operational reasoning in a system that, as Acserald (2004) suggested, tends to reject their responsibilities for consequences of negative externalities, by incorporating nowadays the “sustainability” speech with no commitment to resolve asymmetries, and by implementing actions that hardly mitigate the harm that they cause themselves.

In February 2019, a technical-scientific study requested by Pará Department of Sustainability and Environmental Protection (Semas) to Evandro Chagas Institute (IEC) determined existing abnormalities in domestic dust, soil, and freshwater in nine communities that surround Marituba Landfill which is the waste processing and management station in Marituba, a satellite city in BMA. Authorized by Semas in 2012, the station is private-owned and operated by two companies – Guamá Waste Management Co. and Revita Engineering P.L.C., members of the Solvi Corporation – major group in the national environmental industry, brought in under urgent conditions with the waiver of the bid by Belém Town Hall back in June 2015. At the time, it was imperative to discontinue the Aurá Landfill (further details will be provided later), which operated for over 20 years in the town of Ananindeua and would precariously receive 1.400+ daily tons of solid waste produced in the capital Belém and the metropolitan area to tardily comply with the National Law of Solid Waste.

Since then, the companies held responsible for the BMA landfill respond to five lawsuits filed by the Pará State Public

Prosecution Office (MPPA). Two of them processed in the local judicial power for environmental crimes, one popular action queries the waiver of the bid and a Public Interest Litigation opposes the environmental permits issued to operate the landfill. One of which, triggered by social protests and movements (especially due to the odor) unleashed, back in December 2017, the ‘Gramacho’ Operation – named after the largest dumping ground in Latin America and jointly with the police – placed under arrest operational managers and national directors of the company who also had 53 million Brazilian reais blocked to meet the expenses of environmental damage. At the time, the police inquiry⁶ included three criminal charges and over 30 notices of environmental and administrative infractions by Semas as well as a police inquiry filed by the Environmental Police Station (Dema), in underway against the venture.

The Guamá and Revita companies are part of 50 business organizations from the Solvi Corporation group, present in Brazil, Argentina, Peru and Bolivia. In institutional communication channels, the holdings defended values included “sustainability”, “ethics”, “integrity” and “social responsibility”.⁷ In 2017, the Solvi Corporation closed the fiscal year with over 100 million Brazilian reais in revenue and over two billion Brazilian reais inequities (Relatório, 2017, p. 26).⁸ In that same financial statements report, under the “Contingent Liabilities” section, Solvi Corporation and its companies appear to be involved in 17 lawsuits (civil, criminal and labor), including the ones issued by the Gramacho Operation in Pará. Regarding Marituba Landfill, the report informs that

“due to the lack of evidence, there was no financial provision to meet any demands” (p. 4). The corporation additionally stated that all operations have been certified by the designated public office, the Department of Sustainability and Environmental Protection (Semas) – Preliminary License in 2012, Installation Permit in 2013, and Operating Permit in 2014 – which has conversely fallen under litigation.

The most recent lawsuit filed by the Pará State Public Prosecution Office, in February 2020⁹ investigates what social movements and environmental activists have reported since the landfill installation in Marituba: environmental permits have been inaccurately issued. According to MPPA, “the (Guama) company was given permits start operation despite failing to meet legal environmental requirements”, such as “using the proper equipment for waste treatment and mitigating the environmental impacts on the dumping ground”. MPPA additionally managed to annul the State office’s decision to dismiss the lawsuit for moral and material environmental damages filed by the State against the business owners. “Per the agreement, this lawsuit would have been waived without warranty or any compensation by the corporation to the local community (MPPA, 2019).¹⁰

Also in 2017, after two years of operation and under the pressure of social and environmental movements, Marituba Hall decreed “state of emergency” in the municipality (Decree n. 508/2017)¹¹ as result of social, environmental, and economical damages caused by the landfill, between which the document included:

- Accumulation of slurry,¹² beyond the landfill draining system capacity and with “no

treatment directed to the city water micro-basin whatsoever”;

- The environmental threat caused by the slurry carried to the environmental conservation and protection area Wild Life Shelter Amazon Metropolis (Revis), rich in endemic species and considered the second largest forest reserve surrounded by an urban area in the country;

- The “pungent odor” that reaches several adjacent boroughs, originated from solid waste cells stored in disagreement with technical requirements;

- The dramatic increase in demand for healthcare and medications in public health services;

- “Excessive financial losses” caused by local companies close-downs, freshwater getaways (like vacation and holidays spots near creeks), and restaurants nearby the landfill.

- A centennial traditional society – the Abacatal Quilombola Community – directly affected by both the pervasive smell and the slurry carried to the shared watercourses that provide food to the local people.

During the entire time, Guamá Waste Management company has denied the existence of irregularities.¹³ Notwithstanding, a designated researcher from Evandro Chagas Institute (IEC), responsible for the technical study on the exposure of nine communities to metal poisoning near the Marituba Landfill dumping ground’s, drives our attention to the unquestionable contamination.

We have found several proofs of jeopardy. The most harmful ones include mercury, lead, and manganese. We also found cobalt, hardly ever found in water. In general, it is associated with conductors such as

batteries and plates. We additionally identified cobalt in the dust (far out where children play) (...) in the soil, I highlight the presence of copper at a high level (in a neighborhood near the Landfill). Copper is highly associated to waste. And this is the most valuable indicator of problems with waste. (IEC Researcher, Marcelo Lima, on ORM Portal, *O Liberal*, Feb. 05, 2019).

