

**A GEOGRAPHICAL INTERPRETATION “ON THE CARE OF THE COMMON HOME”: A RETURN TO THE ORIGINS OF SOCIAL CHRISTIANITY**

***UMA INTERPRETAÇÃO GEOGRÁFICA “SOBRE O CUIDADO DA CASA COMUM”:  
RETORNO ÀS ORIGENS DO CRISTIANISMO SOCIAL***

***UNA INTERPRETACIÓN GEOGRÁFICA “SOBRE EL CUIDADO DE LA CASA  
COMÚN”: UN REGRESO A LOS ORÍGENES DEL CRISTIANISMO SOCIAL***



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**ABSTRACT:** Regarding the relevance of the content and meaning of the Encyclical Letter/On Care for the Common Home *Laudato si* for the reflection on the basic roots of the planet's destruction intensification and acceleration, the general objective of this article is to interpret the text of this document, with the purpose of translating it in the sense of strengthening theoretical-empirical criticism for social mobilization for a better world. Thus, hermeneutics was chosen as the pertinent methodological path for the interpretation of the aforementioned document, scrutinizing its explicit and implicit meanings. The general conclusion is that, as a result from the process of reform of an ancient institution that can still contribute to the improvement of human beings and their ways of using, occupying and thinking about the territory, the Encyclical in question became a reference for reinforcing the various forms of resistance and mobilization towards the effective transformation of the world.

**KEYWORDS:** Destruction of Nature. Human captivity. Technical-instrumental rationality of capitalism. Use of the territory.

**RESUMO:** Partindo da ideia da relevância do conteúdo e do sentido da Carta Encíclica/Sobre o Cuidado da Casa Comum *Laudato si* para a reflexão sobre raízes basilares da intensificação e aceleração da destruição do Planeta, estabeleceu-se como objetivo geral deste artigo interpretar o texto deste documento, com a finalidade de traduzi-lo no sentido do fortalecimento teórico-empírico da crítica para a mobilização social por um mundo melhor. Optou-se, assim, pela hermenêutica como caminho metodológico pertinente para a interpretação do referido documento, perscrutando os seus sentidos explícitos e implícitos. Chegou-se à conclusão geral de que, resultando de um processo de reforma de uma instituição milenar que ainda pode contribuir para o aprimoramento dos seres humanos e das suas formas de uso, ocupação e pensamento do território, a Carta Encíclica abordada tornou-se uma referência para reforçar as diversas formas de resistência e mobilização no sentido da transformação efetiva do Mundo.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Destruição da Natureza. Cativo humano. Racionalidade técnico-instrumental do capitalismo. Uso do território.

**RESUMEN:** Partiendo de la idea de la relevancia del contenido y del significado de la Carta Encíclica/Sobre el Cuidado de la Casa Común *Laudato si* para la reflexión sobre las raíces básicas de la intensificación y aceleración de la destrucción del Planeta, fue establecido como objetivo general de este artículo interpretar el texto de este documento, con el propósito de traducirlo en el sentido de fortalecer la crítica teórico-empírica para la movilización social por un mundo mejor. Por tanto, se eligió la hermenéutica como camino metodológico pertinente para interpretar el mencionado documento, examinando sus significados explícitos e implícitos. Se llegó a la conclusión general de que, fruto de un proceso de reforma de una institución antigua que todavía puede contribuir a la mejora del ser humano y de sus modos de usar, ocupar y pensar el territorio, la Carta Encíclica en cuestión se convirtió en una referencia para reforzar las diversas formas de resistencia y movilización hacia la transformación efectiva del Mundo.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Destrucción de la Naturaleza. Cautiverio humano. Racionalidad técnico-instrumental del capitalismo. Uso del territorio.

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## Introduction

The main idea that motivated us to write this essay lies, above all, in the relevance of the content and meaning of the Encyclical Letter *On Care for Our Common Home* (*Laudato Si'*) for reflecting on the foundational roots of the intensification and acceleration of the destruction of Planet Earth—including Nature and the diverse peoples affected by globalization as the current phase of the expansion of the techno-instrumental rationality of the capitalist system.

Within this framework, the primary objective was to interpret the aforementioned text in light of the territorial dimension of society, with the purpose of translating it in order to highlight the main issues raised and to underscore its relevance for strengthening the theoretical-empirical foundations of various forms of critique and mobilization toward a better world in the current context of disrespect for Nature and the dehumanization of the Other.

This work is considered relevant insofar as it may contribute to continually reintroducing essential questions about the World, with the intention of reiterating them—whenever necessary—at least as long as representatives of hegemonic interests within the capitalist system remain indifferent to the danger in which the Planet finds itself, thereby distancing us from the World we desire.

It is therefore necessary to emphasize and value any critical proposals for reflecting on the existing world, even when they originate from religious institutions such as the Catholic Church. This is particularly important because, being present in diverse territories around the World, such institutions continue to influence its ongoing process of construction and reconstruction.

From this perspective—and through hermeneutics—the authors of this study operationalized their approach in order to achieve the objective outlined above. As a method—much like humanistic geography (Lévy; Lussault, 2013, p. 494) has employed it to address landscape—the philosophy of interpretation assisted us in reading the foundational text for this reflection, with the aim of understanding its real meaning for the World.

Hermeneutics specializes in scrutinizing the hidden meaning of texts, based on the certainty that, in context, there is often more than in the text itself. It slips between the lines, because within the lines there is sometimes precisely what was not intended to be said. Thus, a discourse is not understood solely through its form, format, or grammar, but through the content it seeks to convey (Demo, 1995, p. 247-248, our translation).

The interpretation of the document cited above—considering what is said and what is left unsaid—was carried out within the context of Brazil’s historical-territorial formation process, which has always been marked by the destruction of Nature, as well as by the exploitation, subordination, and oppression of populations belonging to Indigenous peoples and the working class.

For this reason, hermeneutics, according to Abbagnano (2014, p. 666), constitutes a methodological procedure for interpreting both hidden meaning and historical knowledge. It should be added that, within this methodological procedure, the territorial dimension of human life and existence on Earth must be considered simultaneously. Moreover, insofar as it also constitutes an internal critique that evaluates the meaning and value of content, Lakatos and Marconi (1992) argue that hermeneutics

investigates the exact meaning the author intended to express. This type of critique is facilitated by knowledge of the author’s vocabulary and language, the historical, environmental, and intellectual circumstances that influenced the work, as well as the author’s education, mentality, character, prejudices, and background. “To understand a text is equivalent to having understood what the author meant to say, the problems posed, and the solutions proposed for them” (Lakatos; Marconi, 1992, p. 49, our translation).

It should also be noted, as Mello (1990) reminded us, that a framework of reference must be considered in order to understand anything, since subject and object are always intrinsically related. For this reason, hermeneutics and the philosophy of interpretation “[...] explain the contents of the mind, such as emotions, desires, intentions, feelings, and other aspects of lived experience” (Mello, 1990, p. 101, our translation).

