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ACCUMULATION BY DISPOSSESSION AND NECROPOLITICS: AGRIBUSINESS EXPANSION IN MATOPIBA AS A PROJECT OF SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL DEATH

ACUMULAÇÃO POR ESPOLIAÇÃO E NECROPOLÍTICA: A EXPANSÃO DO AGRONEGÓCIO NO MATOPIBA COMO PROJETO DE MORTE SOCIAL E ECOLÓGICA

ACUMULACIÓN POR DESPOSESIÓN Y NECROPOLÍTICA: LA EXPANSIÓN DEL AGRONEGOCIO EN EL MATOPIBA COMO PROYECTO DE MUERTE SOCIAL Y ECOLÓGICA

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ABSTRACT: This article analyzes the expansion of agribusiness in the Matopiba region as a political-economic project based on accumulation by dispossession and necropolitics, producing social and ecological death. The main objective is to demonstrate how this selective modernization reconfigures the territory through environmental degradation and systemic violence. The problem studied is how this model naturalizes exclusion as a pillar of "development." The theoretical framework articulates these concepts, thus deepening the analysis. The methodology combines geospatial analysis (QGIS) of IBGE, INPE, and Agrosatélite data (2000-2021) with document analysis. Key results show that Matopiba concentrates 2/3 of recent Cerrado deforestation, is the epicenter of land conflicts and slave labor, and evidence of land speculation. Conclusions confirm the region as a territorial "state of exception". As a proposal of intervention, we advocate for participatory Ecological-Economic Zoning and linking rural credit to socio-environmental compliance

KEYWORDS: Agricultural frontier. Socio-environmental conflicts. Speculative deforestation. Land governance. Capital territorialization.

RESUMO: *Este artigo analisa a expansão do agronegócio no Matopiba como um projeto político-econômico fundado na acumulação por espoliação e na necropolítica, que produz morte social e ecológica. O objetivo geral é demonstrar como essa modernização seletiva reconfigura o território mediante degradação ambiental e violência sistêmica. O problema estudado é como esse modelo naturaliza a exclusão como pilar do "desenvolvimento". A matriz teórica articula esses conceitos, potencializando a análise. A metodologia combina análise geoespacial (QGIS) de dados do IBGE, INPE e Agrosatélite (2000-2021) com análise documental. Os principais resultados mostram que o Matopiba concentra 2/3 do desmatamento recente no Cerrado, é epicentro de conflitos fundiários e de trabalho análogo à escravidão, e evidencia especulação fundiária. As conclusões confirmam a região como um "estado de exceção" territorial. Como proposta de intervenção, defende-se um Zoneamento Ecológico-Econômico participativo e a vinculação do crédito rural ao cumprimento socioambiental.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Fronteira agrícola. Conflitos socioambientais. Desmatamento especulativo. Governança fundiária. Territorialização do capital.*

RESUMEN: *Este artículo analiza la expansión del agronegocio en la región del Matopiba como proyecto político-económico fundado en la acumulación por desposesión y la necropolítica, que produce muerte social y ecológica. El objetivo general es demostrar cómo esta modernización selectiva reconfigura el territorio mediante degradación ambiental y violencia sistémica. El problema estudiado es cómo este modelo naturaliza la exclusión como pilar del "desarrollo". La matriz teórica articula estos conceptos, potenciando el análisis. La metodología combina análisis geoespacial (QGIS) de datos del IBGE, INPE y Agrosatélite (2000-2021) con análisis documental. Los resultados más importantes muestran que el Matopiba concentra 2/3 de la deforestación reciente en el Cerrado, es epicentro de conflictos de tierra y trabajo esclavo, y evidencia especulación de tierras. Las conclusiones confirman la región como un "estado de excepción" territorial. Como propuesta de intervención, se defiende un Ordenamiento Ecológico-Económico participativo y vincular el crédito rural al cumplimiento socioambiental.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Frontera agrícola. Conflictos socioambientales. Deforestación especulativa. Gobernanza de la tierra. Territorialización del capital.*

Introduction

The Brazilian Cerrado, recognized for its biodiversity and water relevance, has been undergoing an accelerated process of transformation under the logic of globalized agribusiness, exemplifying what Busca (2024) calls socially unequal and spatially selective modernization. This dynamic manifests itself particularly intensely in Matopiba, a territorial cut that covers portions of the states of Maranhão, Tocantins, Piauí and Bahia, a region that concentrates 44.61% of the country's cultivated areas (IBGE, 2020) and has deforestation rates that exceed the average of the Cerrado biome (PRODES-Cerrado/INPE). Institutionalized as a strategic frontier of agricultural expansion, Matopiba is a planned territory for the incorporation of large investments, logistics infrastructure and technical-scientific innovations focused primarily on the production of commodities agriculture for the global market (Araújo; Araújo Sobrinho, 2025a).

In this process, the territory is functionalized as productive regions of agribusiness (RPAs), as proposed by Elias (2011) and deepened by Castilho *et al.* (2016), Castillo and Bernardes (2019) and Elias (2024), characterized by the intense application of technologies, capital and infrastructure for large-scale production. This rationality privileges the economic value of land, harming other forms of use and appropriation of space, subordinating traditional agricultural practices and ways of life historically constituted in the Cerrado (Araújo; Araújo Sobrinho, 2025b). Although this model boosts the economic indicators of agribusiness, benefiting large producers, agroindustries and traders it also deepens environmental degradation and intensifies the marginalization of traditional communities and family farmers.