Findings, according to the researcher, are still inconclusive. A second investigation stage was critical to determine the responsibility and the extension of both health and environmental damages nearby the landfill. To that end, “appeals and new requests to Semas” were needed. Thus far, there is no regular monitoring and no information about the implementation of the tests.

Meanwhile, the absence of the mainstream press the lack of attention addressed to the alarming study by the Evandro Chagas Institute was intriguing. A similar situation had been revealed in the outrageous Gramacho Operation. While warrants were issued in several states and senior executives from a nationally distinguished corporation were held accountable, media coverage was impressively discreet and restricted to the local press.

The Permanent Forum on Landfill’s Out, under the “Resistance cannot stop while the Landfill persists” slogan, was one of the most relevant and enduring agents of the environmental dispute field, playing a structuring role of resistance. Later in 2011, the companies established local political articulations to implement the alleged dumping ground while residents began another movement, following the model

offered by Svampa (2016). According to the author, in Latin American territories that are permeated by social and environmental conflicts, there are prevailing elements such as a new form of rural and urban socio-environmental movement. This new form is “characterized by various cultural groupings, certain environmental NGOs – often pre-existing structures –, intellectuals and specialists that observe the behavior of organizations and social movements” (Svampa, 2016, p. 145).

The Landfill’s Out movement¹⁴ ended up creating a resistance network composed by diverse individuals directed to contest socio-environmental damages that affect everyone – local workers and businesses, environmental militants, students, researchers, and especially local community members. Having a common goal to free up the municipality from the metropolitan area waste, the fight has taken place in several ways: physically, in street protests, traffic blocking, participation in events, and the demand for public audiences; and virtually by the intense use of related social networks. The judiciary must be sensitive to environmental flags and the defense of unified movements for human rights.

The purpose was to educate and bring together afflicted people who were interested in the fight to discontinue the landfill after the attempt to prevent its installation had been frustrated. “We do not want accommodations. What we want is for the Landfill to be discontinued and properly removed to somewhere else unlike here”, explained one of the movement members who represented a long-established quilombola community that had been affected. Abacatal Quilombo, over three centuries old, is constituted by 120

Figure 3 – Picture of marching for Landfill's Out



Source: <https://foralixaomarituba.wixsite.com/foralixaomarituba>

families who rely on both domestic agriculture and the Uriboquinha river to maintain their way of life. The watercourse has been seriously affected by the seepage of slurry.

In May 2019, this chronic crisis¹⁵ came public one more time due to the failure to establish solid waste policies for Belém Metropolitan Area. Guamá Co. decided to discontinue Marituba Landfill – which remains irregular – for disagreeing with the amounts paid by Belém City Hall. As a result, the Belém town administrations announced the reopening of the Aurá Landfill. The Public Prosecution Office interfered and granted a time extension to allow Marituba Landfill

to operate adequately. New community protests and movements outbroke against the continuation of the landfill in town. The new time extension triumphed. A new judicial agreement was made. The landfill will continue until 2021. By then, town administrations and the State government will need to find a proper solution for the destination of waste produced in BMA. Again, this time extension is “unpostponable”.

For a better understanding of this case as well as its impacts, the next section will offer an overview of socioeconomic and geographic data about Marituba city and BMA with special attention to the solid waste matter in the region.

The region and the municipality

Marituba is one of the six municipalities that integrate, along with the capital, Belém Metropolitan Area (BMA), located in the Northeast of Pará State, Eastern Amazon. It lies in the estuary of Pará River and is crossed by 30 watercourses – rivers and creeks –, forming a floodplain (Ipea, 2015). With an estimated population of 2.5 million distributed over 4.600 km² (FNEM, 2018), BMA exhibits a 95% urbanization rate and a total of 600 thousand homes (66% of which are concentrated in Belém) most frequently established in swamps and topographically lower areas that historically flood regularly (Ipea, 2015). If compared to the other 26 metropolitan areas in Brazil, BMA displays the lowest income per capita¹⁶ and conversely the highest rates of abnormal occupations in dense urban agglomerations (Nadalin et al., 2014; Ipea, 2015).

The City Wellbeing Index (IBEU), developed by the Metropolis Observatory (2016), is based on five standards – urban mobility, environmental conditions, living conditions, public services, and infrastructure – corroborates and support the idea that Great Belém is one of the poorest metropolitan regions in Brazil (Trindade Junior, 2019). Belém capital appears as the third least developed in the country, after two other capitals in the North: Porto Velho and Macapá. According to the geographer Saint Clair Trindade Junior, such performance (also found in Northeastern capitals) reflects “metropolitan spaces whose demographic and structural growth rates are not followed by a substantial improvement in life quality” (p. 147).

The metropolis keeps certain peculiarities regarding developmental conditions imposed on the Amazon and to its inner process of regionalization. Unlike other regions in which the metropolitan dispersal is more closely followed by the economical dynamics, constructing a polynuclear metropolis, the expansion considered here reflects, above all, poverty conditions that result in large-scale available human-labor in the Amazon (Trindade Junior, 2000, p. 118).