The material constituting the central object of this interpretation was the Encyclical Letter *On Care for Our Common Home* (*Laudato Si’*), promulgated on May 24, 2015, in the third year of the pontificate of Pope Francis (1935–2025), thus completing ten years.

This is because it is a text that effectively represents the set of feelings developed throughout the life experience and existence of a Pontiff who, coming from the Global South and dissatisfied with the suffering of the peoples of this part of the Earth, sought to reflect on the Planet’s historical-environmental context with the aim of transforming it. In other words, according to this document, the challenge of protecting our Common Home is urgent, including

[...] the concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change [...] We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all. [...] I hope that

this encyclical letter [...] can help us to acknowledge the appeal, the immensity and the urgency of the challenge we face (Vaticano, 2015, p. 12, our translation).

This paper is structured as follows: first, it highlights some recognized attempts to renew the Catholic Church, clearly oriented toward a social Christianity. Next, it presents central elements of the Papal Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, emphasizing key ideas for the implementation of an integral ecology. Subsequently, a set of cartographic representations is presented to illustrate the current process of human occupation of Brazilian geographic space, according to the vicissitudes of time and its socio-spatial specificities, thereby revealing the state of dehumanization of subalternized populations and the destruction of Nature. Finally, concluding remarks are offered.

### Attempts at the Necessary Institutional Renewal

Starting from the general assumption that any social institution is a product of a society and that, consequently, every society is constructed within the framework of historical and territorial changes, institutions must keep pace with the necessary advances of the civilizational process. Otherwise, they risk being set aside by society and losing their credibility.

However, particularly when dealing with a secular institution with more than two thousand years of existence—as is the case of the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church (RCAC)—and precisely because it is a human creation, with all its virtues and shortcomings, it also becomes a problematic space, subject, for example, to the same clientelist, conflictual, and self-interested practices used to maintain power hierarchies.

Throughout its historical-territorial formation, the RCAC even distanced itself from its primary objective, becoming an institution shaped almost exclusively by the “works of the flesh,” that is, by the interests of human flesh, and thus far removed from the “works of the Spirit,” as already warned by the Apostle Paul in the Letter to the Galatians:

Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the Law (Bíblia Sagrada, Gl, 5: 16-18, our translation).

Precisely for these reasons, changes within an institution such as the RCAC are not an easy task. In our view, throughout its existence in the world, three moments stand out in which

more emphatic attempts at reform were made: the first during the pontificate of Leo XIII, from February 20, 1878, to July 20, 1903; the second during the pontificate of John XXIII, which lasted briefly from October 28, 1958, to June 3, 1963; and the third during the twelve-year pontificate of Pope Francis, from March 13, 2013, to April 21, 2025.

Regarding the first attempt, its theoretical foundation was the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, promulgated in 1891, which laid the foundations of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church. By questioning the impacts of liberalism, associated with the consequences of monopolistic capitalism on the working class, it drew attention to the need to care for workers' labor conditions:

In any case, we are convinced, and all agree on this, that it is necessary, through prompt and effective measures, to come to the aid of the working classes, since they are, for the most part, in a situation of misfortune and undeserved misery. The last century destroyed, without replacing them, the ancient guilds that had been their protection; the principles and religious sentiment disappeared from laws and public institutions, and thus, little by little, workers, isolated and defenseless, have found themselves, over time, at the mercy of inhuman employers and the greed of unchecked competition. [...] To all this must be added the monopoly of labor and credit, which have become the share of a small number of rich and powerful individuals, who thus impose an almost servile yoke upon the immense multitude of proletarians (Vaticano, 1891, p. 2, our translation).

Within this concern, attention was given to relations between employers and workers, in order to defend rights related to the promotion of justice in labor relations. Thus, unlimited and precarious working hours, wages insufficient for family subsistence, the exploitation of women's and children's labor, and slave labor were condemned.

As for the wealthy and employers, they should not treat the worker as a slave, but should respect in him the dignity of a human being, ennobled further by that of a Christian. Manual labor, according to the common testimony of reason and Christian philosophy, far from being a cause for shame, honors a person, because it provides a noble means of sustaining life. What is shameful and inhuman is to use people as mere instruments of profit and to value them only in proportion to the strength of their arms. [...] It is the employer's duty to ensure that these requirements are fully met, so that the worker is not exposed to corruption or degrading influences, and that nothing weakens the spirit of family life or habits of thrift. Employers are also forbidden to impose work that exceeds a worker's strength or is unsuited to age or sex. Among the principal duties of employers, foremost is that of paying each worker a wage that is just. Certainly, in determining a fair wage, many factors must be taken into account (Vaticano, 1891, p. 2, our translation).

Although this attempt did not deepen the discussion of the real roots of workers' labor conditions, *Rerum Novarum* reinforced the struggles of the working class, which had already



been underway since the intensification of the so-called Industrial Revolution and the consequent mobilization of workers. At the same time, this encyclical influenced the organization of social services in several countries, particularly those related to promoting decent housing for the working class.

Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that, to some extent, this encyclical was not produced solely out of empathy for the precarious working and living conditions of the working class. This is especially evident given that Pope Leo XIII defended private property and was not particularly sympathetic to the ideas of the socialist movement of the time. According to Hobsbawm (1988, p. 134, our translation),

[...] although the political potential of Christian parties was enormous, as European history after 1945 would demonstrate, and although this potential evidently grew with each extension of the franchise, the Church resisted the formation of political parties formally supported by it. Even though, since the early 1890s, it had recognized that it would be desirable to draw the working classes away from socialist and atheist revolution and, of course, necessary to care for its largest electorate, the peasantry, despite the papal blessing for the new Catholic concern with social policy (the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, 1891), the ancestors and founders of what would become the Christian Democratic parties of the post-Second World War era were regarded with suspicion and treated with periodic hostility by the Church—not only because they, like “modernism,” seemed to align with undesirable trends in the secular world, but also because the Church felt uncomfortable with the cadres of the new Catholic middle and lower-middle classes, urban and rural, emerging from expanding economies, who found in them their field of action.

The second effective attempt at reform of the RCAC was theoretically supported, among other documents, by the encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, promulgated in 1961, which revisited the content of *Rerum Novarum*, reasserting the issue of the Church’s social function within Christian doctrine in order to strengthen social Christianity.

As a landmark of the RCAC’s social doctrine, *Mater et Magistra* sought to bring the institution closer to the temporal problems of the world at that time, which was marked by the Cold War, by seeking paths to prevent the deepening of inequalities among the world’s peoples, especially those living under conditions of underdevelopment. In this regard, it defended the need for an “adjustment between economic progress and social progress”:

As the economies of various countries develop rapidly, at an even more intense pace in the postwar period, we consider it timely to recall a fundamental principle. Social progress must accompany and keep pace with economic development, so that all social groups may share in the increased production. It is therefore necessary to monitor carefully and work effectively

so that economic and social imbalances do not grow, but rather, insofar as possible, are reduced (Vaticano, 1961, p. 14, our translation).

Like the previous encyclical, this one also did not fully deepen the reflection on the fundamental roots of the social problems raised. At the same time, in the Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*, written in 1963, also during the pontificate of John XXIII, a reflection was presented centered on the idea that the Church should have a strong commitment to the world of the poor.

This reflection strongly influenced the creation, under the subsequent pontificate of Pope Paul VI, of Liberation Theology<sup>3</sup>—a theological conception central to the formation of Base Ecclesial Communities (BECs)—as well as the formulation and implementation of public policies aimed at providing social welfare in various parts of the world, including Brazil.

In this country, the Base Ecclesial Communities (BECs), for example, played a fundamental role in the struggle against the civil–military dictatorship established in 1964, making use of their extensive territorial network across Brazilian space. Thus, the Church of the popular classes, grounded in *Pacem in Terris*, defends a commitment to justice, charity, and freedom, based on the human right to a dignified existence. This commitment was reinforced by the idea that:

[...] every human being has the right to existence, to physical integrity, and to the means necessary for a dignified standard of living: these include, above all, food, clothing, housing, rest, medical care, and essential social services. Consequently, the human person also has the right to be provided for in cases of illness, disability, widowhood, old age, involuntary unemployment, and in any other situation in which one is deprived of the means of subsistence through no fault of one's own. These are rights that pertain to moral and cultural values. Every human being has the natural right to respect for his or her dignity and good name; the right to freedom in the search for truth and, within the limits of moral order and the common good, to freedom of expression and dissemination of thought, as well as to the cultivation of the arts. There is also the right to truthful information about public events. From human nature also derives the right to share in the benefits of culture and, therefore, the right to a basic education and to technical and professional training consistent with the level of cultural development of the respective community. Efforts must be made to ensure that those whose abilities permit have access to higher education, so that, insofar as possible, they may rise in

<sup>3</sup>It was at the meeting of the Second Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM), held in Medellín, Colombia, in 1968, that the ICAR's new position and commitment, rooted in the political reality of this continent, was established: “The poverty of so many brothers and sisters cries out for justice, solidarity, witness, commitment, effort, and overcoming in order to fully fulfill the salvific mission entrusted by Christ. The present situation therefore requires bishops, priests, religious, and laity to have a spirit of poverty which, ‘breaking the bonds of selfish possession of temporal goods, encourages Christianity to make organic use of the economy and power for the benefit of the community’” (Orth, 1973, p. 147, our translation).



social life to positions and responsibilities suited to their talents and acquired expertise (Vaticano, 1963, p. 3, our translation).

However, from the pontificate of Pope John Paul II, which lasted from 1978 to 2005—coinciding with the global context of the reactivation of economic neoliberalism and political conservatism—a process of counter-reform began within the RCAC and in its relations with oppressed peoples, reverberating across the planet. From that period until the election of Pope Francis in 2013, the institution gradually distanced itself from the problems of the popular classes in various parts of the world. As a result, its significant historical-territorial network—largely constituted by the BECs—was dismantled and/or weakened, thereby reducing its capacity to speak directly to the poorest and most marginalized sectors of society.

With regard to the third attempt to reform the RCAC, under the pontificate of Pope Francis—which constitutes the central object of discussion in this essay—it will be addressed in the following section. It should nevertheless be anticipated that this attempt is considered the most radical in relation to the previous ones, insofar as it recognized that “through an ill-considered exploitation of nature, [human beings] risk destroying it and becoming, in turn, victims of this degradation” (Vatican, 2015, p. 4, our translation), which underscores “the urgent need for a radical change in the behavior of humanity” (Vatican, 2015, p. 4–5, our translation). This is because, the encyclical continues, achieving the most extraordinary scientific advances and the most remarkable economic development will be of little value if they are not accompanied by social and moral progress.

It was not only argued that prevailing technological progress and economic development were “against humanity,” serving merely “[...] purposes of immediate use or consumption,” but also that a profound change was required “[...] in lifestyles, models of production and consumption, and the consolidated structures of power that today govern societies” (Vatican, 2015, p. 5–6, our translation). Thus, insofar as the encyclical identified the true structural causes that, arising from disrespect for Nature, are responsible for the destruction of the Earth—our “common home”—it unsettled key representatives of Western imperialism and the State of Israel, grounded respectively in Eurocentrism and Zionism.

## **The papal encyclical *Laudato si* “On Care for Our Common Home”: from the context of the accelerated destruction of the planet**

Based on the general principle that a crime against Nature is a crime against human beings themselves, the Encyclical *Laudato si* invites us to seek solutions to the problems generated by the greed and selfishness of the capitalist system not only in technical measures, but also—and simultaneously—in the transformation of human beings themselves on Earth. This includes overcoming “modern anthropocentrism,” which fuels the humanitarian crisis and places “technical reason above reality.” According to the Encyclical, this must occur through “integral ecology,” grounded in the “full development of the human person,” which transcends scientific language in order to bring us closer to our very essence as human beings in the world. Thus, “[...] if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will spontaneously arise” (Vatican, 2015, p. 11, our translation), with the aim of renouncing the treatment of reality as a mere object of use and domination for purely speculative purposes.

In this sense, by asserting that every society—and therefore every culture—creates and institutes its own idea of Nature, Porto-Gonçalves (2011, p. 23, our translation) argued that “[...] the concept of nature is not natural; rather, it is created and instituted by human beings. It constitutes one of the pillars through which humans construct their social relations, their material and spiritual production, in short, their culture.” Accordingly, the idea of using Nature in a purely speculative sense can—and therefore must—be reconsidered according to other parameters, such as, for example, the notion of care.

In this sense, the Encyclical cited above presents, as its central “appeal,” the effective appreciation of the human being, with the aim of deepening the critique of the current actions imposed across different geographical spaces, which are negatively affecting and degrading the environment, while also imposing precarious conditions and, consequently, a state of misery on the poorest populations.

The urgent challenge of protecting our common home includes the concern to unite the entire human family in the pursuit of sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. The Creator does not abandon us, never retreats from His plan of love, nor does He regret having created us. Humanity still possesses the capacity to collaborate in the construction of our common home. I wish to thank, encourage, and express appreciation to all those, in the most varied sectors of human activity, who are working to ensure the protection of the home we share. Special gratitude is owed to those who struggle with determination to address the dramatic consequences of environmental degradation in the lives of the world’s poorest. Young people demand change from us; they question how one can claim to

build a better future without thinking about the environmental crisis and the suffering of the excluded (Vaticano, 2015, p. 12, our translation).

From the perspective, therefore, of building sustainable and integral development aimed at the construction of our common home, according to Vatican (2015), it is first necessary to promote the essential debate that unites the peoples of the Earth, thereby enabling the construction of a new universal solidarity. It was precisely in this sense that the Encyclical was conceived, that is, to propose an “ecology which, in its various dimensions, integrates the specific place that the human being occupies in this world and his or her relationships with the surrounding reality” (Vaticano, 2015, p. 14, our translation).

Thus configured as a mode of thinking that is realized through the environment—understood as the instance of intrinsic, dynamic, and dialectical interrelations between nature and society—as an object of reflection, this proposal contributes to what Leff (2012), in alignment with the idea previously advanced by Porto-Gonçalves (2011), calls environmental epistemology.