In general, the process of urbanization in the Amazon, especially the metropolisation development of Belém dates back to the 1960s. Belém was established in the Forte do Presépio in the 17th century as the foundation of the first capitalist boundary vis-a-vis the conquer, expansion, and appropriation of natural resources in the region. In the 1960s, the inauguration of the Belém-Brasília highway, urbanization advances, becoming consolidated in the 1970s after national integration policies as well as extensive projects (Castro, 2006; Becker, 2013; Trindade Junior, 2019). Under State intervention, both structured and unplanned colonization, attracted large amounts of contingent immigration¹⁷ to the frontiers of capital expansion where previously marginalized populations had already been banned from their original territories due to processes of primary capital growth. Many individuals migrated from areas of agricultural frontiers in rural Amazon – outermost edge of both human settlement and geographical limits (Martins, 2009) – to inflate peripheral neighborhoods, surrounding villages and districts in Belém, and establish new relations doomed to the social inequality and imbalance

that characterize capitalist urbanization. As Harvey (1980) stated, development and underdevelopment are two sides of the same coin. Hence, as explained by Sirotheau (2019, p. 143), cities define themselves as “condensed forms of some values and conversely responsible for the deconstruction of other values becoming, therefore, naturally disruptive”.

Marituba municipality

Marituba, the smallest metropolitan municipality in Belém, in terms of the territory is located at the heart of BMA, almost merged with Ananindeua and Belém along the banks of Guamá river. With an estimated population of 129 thousand inhabitants (IBGE, 2018), it serves as a commuter town whose economically follows the region and is essentially tertiary.¹⁸ The city is highly impoverished and lacks the infrastructure to serve its low-income population whose 42% of households make as little as half a minimum wage per individual (IBGE, 2010). It is the number one metropolitan city when it comes to inadequate agglomerations¹⁹ (IA) which means that 77% of Marituba population lives in urban settlements where conditions are “intolerable for social and urban development” (Nadali et al., 2014, p. 75), most commonly known as favelas (Ipea, 2015).

According to the social vulnerability index (SVI),²⁰ Marituba displays high social vulnerability, especially in terms of infrastructure, which includes poor sanitary conditions and no waste collection, leading to the worst rates within BMA. Developed by Ipea to reveal positions of vulnerability and

social exclusion, SVI comprises three domains and sub-indices – Urban Infrastructure, Human Capital, Work and Income – which measure the presence, absence, or insufficiency of assets (Ipea, 2015), or living conditions that should be provided to every individual by the State.

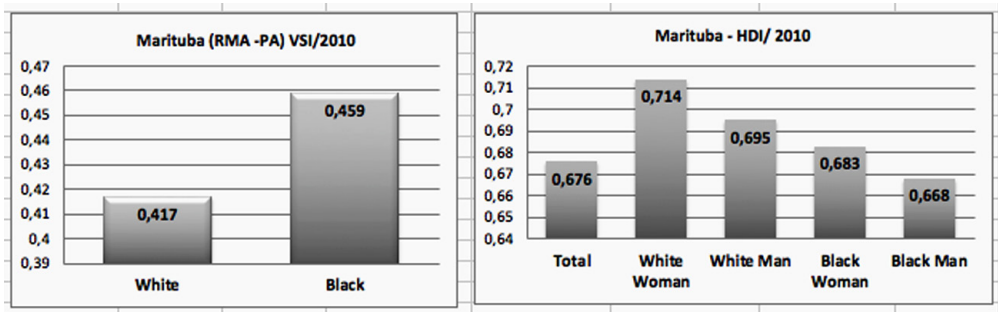
The social vulnerability index in Marituba has improved, though. It came from “very high” (0,690) in 2000 to “high” (0,455) in 2010, accompanying most municipalities and metropolitan areas in the North and Northeast of the country. Nevertheless, these places remain among the worst scenarios according to scholarship while the historic logic of social segregation lingers. SVI, likewise the Human Development Index (HDI)²¹ in the city, consistently displays significant differences as opposed to more developed regions when it comes to race and sex (Figure 4).

Sanitation and waste

In terms of sanitation, there are significant asymmetries among the municipalities (IBGE, 2010). While the provision of clean water reaches 75% of homes in the capital, it barely gets to 40% in both Ananindeua and Marituba. The sewage collection system and septic tank exhibit an even worse situation: in Belém, 68% of the homes are provided while in Marituba, Benevides, Santa Bárbara, and Santa Isabel do Pará, this figure is lower than 20%.

As far as solid waste management is concerned, indicators are more stable (IBGE, 2010). Most of the municipalities in BMA have household waste removal regularly with indices as high as 90% in Marituba on one hand; however, 11,06% of the population is lack of the service on the other hand (SVI,

Figure 4 – SVI e HDI in Marituba (RMA, PA) town per race and sex



Source: elaborated by the authors. Atlas of Social Vulnerability – <http://ivs.ipea.gov.br>

2010). The ultimate challenge is particularly the disposal and treatment of the waste produced. The daily production of domestic solid waste in Belém Metropolitan Region is as much as 1.490 tons, from which 69% are generated in the capital (1.000 t/day), 24% in Ananindeua (350 t/day), 2.7% in Marituba (40 t/day), 2.5% in Santa Isabel (35 t/day), 1.3% in Benevides (20 t/day) and 0.3% in Santa Bárbara do Pará (5 t/day). These data (Pereira, 2015) do not include Castanhal, a municipality that incorporated BMA in 2011.

The Solid Waste National Policy, set in 2010 over twenty years of debate in the National Congress, emphasized shared responsibility by society as a whole – citizens, governors, private sector, and civil society – for the environmentally acceptable management of solid waste. For that purpose, the elaboration of the National Plan of Solid Waste Management (NPSWM) was initiated in 2011 and approved in the following year. In metropolitan regions, this plan prompts

the creation of inter-municipal associations to integrate the response to regional demands. The NPSWM also determined the discontinuation of all landfills by 2014 which was later extended to 2018.