Environmental epistemology leads this exploratory path beyond the limits of the rationality that underpins normal science in apprehending the environment, toward constructing the very concept of the environment and configuring the knowledge that corresponds to it from the perspective of environmental rationality [...] culminating in a form of knowledge that goes beyond the field of the sciences and questions the rationality of modernity (Leff, 2012, p. 17, our translation).

Beginning with an assessment of the state of the art regarding what is happening on the planet, the Encyclical therefore raises the following issues: pollution and climate change, which generate environmental refugees and place people at risk; the issue of water, which, having lost its meaning as a Common Good, becomes a commodity; biodiversity, threatened by the depredation of forests and woodlands; the deterioration of the quality of human life and social degradation; planetary inequality, driven by exacerbated and selective consumerism; the weakness of responses, indicating that, despite the growth of ecological awareness among populations, it is still not strong enough to change harmful consumption habits; and the diversity of opinions, which fragment into different lines of thought—ranging between the myth of progress and the myth of overpopulation.

As a consequence of the set of problems highlighted above, the Encyclical emphasizes that they are due, respectively, to: the culture of disposability linked to consumerism, which does not conceive the climate as a Common Good; the privatization of this good, which loses its character as a Common Good and becomes a commodity; deforestation and the

extermination of species; the submersion of human beings in cement, asphalt, glass, and metals, depriving them of physical contact with nature; the unequal distribution of population and available resources between the Global North and South; the weakness of international political responses and the subordination of politics to technology and finance; and the inability to think about the purposes of human action, allowing oneself to be driven by immediate impulses resulting from the prevailing system of excessive planetary consumption.

Along this path, for *Laudato si'*, integral ecology must simultaneously enable closer relationships between nature and society, overcome the current humanitarian crisis, and allow, among other purposes, the possibility to “combat poverty, restore dignity to the excluded, and at the same time care for nature” (Vatican, 2015, p. 108, our translation). For this reason, it is essential to continue the constant pursuit of actions that foster dignity for people, especially the poorest.

### **A return to authentic Christianity and to the new human being**

Starting from the premise that there is no single way to see, interpret, and transform reality, the Encyclical cited above emphasizes the need to pay due attention to the urgent necessity of engaging in effective dialogue among the diverse forms of knowledge and practices constructed throughout the history of human life on planet Earth.

This is because, within the context of deep and integral ecology, integral solutions can only be conceived and implemented if natural systems are integrated with social systems. In other words, according to Vatican (2015), the analysis of environmental problems is only effective if they are considered inseparable from the contexts in which they occur—that is, those related to human, individual, family, labor, urban, and other dimensions—within the historical-territorial process.

If we acknowledge the complexity of the ecological crisis and its multiple causes, we must recognize that solutions cannot arise from a single way of interpreting and transforming reality. It is also necessary to draw upon the diverse cultural riches of peoples, art and poetry, interior life, and spirituality. If we truly wish to build an ecology that allows us to repair all that we have destroyed, then no branch of science and no form of wisdom can be disregarded, not even religious wisdom with its own language (Vaticano, 2015, p. 49-50, our translation).

It therefore becomes essential, through environmental epistemology, to take into account this complexity inherent in any living being on Earth, so that the necessary conditions

are established to ensure the formation of genuinely new human beings. Indeed, there will never be a new relationship between human beings and nature as long as, as argued by Vatican (2015), human beings place themselves at the center of everything that exists, insofar as they continue to give “[...] absolute priority to their contingent interests, and everything else becomes relative” (Vatican, 2015, p. 94–95, our translation).

This constitutes a clear and profound critique of anthropocentrism, which has sustained the exacerbation of selfish individualism and greed that drive the logic of the technical-instrumental rationality of the capitalist system in thinking and acting upon the planet, rendering irrelevant and disposable everything that is not human. This is “[...] the same ‘use and discard’ logic that generates so much waste, merely out of the disordered desire to consume more than is actually necessary” (Vatican, 2015, p. 96, our translation).

Despite recognizing the importance of legislation and historically constructed techniques, the Encyclical makes it clear that, without taking into account the complexity of local problems and the active participation of inhabitants—Indigenous peoples, men and women living in precarious urban conditions, among others—from different parts of the world, it will not be possible to move toward effective transformation. On the contrary, these inhabitants will become increasingly *dis-engaged* from their historical-natural contexts, without which they will remain vulnerable to conditions of exploitation, subalternization, and oppression.

Thus, *dis-envelopment* means removing the involvement (autonomy) that each culture and each people maintains with its space and territory; it means subverting the way in which each people sustains its own relationships among men (and women) and between them and nature; it means not only separating human beings from nature, but also separating them from one another, individualizing them (Porto-Gonçalves, 2012, p. 81, our translation).

Ultimately, new human beings—men and women—will be able, from the perspective of the Common Good and respect for the human person through their *re-envelopment*, according to Vatican (2015), to exercise a form of politics that, grounded in a broad and interdisciplinary view of the world, is capable of breaking with the perverse logic of the current historical-environmental trajectory produced by consumerism, and of beginning to care for the environment and for those who suffer the most. The exercise of such politics is possible insofar as, the same document continues, there are no systems capable of completely nullifying “[...] openness to goodness, truth, and beauty, nor the capacity to respond which God continues to

awaken deep in our hearts. To every person in this world, I ask that they not forget this dignity [...]” (Vaticano, 2015, p. 157, our translation).

### **Brazil and disrespect for the common home: destruction of nature and the oppression of subalternized populations**

With more than 8.5 million square kilometers and a population exceeding 210 million inhabitants (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics [IBGE], 2022), Brazil is not only one of the largest countries in the world in territorial and demographic terms, but also a vast mosaic of climatic, tropical geobotanical, and socio-anthropological contrasts. From this perspective, reflecting on the disrespect for the Common Home—through the denial of nature and the subalternization of the poorest populations—necessarily involves recognizing that environmental and ethno-cultural diversity is being gradually lost.

This leads us to the traumatic character of the contemporary socio-territorial drama. The current environmental crisis in Brazil thus prevents the realization of integral ecology along the lines proposed by the Encyclical Letter *Our Common Home: Laudato si'*, making it necessary to emphasize that its roots lie in the very nature of the historical-territorial formation process, still marked by the persistence of the coloniality of power and knowledge.

Along this path, the integral ecology proposed by Pope Francis leads us to the notion that there must be a direct and inseparable relationship between nature and society, through which environmental, economic, spiritual, and social dimensions must maintain the necessary interconnection and harmony, thereby preventing the conception of

[...] nature as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are included in it, we are part of it, and we are deeply intertwined with it. The reasons why a given place is polluted require an analysis of the functioning of society, its economy, its behavior, and its ways of understanding reality (Vaticano, 2015, p. 108, our translation).

Contrary to this perspective, the current historical moment and the socio-environmental issue within the context of Brazilian development sustain a scenario resulting from the persistent denial of both humanity and nature in their diversity, grounded in the *dis-envelopment* of life in the world. This situation is clearly a product of the historical-territorial formation that underpins structures of capitalist domination since the colonial period and that, through the coloniality of power—as a modern-colonial-racist world system—rests on the maintenance of



past relations that are rearticulated in the present through new dynamics of capitalist instrumental logic: “[...] coloniality was—and is—the central, inherent, and inescapable feature of the new pattern of power produced in the Americas. On this basis, its global character was and is founded” (Quijano, 2005, p. 20, our translation).

From this standpoint, the colonial matrix of power, within a world of neoliberal relations, imposes a process of converting human life into a commodity, centered on its labor capacity through broad forms of expropriation and exploitation, while nature comes to be viewed as a mere resource. Although this dynamic has assumed new forms in contemporary times, its essence remains largely intact.

“Nature”—broadly conceived—was transformed into “natural resources,” while “nature,” as a concrete noun naming the physical, non-human world, became in the New World the basis for the cultivation of sugar, tobacco, cotton, and so forth. In other words, the concept came to refer to the source of natural resources (coal, oil, gas) that powered the machines of the Industrial Revolution. That is, “nature” became a repository of objectified, neutralized, and essentially inert materiality that existed to fulfill the economic goals of the “masters” of materials. The legacy of this transformation persists today in our assumption that “nature” is the provider of “natural resources” for daily survival: water as a bottled commodity (Mignolo, 2017, p. 7, our translation).

For this reason, geographic reality results from a process in which coloniality and globality establish a pattern of domination that places Brazil in a condition of historical dependence. Along this path, it can be observed that forms of social and economic domination—through certain activities linked to modern global productive sectors—deny integral ecology in all its dimensions. This occurs most notably in what concerns the humanity of individuals, distancing them, above all, from their lived experience and relationship with territory. In this regard, Krenak (2019, p. 23, our translation) argues that

[...] we locally exclude from life forms of organization that are not integrated into the world of commodities, placing all other ways of living at risk—at least those we were encouraged to think of as possible—ways in which there was co-responsibility toward the places where we live and respect for the right to life of beings, and not only of this abstraction we allow ourselves to constitute as humanity, which excludes all others and all other beings. This humanity that fails to recognize that the river lying in a coma is also our grandfather, that the mountain exploited somewhere in Africa or South America and turned into a commodity elsewhere is also the grandfather, the grandmother, the mother, the brother of some constellation of beings that wish to continue sharing life in this common home we call Earth.

Such a structure of domination imposes an aggressive form of destruction of subjectivities and denial of persons, violating their ways of life, expropriating and exploiting their territories, and establishing a historical process of uprooting and perversity:

[...] violent and traumatic uprooting, the experience and violence of racialization and slavery obviously implied an equally massive and radical destruction of prior subjectivity, of prior experience of society, power, and universe, of prior experience of networks of primary and social relations (Quijano, 2005. p. 18, our translation).

As a result—and in an inseparable manner—the current Brazilian socio-spatial organization includes areas that exhibit strong economic growth, driven by market-valued activities, while simultaneously revealing the presence of perverse relations that deepen inequality and socio-territorial injustice affecting the poorest populations. This situation, imposed by the irrational logic of capitalist domination and historical-territorial organization, subverts all other forms of existence, even denying ecology in its dimension of the *Common Good*.

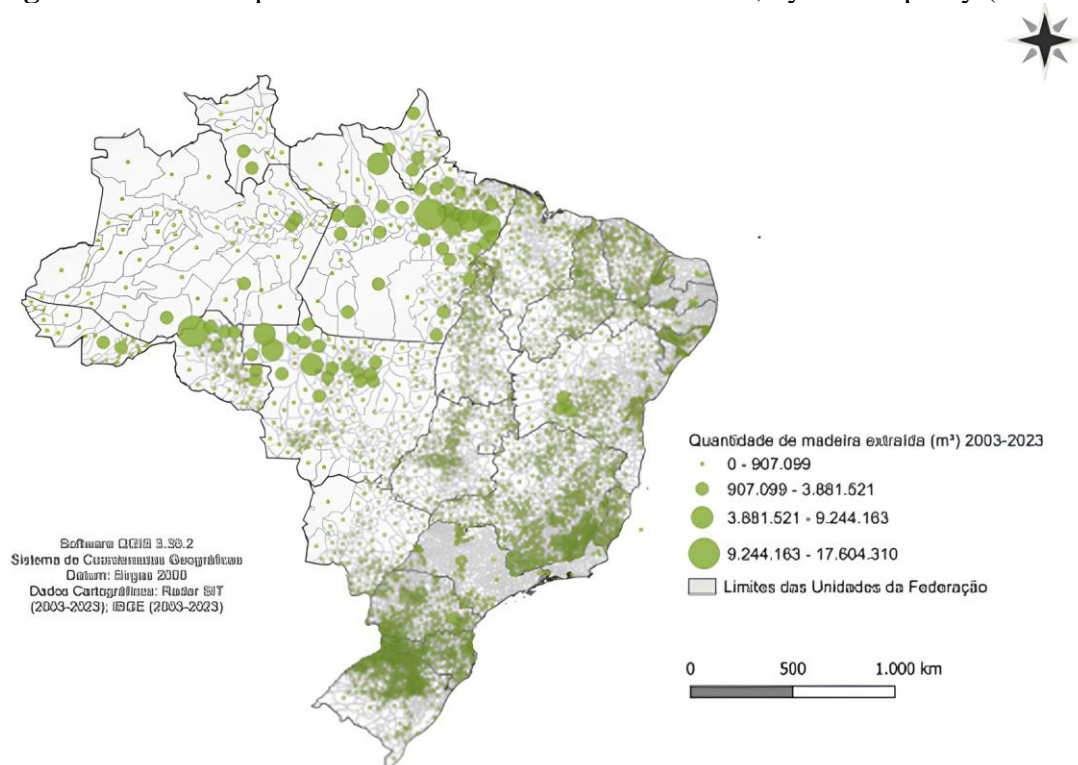
The common good presupposes respect for the human person as such, endowed with fundamental and inalienable rights oriented toward their integral development. It also requires mechanisms of social welfare and security, as well as the development of various intermediary groups, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. Among these groups, the family stands out as the basic cell of society. Finally, the common good requires social peace—that is, the stability and security of a certain order—which cannot be achieved without particular attention to distributive justice, whose violation invariably generates violence. Society as a whole—and within it, especially the State—has the obligation to defend and promote the common good (Vaticano, 2015, p. 121, our translation).

Accordingly, as Quijano (2005) argues, contemporary socio-spatial relations, grounded in domination as a colonial legacy, reveal the persistence of a set of past relations that are reaffirmed in the present. Under these conditions, the central problems shaping Brazil's spatial arrangement—originating from the association between modernity and coloniality—continue to recur. In sum, the colonality of power created a permanent structure of domination, intensifying profound inequalities and contradictions (Galeano, 2010). Land use and occupation, even in the twenty-first century, have continued, according to Quijano (2005), to operate within the parameters of the colonality of power and knowledge, which remain intrinsically linked to Eurocentrism.