The municipalities in the Belém Metropolitan Area, likewise most cities in Northern Brazil, excepting for Rondônia and a small part of Tocantins, have not complied with the NPSWM yet. Nor have they established an integrated inter-municipal plan or alliance for managing solid waste. On top of that, local management resources are equally scarce (Brasil, 2017). Pará State Government has created its own Integrated Solid Waste Management Plan (ISWMP) in 2014, however, there is no evidence that such a plan has been launched. The capital, Belem, has created its Solid Waste Integrated Management Municipal Plan (Ordinary Law n. 8899) in 2011; although, on practical terms, the lack of public policies and definitions are observed with the proper disposal and treatment of generated waste.

In 2015, pressured by the new The Solid Waste National Policy, Belém discontinued the Aurá Landfill after 23 years of inadequate and non-licensed operation in Ananindeua where all waste generated in BMA was disposed with no soil impermeabilization, drainage and collection of percolated liquids, creating slurry and contaminating watercourses that form the Guamá River micro basin (Matos et al., 2011). During that time, the major springs in Great Belém – Bolonha and Black Water Lakes – located just 1.400 meters from the landfill and responsible for 65% of the freshwater provided to the entire metropolitan area. After over two decades of a disastrous operation, Aurá Landfill was responsible for the emission of greenhouse effect gases (especially methane) in amounts that correspond to the burning of 34 thousand acres forest (UFPA, 2017).²²

Aurá Landfill was closed, but not brought to an end. Thus far, the area has never been restored from the environmental damages created. According to reports by social movements, percolated liquids keep seeping. Additionally, requirements of the Solid Waste National Policy have not been met regarding the socio-economic inclusion of waste pickers (around 2 thousand pickers). Once again, in 2014, while the destination of the Landfill was in discussion, waste pickers blocked the traffic on BR 316 highway to report neglect and demand concrete actions. At the occasion, in June of 2015, about 1.4 thousand tons of urban solid waste had an alternative destination; the problems, however, just moved out to a different address. They were transferred, as previously explained, to a neighbor community, Marituba. The imperative/punitive logic once again would be evidenced in the choice of a new space, ignoring who

lives there, and denoting, as shall be discussed in the next two sections, the violent and racial logic of environmental injustice mechanisms that are imposed to “disposable” bodies in poor and peripheral places.

Territorial shocks and well-living fights

I can see our community being swallowed by the progress. It is the Landfill, the power-light lines, the gas pipeline, the allotment...(around our community). In 1987, our homes were taken down with electric saws and retro excavators, but we resisted. (Abacatal Quilombola Community member).²³

The Marituba Landfill case, as described here, must be interpreted from a variety of standpoints: the nature of conflicts, the disposition of involved social agents, and especially the unequal logic of power-division regarding environmental matters. The excerpt above, from a member of the Abacatal Quilombola community, illustrates the undeniable manner of how environmental injustices and its resulting conflicts are connected by an invisible line since they all emerge from the same predatory and unequal territorial occupation. In a geopolitical scenario of new asymmetries between North and South, the last two decades witnessed intense socio-environmental conflicts in Latin America, led by indigenous people, farmers, and various urban agents.

In geopolitical terms, the extractive option and reprimarization of the economy in Latin American countries, that continually

export raw material and proliferate exportation zones in their territories, have imposed a new distribution of labor and land, characterized by the unrestrained use of non-renewable natural resources. This scenario has brought to light the fight for environmental justice and updates the developmental model based on a strong impact and the primary sector that initiated in the 1960s and 1970s, how will be discussed in this topic.

A new cycle of conflicts took place in the 2000s in the continent as suggested by Maristella Svampa (2016). New urban and rural socio-environmental clashes have emerged since then, whose social composition of the actors is distinct from traditional social movements. Many of these movements are starred by the youth and women who played a crucial role in their organizations.

This is what the author described as 'ecoterritorial turn' of fights. "The social perspective of fights and the establishment of a common diagnosis have led to the creation of a dense network of organizations as well as the multiplication of merging groups that reflect a new internationalism", stated the author (2016, p. 145). These merging groups are articulated on a multi-level system that embraces the local, the national, and the subcontinental. Different territorial rationales interplay here, intersecting principles of action and rationalities that echo contrasting and often opposing values.

On one hand, the territorial rationale of corporations and business elites is based on an economical paradigm whose goal is to transform territories of strategic natural resources into efficient and productive zones. On the other hand, the territorial rationale of local communities is based on the defense

of life and natural, social, cultural, non-transferable assets that must be kept safe from both market greed and offensive ideas. The analysis of socio-environmental conflicts offers a privileged viewpoint, according to Svampa (2016) of two central issues of the present day, the development and the environment, intertwined as much as complex. This approach incorporates the political ecology perspective, line of reasoning that criticizes both maximum profit and the marketization of nature, to which the relations humans beings establish among themselves and with nature are created through power relations (Castro, 2015, p. 238).

Following this viewpoint, Acserald (2002) affirmed that the popular action that rises against the dominant environmental order results in two complementary and indissociable outcomes. At first, the objective distribution of environmental effects that result from social practices in which differences in power over environmental resources are visible in various social groups. Secondly, controversies at the discourse level in which distinct world representation patterns are confronted, and the legitimacy of power-division patterns over natural resources are at stake.

Both outcomes can be observed in the Permanent Forum on Landfill's Out movement, initiated in 2015 when Marituba Landfill was created by a private society. The movement branched out into an array of actions and mobilizations, such as the blocking of BR-316, which reached major repercussions in the local press, in addition to articulations with representatives of the State Parliament and the House of Representatives, where the fight had many reverberations.