Thus, Brazil's vast human and natural potential is being sidelined in favor of speculative interests concerned solely with extracting wealth for capital accumulation. Although more than

97% of Brazilian territory lies within the Tropical Zone and despite possessing extensive landscape domains that constitute “[...] a remarkably complete showcase of the principal landscapes and ecologies of the Tropical World” (Ab’Saber, 2003, p. 10, our translation), Brazil represents, according to this same author, a spatial arrangement marked by strong morphoclimatic diversity. Notwithstanding this fact, its territory has suffered significantly under a land-use perspective that treats nature as a mere economic-financial resource. To provide a limited illustration of this historical-territorial condition, Figure 1 shows the spatial distribution of timber extraction, in cubic meters (m<sup>3</sup>), by municipality in Brazil between 2003 and 2023.

**Figure 1** – Brazil: Spatial Distribution of Timber Extracted, by Municipality (2003–2023)



Source: Prepared by the authors. Adapted from Radar SIT – Panel of Information and Statistics of Labor Inspection in Brazil (2003–2023) and the IBGE Automatic Recovery System (SIDRA) (2003–2023).

This map was produced to highlight one of the outcomes of the predatory logic toward nature that has guided land-use and occupation patterns in Brazil since the colonial period, increasingly distancing the country from the realization of integral ecology.

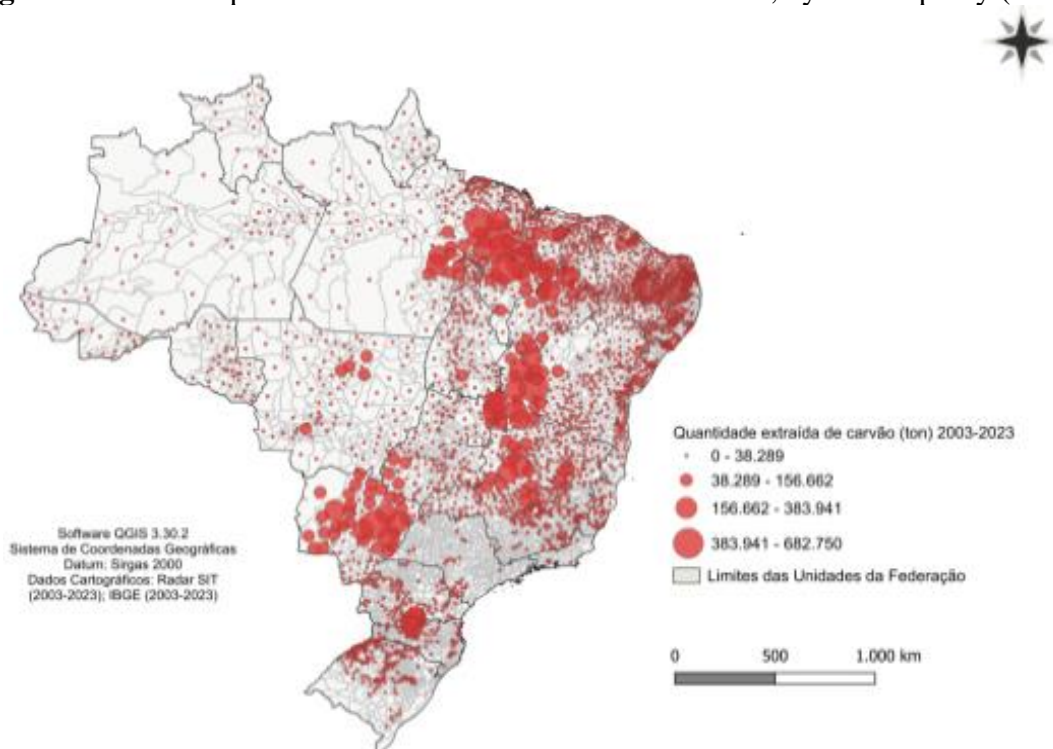
During Portuguese domination, “the exploitation of wood—pau-brasil—covered the first period of coastal colonization, and large sugar plantations were soon organized in the Northeast” (Galeano, 2010, p. 37, our translation). In the present day, timber extraction remains

a widespread practice throughout Brazil, with higher concentrations in the Northern region—particularly in the states of Pará, Rondônia, and Amazonas—as well as in the Central-West region, notably Mato Grosso, whose expansion reaches the border with Amazonas. These regions still contain relatively preserved forest ecosystems.

At the municipal scale, based on data on timber extraction, the highest values were recorded in the state of Pará, specifically in the municipalities of Portel with 17,604,310 m<sup>3</sup> (5.89%), Tailândia with 9,244,163 m<sup>3</sup> (3.10%), Paragominas with 7,911,763 m<sup>3</sup> (2.65%), Baião with 6,689,367 m<sup>3</sup> (2.24%), Almeirim with 6,605,648 m<sup>3</sup> (2.21%), and Santarém with 4,961,665 m<sup>3</sup> (1.66%). It is important to note that total timber extraction in Brazil during the period analyzed amounted to approximately 298,635,030 m<sup>3</sup>, of which the state of Pará alone accounted for 123,915,230 m<sup>3</sup>.

Alongside—and closely associated with—timber extraction is charcoal production. Within the scope of the present discussion, Figure 2 illustrates the current spatial distribution of charcoal production in Brazil.

**Figure 2** – Brazil: Spatial Distribution of Charcoal Production, by Municipality (2003–2023)



Source: Prepared by the authors. Radar SIT – Panel of Information and Statistics of Labor Inspection in Brazil (2003–2023) and the IBGE Automatic Recovery System (SIDRA) (2003–2023).

Charcoal production occurs in eastern Pará, Maranhão, Mato Grosso do Sul, and eastern and western Bahia, with expansion into the state of Goiás. This production takes place in a manner that is predatory toward both nature and human beings, *dis-engaging* them from their respective historical-territorial contexts. The highest production values are found in the following municipalities: Grajaú (MA) with 677,168 tons (2.56%); Barra do Corda (MA) with 467,084 tons (1.76%); Bom Jardim (MA) with 635,172 tons (2.40%); and Riachão das Neves (BA) with 353,944 tons (1.34%). In addition, it is worth noting the concentration of extraction in Pará, which accounts for 2,547,101 tons of Brazil's total production (26,479,647 tons), with Paragominas standing out as the leading municipality, producing 682,750 tons (2.58% of the national total). In Mato Grosso do Sul, a negative highlight is observed due to a total production of 4,861,706 tons of charcoal between 2003 and 2023, with the municipality of Ribas do Rio Pardo alone producing 675,997 tons, approximately 2.55% of Brazil's total.

The maps presented above therefore demonstrate the historical-territorial continuity of the destruction of Nature, which has not been treated as Our Common Home, insofar as timber extraction and the consequent production of charcoal have been carried out in a perverse manner, in accordance with the technical-instrumental rationality of capitalism in Brazil. The Encyclical Letter under discussion underscores the severity of this process of environmental destruction, to which constant attention must be given.