Acserald (2002) highlights three central positions around current environmental issues. The first and prevailing one is ecological modernization through which political institutions incorporate ecological concerns in hopes of associating them with economic gains. This view values technique and market economy, searching for collaboration and consensus. The second position is represented by the risk society theory, by Ulrich Beck (2002), which would bring a critical and radical alternative. This theory acknowledges the existence of ecologic conflicts and inequality of power over technique and provides a rationale for the critical action of ecologism. In Beck's view, the risk-society would have emerged after the rising of industrial societies in the XIX century. From this perspective, the contemporary ecological crisis should be a result of institutions failing to control and preserve, being unable to mitigate risks, who ended up sanctioning, in practical terms, their legal conformity.

This criticism, however, is directed to the technical-scientific rationality, not to the established capital power, the reason why Acserald contests, "[...] Not even the defenders of ecological modernization or the theoreticians of the risk society [...] have analytically incorporated both social diversity in construction risk and the presence of a political logic into unequal environmental damages. (Acserald, 2002, p. 51).

The third position is the development of a direct relationship between environmental degradation and social injustice. The partisan social individuals in this position do not trust the market as an instrument of triumph over

environmental inequality and the ascent of principles understood as environmental justice. In the author's words:

Such agents consider a clear social inequality in the exposure to environmental risks which results from a logic that extrapolates the simple abstract rationality of technologies. To them, combating environmental degradation is an opportunity for gains in democratization, not only gains in market efficiency and expansion. (Acserald, 2002, p. 51)

In that view, therefore, conditions for access to environmental protection are socially unequal and, on top of that, indissociable from oppression based on class, race, and gender. The movements that are based on such assumptions and have fought for environmental justice were responsible, according to Acserald, for revealing an agenda that was submerged and invisible to nationwide political discussions. The movement began in the 1960s in the United States by creatively reconciling fights for social, territorial, environmental, and civil rights. The year 1982 was a milestone after the fight put forth in Afton, Warren County, North Carolina. Since then, other similar movements have come up to which local environmental inequalities are a central political issue for civil rights. Another very significant advance in that sense happened in 1987 after a study conducted by the Racial Justice Committee of the United Church of Christ found that the racial distribution in a community is a significant indicator of the presence or absence of dangerous waste in a certain area.

Consequently, the term ‘environmental racism’ (Pinderhughes, 1996) was coined to refer to the imposition of dangerous waste to black communities.

The movement against environmental inequality in the USA has established the basis for global resistance which has been articulated against the unequal distribution of environmental damages. This is evidence of environmentally-sensitive social divisions in which poor and black classes are spatially segregated – due to their limited social mobility – by the transfer of predatory activities to the environment where they live (Acserald, 2002, p. 57).

On that note, the understanding of such socio-environmental asymmetries may be related to the Fanonian notion of *racism*. To Franz Fanon (2008), racism is a global hierarchy of superiority and inferiority on what he refers to as “human line” which, since the XVI century, has been politically reproducing as a structure of dominance. As explained by Grosfoguel (2012), to the Caribbean author, people who are above the human line are socially recognized in their humanity and as subjects of human, social, labor, and, even more, environmental rights. People below that line are considered sub-human or non-human, therefore, their humanity is denied.

Inspired in Fanon, Boaventura de Souza Santos (2019, p. 43) defined “abyssal thinking” as a system of two worlds that resulted from historic colonialism. The metropolitan world, “consisted of equivalence and reciprocity between “us”, the “entirely humans”, with sociabilities commanded by tensions between social regulation and emancipation, and the mechanisms of the liberal State, State Law, human rights, and democracy. On the other

side, the colonial world, the world of “them”, those who are on the other side of the abyssal line to which forms of sociability are embedded with patterns of violent appropriation of lives and resources, in other words, violent regulations – the Colonial and Neocolonial State, the apartheid, forced and slave labor, torture, primitive capital appropriation, racism, feminicide, among so many other structural violence, likewise ecocide and epistemicide.

Also inspired in Fanon, Aníbal Quijano (2009) develops the notion of coloniality of power as a cultural matrix of social classification that, even after the end of historic colonialism, becomes natural in everyday life through processes of reproduction and the maintenance of a certain power pattern. The pioneer pattern of worldwide power, forged in the establishment of a “New World”, relies on the intersection of two central factors that, according to the author, have raised and sustained the capitalist colonial modern world-society (Wallerstein, 1999) – the classification of worldwide population-based on both race and the articulation of all forms of labor control. To Quijano (2009), as explained by Porto-Gonçalves e Quental (2012), social identities based on racial classification of the world population are progressively associated with the place that the groups start to occupy in the division of labor found in the so-called emergent capitalist system. To the indigenous, bondage; to the black, slavery; to the European, paid job.

In this very same process, territories and territory-based political organizations have been classified according to the alleged “racial” position in which their citizens were placed. (...) From the perspective of

race, therefore, a set of power relations are constituted which hierarchize their places and their peoples (Porto-Gonçalves e Quental, 2012, p. 42).