The earth's resources are also being plundered because of short-term ways of understanding the economy and commercial and productive activity. The loss of forests and woodlands simultaneously entails the loss of species that could, in the future, constitute extremely important resources not only for food but also for curing diseases and providing various services. Different species contain genes that may become key resources for meeting some future human need or regulating an environmental problem (Vaticano, 2015, p. 27, our translation).

At another point, the Encyclical also states that

Tropical forest ecosystems possess a biodiversity of enormous complexity, almost impossible to fully understand; yet when these forests are burned or cleared to make way for crops, countless species are lost within a few years, or such areas are transformed into arid deserts (Vaticano, 2015, p. 31, our translation).

Within this perspective, the process of denying Nature in Brazil is accompanied by dispossession that dehumanizes and marginalizes the poorest populations, rendering their lives increasingly precarious. This dynamic is part of a "Colonial-Slave formation subordinated to the Mercantile-Salvationist Empire" (Ribeiro, 2013, p. 36, our translation), resulting from a

cultural configuration rooted in European colonial expansion and centered on the continuous reproduction of slavery. In this sense, the persistence of slavery constitutes a dehumanizing social condition that subjects Black and peripheral populations to the most precarious living conditions in society. It represents the cruelest form of labor superexploitation and should not be understood as an archaic labor relation confined to the colonial past; rather, it is intrinsic to the process of expanding capitalist accumulation in Brazil.

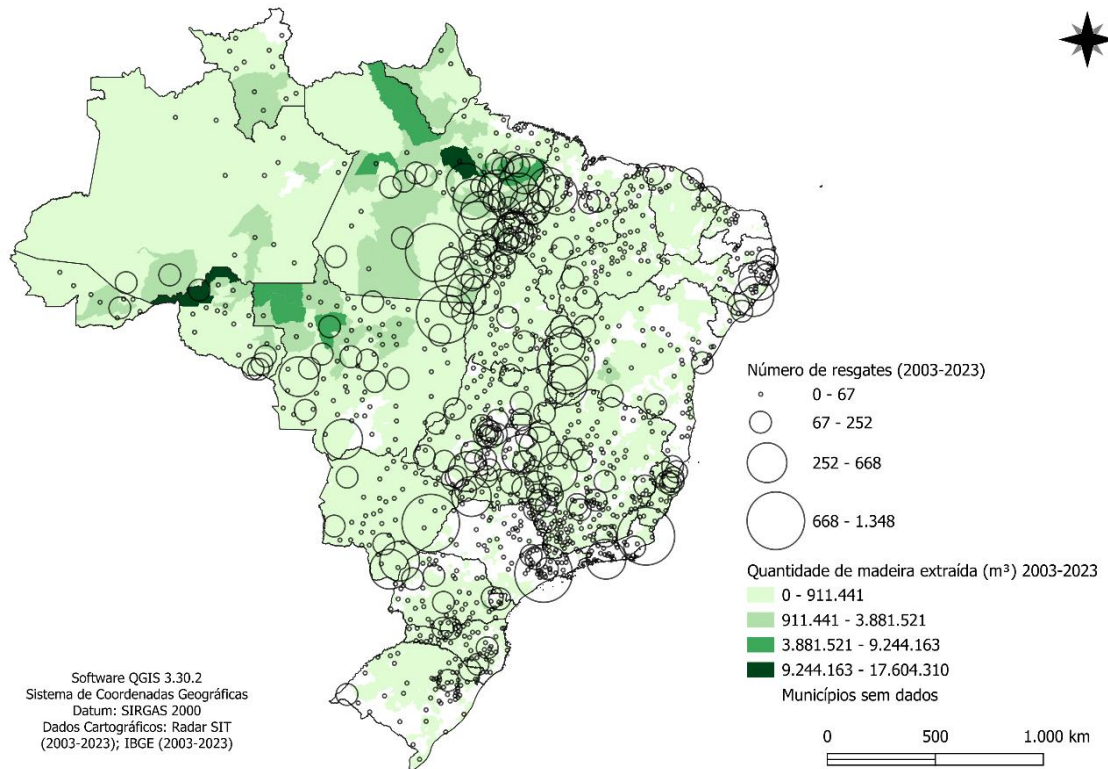
The use of contemporary slave labor is not a remnant of archaic modes of production that temporarily survived the introduction of capitalism, but rather an instrument employed by capital itself to facilitate accumulation in its process of expansion (Sakamoto, 2008, p. 112, our translation).

The perpetuation of this rationality across Brazilian space-time has thus sustained structural racism, which has become consolidated and continues to exploit Black populations (Almeida, 2019). In this regard, Fernandes (2008) had already recognized that, in Brazil, slavery persisted in the mindset of the ruling classes such that, even after its official abolition in 1887, slave-like labor relations continued to exist.

For this reason, the territory continues to be used, occupied, and conceived as an empty space to be permanently conquered by force. This demonstrates that territory, according to Santos (2003), constitutes a complex totality established through the solidary and dialectical interrelations between the technosphere and the psychosphere, within a continuous process of (re)making itself in multiple directions. Figures 3 and 4 respectively illustrate the spatial distribution of workers subjected to slave labor across Brazilian territory between 2003 and 2023.