The Marituba Landfill studied here, located in a town with the lowest rates of human development index (HDI) of the Belém Metropolitan Area, where generalized multi-dimensional social vulnerability is worsened when associated to the “skin color” variable, is a peculiar case with neo-colonial segregation marks that reflect a disproportionate environmental order with permanent wellness jeopardy for the surrounding population due to all types of risks, contaminations, and reiterated daily distress. The distress here must be considered in a subjective dimension of illness, as being part of the waste, of the dreadful smell that lingers around everywhere and everyone. This is overwhelmingly testified by local inhabitants around the Landfill:

I felt violated. It seems like they steal a part of us, of what we had, they came in and devastated. They said it will be here and that's it. They never asked permission, there was no voting, and now we need to go through so much for them to leave. And they don't want to get out, they don't listen. (Inhabitant 1)²⁴

The landfill goes under construction five, six years ago. Right where I was [...] a child, a reservation, natural, very beautiful. Then, they devastated it, turned it into a “junkyard” where today is a landfill, and it becomes a 5-meter deep hole, giant hole, then they kept throwing garbage, and today there is a 5-meter pile of junk. I witnessed the entire process. (Inhabitant)²⁵

Everything changed. Pushed the clientele away, downtown seems like a cemetery. [...] The stench is noticed here at the park, it sometimes crosses the town. (informal worker, food seller)²⁶

After it was brought to public attention, environmental justice began to occupy a central position in the agenda of most social fights in today's world with special emphasis in Latin-American countries where several networks have been engaged. This agenda includes the inequality of environmental costs, the absence of democratic mechanisms, environmental racism, gender injustice, and ecological debt (Svampa, 2016).

However, what does environmental justice precisely and conceptually entail? According to Acserald (2004, p. 16), it “entails the right for a safe, healthy, and productive environment to all, the environment as a whole, including ecological, physical, constructed, social, political aesthetic, and economical dimensions”. Such right, stated the author, is to be freely exercised, respecting individual and group identities as well as the dignity and autonomy of communities.

The concept of environmental justice equals Well-Living, a developing construct, according to Alberto Acosta (2016, p. 33), that “may serve as a springboard to build, reach consensus, and provide answers to the devastating effects of climatic changes as well as to growing marginalization and social violence”. Well-Living emerges from utopic views, defined as a proposition of fight against power coloniality, challenges the Eurocentric notion of well-being that relies on the assumption of life-long accumulation and patterns of unsustainable consumption.

“Production and consumption become, therefore, a never-ending spiral, irrationally ruining natural resources and increasingly aggravating the tension that results from social inequalities” (Acosta, 2016, p. 36). The indigenous way of life is of terrific inspiration. However, the author highlighted that it goes beyond the Andean and Amazon views, in a search for various voices that emerge in the world, including in circles of the Western culture, such as ecologists, feminists, cooperatives, Marxists, humanists, among others (p. 34).

The next section will discuss narratives from inhabitants of the Marituba Landfill in light of contributions by Foucault (1999) and Mbembe (2016, 2018), who complement the considerations made so far.

State racism and necropolitics: living and dying in garbage

In the course entitled “In Defense of Society”, Michel Foucault (1999) discusses the agents of dominance in what they hold as effective, factual, and empirically observable throughout history. In doing so, he intends to go beyond what he refers to as “triple primitivism” upon which power sovereignty is anchored – the subject is to be subjected, power unity is to be reasoned, and legitimacy is to be respected.²⁷ By establishing this, Foucault introduces the notion of State racism of utmost importance for the discussion on this point of the study.

To Foucault, there is a discourse of perpetual war that crosses the Western world history. “The idea presented is of the war as an endless plot in history [...] the war

develops under war and peace, the war that misleads our society and divides it into a binary mode is essentially the race war” (Foucault, 1999, p. 70). The author recognizes, from this conclusion, that race is a type of “vital junction” to analyze power patterns in society and that the social body is essentially articulated based on two races.

It is about biological-racial racism that is incorporated and permanently recreated in the social body. According to the Foucaultian standpoint, this binary fracture, expressed in what we perceive as polarity, “is not the battle of two exterior races against each other; it is the division of one single race into a super-race and a sub-race [...]. In short, the inside out and the bottom of the race that appears on it” (Foucault, 1999, p. 72).

Accordingly, the race conflict discourse that emerged during the XVII century turned out as the power discourse itself, bound in the battle declared, not between two races, but initiated by the race imposed as the one and only, the holder of power and guardian of the norm. It is the race that dictates who meets or not the norm and confronts those who supposedly represent jeopardy to the biological equity. The biological-racist discourses about decay, at this point, have served as a discursive matrix that began to direct the operation of institutions of the social body. Since then, it was taken as the criterium of social elimination, segregation, and, finally, normalization.

“We have to defend society from all biological jeopardy caused by that other race, that sub-race, that counter-race that we are, unwillingly, creating” (Foucault, 1999, p. 73), edicts the philosopher on the criterium used to direct society which serves the global strategy

of the social conservatives. State racism, as displayed, becomes one of the pillars of social normalization. The modern State relies on the intrinsic correlation between racism, State structure, and biopower.

Biopower refers to, as the term reveals, the power over life, not over the individual body, but the social body, leading to a type of biological statization. The new technology of power takes effect, managing a social life, measured in numbers and figures, following demographic criteria. Birth, mortality, longevity, control of epidemics and endemics, safety, it is all under the biopolitical and biopower hospices. Foucault believes that the XIX century has been through a massive transformation.

One of the key points in that transformation, in the Foucauldian view, is the reversion of the right of life and death that the supreme ruler had in the classic theory of sovereignty, established on the assumption of power over the decision to let live or let die. In the new power structure, the assumption is to 'let' die to 'make' live, what precisely defines the State racism and evidence what Foucault refers to as "the murderous function of the State" (1999). In other words, it is decided who dies so that others may live. And this is not just about physical death, but also symbolic death, an important issue discussed here. To die symbolically may refer to being condemned to exclusion, rejection, degradation, deprived of rights. There is nothing more appropriate to understand the game of life and death than the Marituba Landfill and so many other urban landfills. Some types of death in life.