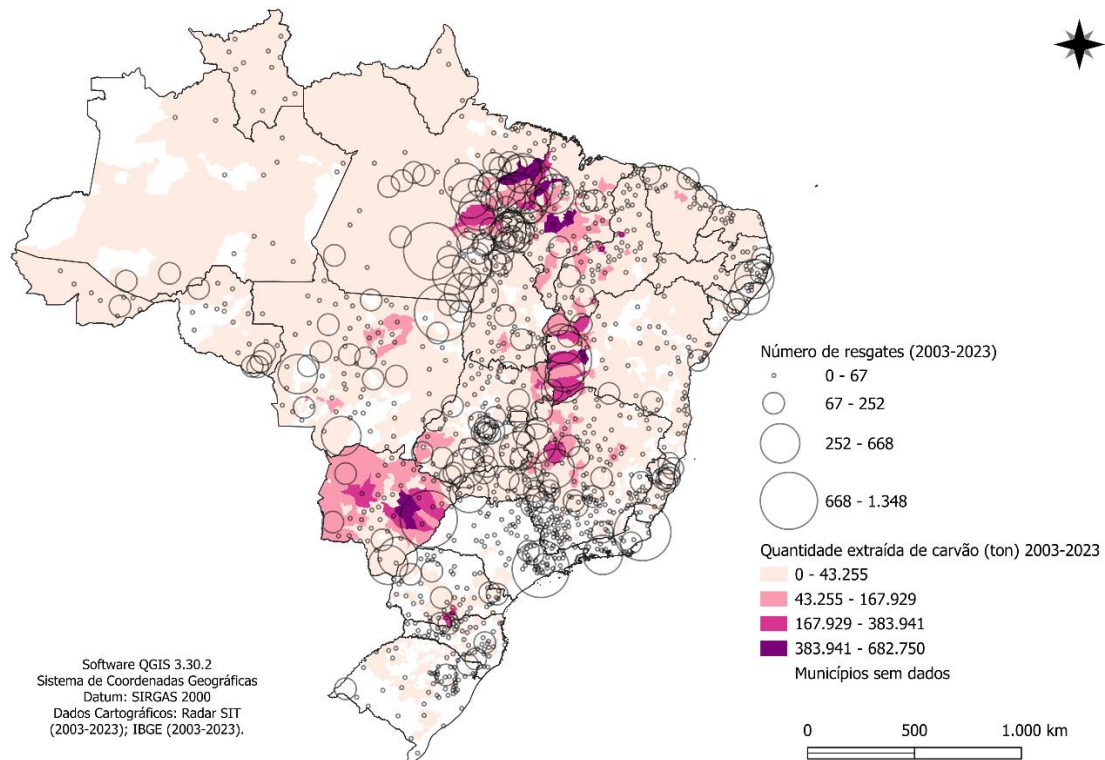


**Figure 3** – Brazil: Spatial distribution of slave labor and timber extraction, by municipality (2003–2023)



Source: Prepared by the authors. Radar SIT – Panel of Information and Statistics of Labor Inspection in Brazil (2003–2023) and the IBGE Automatic Recovery System (SIDRA) (2003–2023).

**Figure 4** – Brazil: Spatial distribution of slave labor and charcoal production, by municipality (2003–2023)



Source: Prepared by the authors. Radar SIT – Panel of Information and Statistics of Labor Inspection in Brazil (2003–2023) and the IBGE Automatic Recovery System (SIDRA) (2003–2023).

It can be observed that the Brazilian federative states in which timber extraction and charcoal production are most significant—indissociably sustaining the reproduction of speculative interests—are precisely those in which human captivity and the most perverse processes of environmental destruction are simultaneously present. This is the case in Pará, especially its eastern portion; Maranhão; Mato Grosso, particularly its northern region; Amazonas, in its southern portion; Rondônia, in its northern region; and Minas Gerais, in its western portion.

In this regard, it is emphasized that human captivity has produced marginalized population groups, condemning them not only to remain in the condition of a “machine of colonialism” (Schwarz, 2000, our translation) but, simultaneously, to a mode of existence that renders their situation within Brazilian society precarious.

Within this context, and according to the cartographic representations presented above, it is evident that the current process of human occupation of Brazilian geographic space—considering the vicissitudes of time and its socio-spatial specificities—reveals a condition of dehumanization of subalternized populations and the destruction of Nature. In this process,

labor exploitation—within the context of neoliberal expansion—imposes severe and perverse processes of environmental degradation and deterioration of human quality of life. In this respect, the following idea is also recovered:

Taking into account that the human being is also a creature of this world, who has the right to live and to be happy and, moreover, possesses a special dignity, we cannot fail to consider the effects of environmental degradation, the current model of development, and the throwaway culture on people's lives (Vaticano, 2015, p. 34, our translation).

The maintenance of this logic—linked to the constitution of socio-spatial injustices and inequalities—results in the expropriation, dispossession, and denial of the men and women who formed the foundation of Brazilian society. Within this process, and in a context of climate change, practices such as violence against and the elimination of peoples, as well as the incorporation of Nature as a commodity, further intensify the process of environmental destruction in Brazil.

From this perspective, it is worth highlighting, according to Bales (2020), that there is an inseparable link between slavery, environmental destruction, and climate change:

One of the ways in which enslaved labor is employed is through the exploitation and destruction of the natural environment on an increasing scale. This does not merely involve, for example, enslaved people being used as labor to destroy forests and increase greenhouse gas emissions, thereby intensifying climate change. Nor is it limited to cases in which climate change leads to droughts, floods, or desertification that force people into situations of greater vulnerability, making them victims of contemporary slave labor. What has happened—and continues to happen worldwide every day—is a cycle of slavery and environmental destruction that persists without interruption, destroying both the natural world and the lives of the people who are enslaved and forced to carry out the destruction of that natural environment (Bales, 2020, p. 156, our translation).

In sum, if the processes of Nature's destruction and the enslavement of people continue, we will increasingly distance ourselves from the perspective of caring for Our Common Home and, in turn, contribute to our own destruction. Therefore, particularly in Brazil, it is essential to frame the ecological debate as a social and environmental issue, opening pathways toward the necessary overcoming of the current process of space production that merely reaffirms the perversity of the modern-colonial-racist world system.

Ecological culture cannot be reduced to a series of urgent and partial responses to problems arising from environmental degradation, the depletion of natural reserves, and pollution. It should represent a different outlook—a way of thinking, a policy, an educational program, a lifestyle, and a spirituality that

resists the advance of the technocratic paradigm. Otherwise, even the best ecological initiatives may end up being constrained by the same globalized logic. Seeking only a technical remedy for each environmental problem that emerges isolates phenomena that are, in reality, interconnected and conceals the true and deeper problems of the global system (Vaticano, 2015, p. 87, our translation).

However, by reactivating our capacity to dream and maintaining the courage to confront the adversities encountered in processes of social transformation, it remains necessary to seek alternative ways of using, occupying, and thinking about territory. This entails valuing the rebellious initiatives of men and women descended from Indigenous and enslaved peoples and, in turn, their territorialities. Without this, it will not be possible to realize integral ecology, at least in the terms proposed by the Encyclical Letter *On Care for Our Common Home* (*Laudato si'*), in conjunction with the necessary environmental epistemology defended by science.

## **Final Considerations**

The Encyclical Letter *On Care for Our Common Home* (*Laudato si'*) was developed and promulgated precisely with the aim of highlighting the issues related to the socio-environmental conditions of the contemporary world, reinserting them into their real historical-territorial context resulting from the formation and expansion of the capitalist system, whose very nature lies in the destruction of Nature and the exploitation of people.

Brazil exemplifies the realization of this process insofar as, largely due to the persistence of the coloniality of power and knowledge inherent in the technical-instrumental rationality of Eurocentrism, it has accelerated and intensified modes of using, occupying, and thinking about territory inherited from the colonial period.

From this perspective, it has been demonstrated to what extent activities such as timber extraction and charcoal production, associated with labor relations structured around the captivity of people, constitute practices that have reinforced disrespect for—and even the destruction of—Our Common Home. If this home is not properly cared for, the risk of the extermination of the planet—and, consequently, of human beings themselves—will become increasingly plausible.

It is within this provocative call for attention that the aforementioned Encyclical becomes highly relevant, as it joins other works of critical reflection on the contemporary world in strengthening diverse forms of social mobilization aimed at combating these modes of using,

occupying, and thinking about territory, in order to uphold alternative dreams of a genuinely better world.

In this perspective, definitively—as critical social theory has urged since its origins—no initiative capable of contributing to the difficult task of transforming the world should be dismissed. This holds true even when such initiatives originate from millenary institutions such as the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church (RCAC), which, precisely due to its long history and as a human creation, has become vulnerable to the virtues and flaws inherent to human beings, who continuously create and recreate it.

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