*You do not know what is to live around
stench, to sleep around stench [...].
Today we have no more preys, we*

*have lost our creek, the enjoyment of
our children. (representative of the
Abacatal quilombola community)*

Achille Mbembe (2011) revolutionized Foucault's concept of biopower for considering it insufficient "to reflect contemporary norms of submission of life before death"²⁸ (2011, p. 75). He offers, then, the concepts of necropower and necropolitics to indicate new forms of domination and submission, particularly having post-colonial Africa as his springboard. In the post-colonial world, power is diffuse, in his understanding, not necessarily performed by the State. The death economy is engraved in the relations of production and power. The last expression of sovereignty relies predominantly upon, according to Mbembe (2016), in the power of deciding who is to live and who is to die. Likewise, Foucault, he situates race as the origin of the forms of domination that have ruled since the European colonization in America.

Throughout the centuries, Mbembe stated that race has operated as a primary, material, and ghostly category "in the origin of a myriad of catastrophes, having caused psychic evil devastations of countless crimes and massacres" (2018, p. 13). What the post-colonial world experiences today is the European case, referred to as "imperialism of disorganization", which produces disasters and disseminates everywhere excluding conditions, flourishing in many countries a "raceless racism", responsible for the accomplishment of a higher level of discrimination. The race is still a critical determinant of difference and inequality; racism, conversely, has served as a pretext of all kinds of discrimination, diffuse, reiterated,

and violent, that opposes black bodies to poor peripheral bodies. For that reason, he foresees a black revolution in the world.

This is the everyday scene and drama among favela inhabitants in Marituba, where living in the waste and its unbearable stench is another way to slowly die, surrendering to the necropower. The following reports speak for themselves on this.

The stench has lingered for over two years, but last year in November I went breathless and fatigued and in December I experienced several pains, chest pain. When the smell becomes too sharp, I stand by the fan feeling suffocated...then the smell goes away, and I feel better. (Inhabitant 2)²⁹

Many people exhibited symptoms of stomach ulcers that they didn't have. Until I stayed home longer, I began to feel the same. Dry mouth, cracked lips, rough tongue. Like I was eating an unripe fruit [...]. When we are in bed, and then wake up or have breakfast, anytime...no one invites anybody else (come over) because it's unbearable. (Inhabitant 1)³⁰

Final considerations

This article aimed at bringing to discussion notions of justice or environmental racism, which are background and key issues for the understanding of immemorial socio-environmental disputes from the perspective of different narratives in conflict. This discussion was empirically based on the disproportionate distribution of environmental damages related to waste disposal in the

Belém Metropolitan Area, the main metropolis in an unseen urban Amazon.

The habitual action of building sewage and waste landfills in areas that are occupied by working for poor populations, impoverished members of black populations, and ethnical minorities, is not novel, that has been observed since the Ancient times as described by Acserald (2002, p. 52). The rejected, deported, clandestine, and undocumented ones are defined by Mbembe (2018, p. 306) as “intruders” and “human waste” – victims of historic “post-abyssal exclusions”, in the Boaventura Santos terms, situated apart from the “human line”, according to Fanon.

It is evidenced here the reassertion of a strategy of dominance by obedience, control by lowering the other, turned into “a thing”, disposable, subject to places “unacceptable” to human development, revealed in the growing scene of impoverished and vulnerable populations in the so-called subnormal metropolitan suburbs like the Marituba Landfill.

The racialization of colonial power structures (Quijano, 2009) reappears modernized in contemporary environmental disputes. It is objectively revealed, as stated by Acserald (2009), in the direct effects of an unjust and unequal ecological distribution, in the access to goods and resources, well-fare, and well-living of individual and social groups. It is subjectively uncovered in controversies of discourse structures, in the insensitivity and arrogance of bureaucracies as well as the allurements of delusional discourses and effortless reasoning of the market.

Nevertheless, not everything is black and white. The world commonplace project, where principles of equality

may prevail as well as the fundamental unification of the human gender is universal, as projected by Achille Mbembe (2018), and maybe it is already possible to presently identify some feeble signs in this direction. They rise from resistance, in the act of performing and persisting. In the collective struggles for justice that are reinvented as they overflow and touch beyond the austerity of a single thought or a single notion of class. No advance in this sense, however, can be substantial while racism persists and the self-declared superiority of one race over another.

Those who the African thinker, about the revolutionary and Caribbean philosopher, defines as “the new condemned on Earth” are denied the right to have rights or the right to come and go. Therefore, they are doomed to live in every type of reclusion and exclusion – open fields, screening centers, millions of places of confinement – to which we may add impoverished, unattended, and violent suburbs in large cities in the North and Northeast of Brazil where urban dumping grounds and irregular landfills are located wherever they persist, like the Marituba one, in the Belém Metropolitan Area.

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Notes

- (1) The concept of planned obsolescence comes with the current rationale of the capitalist system, that is self-replicated in untimely disposal of consumer goods, that rapidly become obsolete (Mézsáros, 2002, in Zanetti et al., 2009).
- (2) Solid waste is every “material, substance, item, or disposed good as a result of human activities in Society whose components make their dumping in public sewages or water bodies unacceptable (Brasil, 2010 – PNRS. Chapter 2, item XVI).
- (3) Thirty-six countries are OECD members – Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development –, established post-World War II. Since the 1980s, these high GDP countries have increased their waste per capita in 35% (World Bank, 2012). See “What a waste: a global review of solid waste management. Available at: <<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/17388>>
- (4) Urban Solid Waste(USW) – domestic and city cleaning waste (sweeping, street and public spaces cleansing, and the sort) (Brasil, National Plan of Solid Waste, 2012).
- (5) RMB: Belém, Ananindeua, Marituba, Benevides, Santa Isabel do Pará, Santa Bárbara do Pará (and, more recently added in 2011, the town of Castanhal).
- (6) Marituba Bureau of Criminal Apprehension. Reference to Lawsuit (MP): 0009250-89.2017.8.14.0133. Available at: <https://www.jusbrasil.com.br/diarios/documentos/535913883/andamento-do-processo-n-0009250-8920178140133-11-de-dezembro-do-tjpa?ref=topic-lawsuit>.
- (7) Available at <<http://www.solvi.com/>> and the company’s corporate publication <http://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/499343_43ddf5292e8f44dda9010c404b3a1d05.pdf>.
- (8) Solvi Corporation P.L.C. Statement of individual financial transactions consolidated on December 31, 2017 and 2016. <http://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/499343_7cc85e66489c48e3bcc6e00b6019b2b8.pdf>.
- (9) See MPPA: <<https://www2.mppa.mp.br/noticias/inquerito-civil-vai-apurar-licenciamento-ambiental-de-aterro-sanitario.htm>>.
- (10) On this subject, visit: <http://www.mppa.mp.br/noticias/conforme-exigencia-do-mp-aterro-de-marituba-sera-encerrado-em-no-maximo-dois-anos.htm>.
- (11) Marituba Hall Decree from March 20, 2017, published on DOM on March 31. Available on: <https://www.marituba.pa.gov.br/site/decreto-no-508-de-20-de-marco-de-2017/>.
- (12) Slurry is any liquid that, while passing through matter, extracts soluble or suspended solids, or any other component of the material through which it has passed. (Wikipedia)
- (13) Justice denies habeas corpus to company directors that operate Marituba landfill - G1 Pará, published on 12/18/2017. Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/pa/para/noticia/justica-nega-habeas-corpus-a-diretores-das-empresas-que-operam-aterro-de-marituba.ghtml>.
- (14) Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/foralixaomarituba/> and https://foralixaomarituba.wixsite.com/foralixaomarituba?fbclid=IwAR2DxeSc_l_iocRP-zFo4pnn51xw1UEZDU95CsMy96BsyhqAJGrIGdwXQr8.

- (15) Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/pa/para/noticia/2019/05/31/justica-determina-que-aterro-de-marituba-continue-a-funcionar.ghml>.
- (16) Estimated population IBGE 2018 and GDP per capita. On: Fórum Nacional de Entidades Metropolitanas – FNEM. Available at: <http://fnembrasil.org/regiao-metropolitanadebelempa/> and <http://fnembrasil.org/fnem/painel/>.
- (17) As a result of several endeavors to occupy the Amazon, the region recorded the highest rates of urban growth in the country, with a population that increased from 35% in 1970 to 72% in 2007 (Becker, 2013).
- (18) The tertiary sector of the economy, that provides services, is responsible for 83% of the GDP in Belém Metropolitan Area, mostly concentrated in the capital, 85% in Belém, followed by Marituba (80% of municipal GDP) 79% in Ananindeua, and 78% of the GDP in Castanhal.
- (19) According to the definition by IBGE (2010), subnormal agglomerations (AS) are described based on a minimum of 51 household units (shacks, houses, etc.) mostly deprived from essential public services and generally in disordered and dense distribution.
- (20) The Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) consists of 16 indicators disposed in three dimensions – Urban Infrastructure, Human Capital, Work, and Income – based on the breakdown of data from the Census and the National Household Survey (PNAD), conducted by IBGE. The index results from the arithmetic means of sub-indices and varies from 0 to 1, very low social vulnerability (0 to 0,2), low (0,2 to 0,3), medium (0,3 to 0,4), high (0,4 to 0,5) and very high (0,5 to 1). See: <http://ivs.ipea.gov.br>.
- (21) The Municipal Human Development Index (MHDI) adapts the methodology developed to measure the human development of countries to apply in the municipalities. It is a measure composed by three indicators dimensions of human development: longevity, education, and income. The index ranges from 0 to 1. The closer to 1, the greater the human development (Atlas do Desenvolvimento Humano, s/d). Available at: http://www.atlasbrasil.org.br/2013/pt/o_atlas/idhm/.
- (22) Study from the Tropics in Movement Project UFPA (2017). Available at: <https://www.portal.ufpa.br/index.php/ultimas-noticias2/7711-estudos-revelam-que-a-emissao-de-gas-metano-no-lixao-do-aura-e-equivalente-a-queima-de-34-mil-hectares-de-floresta>.
- (23) Interview conducted on March 28, 2018 after Public Session at the House of Representatives, held at Salão Paroquial Menino Jesus in Marituba, incited by the federal depute Edmilson Rodrigues (PSOL).
- (24) As we report excerpts from inhabitants that live nearby Marituba Landfill, we will make use of a sequence that discerns them only with gender identification. Interview conducted on March 28, 2018.
- (25) Interview conducted on March 28, 2018.
- (26) Same.
- (27) Regardless of the monarch's physiognomy or the form of State, to Foucault (1999), sovereignty stands on the unity of power. "The multiplicity of powers can only be established and can only work have based on the unity of power, ingrained on the sovereignty theory" (p. 51). To the author, sovereignty is the cycle of the subject to the subject and is essentially based on the law, but in a fundamental legitimacy that transcends the law and is more fundamental than all laws.

- (28) Our translation from the original “[...] Para reflejar las formas contemporáneas de sumisión de la vida al poder de la muerte” (Mbembe, 2016, p. 75).
- (29) Interview conducted on March 28, 2018.
- (30) Previously mentioned, interview conducted on March 28, 2018.

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