The result of this process is the consolidation of a scenario marked by increasing land concentration, worsening socio-environmental conflicts, and the expulsion of vulnerable populations from their territories (Oliveira, 2024). As Alves (2022) demonstrates, this exclusion is not a side effect of growth, but a structural element of a system that operates through accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2005), in which the progress of certain economic agents is sustained by the material and symbolic expropriation of others. In this sense, the very notion of "backwardness" attributed to peasant, Indigenous, and traditional communities must be understood as a deliberate consequence of the selective modernization that guides the expansion of agribusiness in the Cerrado (Busca, 2024; Araújo; Sobrinho, 2025a).

Despite being often treated as a homogeneous region, Matopiba presents significant internal heterogeneity, both from a historical and geographical point of view. Areas such as the west of Bahia reveal more consolidated processes of agricultural mechanization,

financialization of land and integration into the global circuits of commodities, while portions of Southern Maranhão, Piauí and Tocantins concentrate more recent dynamics of border opening, often associated with the direct conversion of native vegetation, land speculation and territorial conflicts. This differentiation shows that the expansion of agribusiness in the Cerrado occurs unevenly, combining already consolidated agricultural regions with new frontiers of territorial incorporation, producing contradictory spatialities and overlapping temporalities.

Given this scenario, the central problem that this article proposes to investigate is: how does the expansion of agribusiness in Matopiba, articulated to the logics of accumulation by plunder and necropolitics, produces and naturalizes environmental degradation and socio-spatial exclusion as constitutive elements of its development project? The research answers this question by demonstrating, through geospatial analysis and socioeconomic data, that the apparent technical and economic rationality of agribusiness hides a structural violence that redefines the territory, where economic growth for the few is sustained by environmental destruction and social death for the many.

This research proposes to analyze the expansion of agribusiness in the Matopiba region as a contradictory geographical process, structured by the logic of accumulation by plunder (Harvey, 2005) and necropolitics (Mbembe, 2016). The objective is to demonstrate how this model of selective and socially unequal modernization (Busca, 2024), supported by the state and oriented to the global market of commodities (Araújo; Araújo Sobrinho, 2025a), simultaneously produces: 1) a territorial reconfiguration marked by land concentration, land financialization and the formation of productive agribusiness regions (RPAs); 2) a destructive environmental dynamic, with concentrated deforestation and accelerated conversion of Cerrado ecosystems; and 3) a systemic socio-spatial violence, manifested in the expropriation of traditional communities, in the aggravation of land conflicts, in the exploitation of labor analogous to slavery and rural lethality.

From the methodological point of view, the research is based on the analysis of quantitative data from official public sources. From the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), information from the 2017 Agricultural Census was used to examine the distribution and concentration of soybean cultivated areas, with spatial cropping for the Cerrado biome and Matopiba, adopting the municipalities as the unit of analysis. From the National Institute for Space Research (INPE), data from the PRODES-Cerrado program were used, which monitors deforestation by shallow cutting in the biome with a spatial resolution of 30 meters and time series between 2001 and 2020. Additionally, the Agrosatellite database

Geotecnologia Aplicada (2021) was incorporated, which maps the expansion of soybeans in the Cerrado between the 2000/01 and 2020/21 harvests, allowing comparison between Matopiba and the other states of the biome.

The geospatial analyses involved thematic overlay procedures for the intersection between land use and deforestation, calculation of annual conversion rates, and preparation of spatial concentration maps. Statistically, descriptive analyses (means and percentages) and simple linear regression were applied to identify temporal trends of agricultural expansion and environmental degradation. All processes were performed in QGIS software (version 3.22), ensuring the reproducibility of the results.

Finally, the article is organized as follows: after this introduction, the first section discusses the advancement of agribusiness in the Cerrado from the notion of selective modernization and the constitution of contemporary agricultural frontiers, highlighting the differences between consolidated regions and new areas of expansion. The second section presents the results of the geospatial analysis of soybean expansion and deforestation, comparing the behavior of Matopiba with that of the other states of the biome. The third section examines the socio-environmental contradictions of this process, with emphasis on land speculation, territorial conflicts, and violence in the countryside. The final considerations summarize the main findings and discuss alternatives for reorienting territorial governance.

Selective modernization and contradictory spaces: agribusiness expansion on the Matopiba border

The neoliberal reorientation of Brazilian agriculture, starting in the 1990s, began to prioritize globalized agribusiness, in consequence harming local production systems and family farming (Araújo; Araújo Sobrinho, 2022). This political option compromises food sovereignty, understood as the ability of peoples and territories to define their own agri-food systems, and weakens food security by subordinating domestic supply to fluctuations in the international market and the logic of commodities production (Oliveira, 2016). In this context, a model that Ioris (2016, 2017) calls agroneoliberalism is consolidated, in which agricultural and food policies are oriented primarily by market interests, shifting the focus from food production to domestic consumption in favor of export. This rationality reinforces a transnational agenda that neglects local demands for regular access to food, environmental preservation, and cultural recognition, deepening territorial inequalities (Romero; Oliveira; Romero, 2018). Supported by

historical paradigms such as the Green Revolution (Mazzali, 2000; Delgado, 2012), this trajectory was marked by alliances between rural oligarchies and urban-industrialized sectors (Moreira, 2013), consolidating institutional arrangements that perpetuate structures of socioeconomic exclusion and limit the autonomy of territories in the face of global agribusiness dynamics (Araújo; Araújo Sobrinho, 2022).

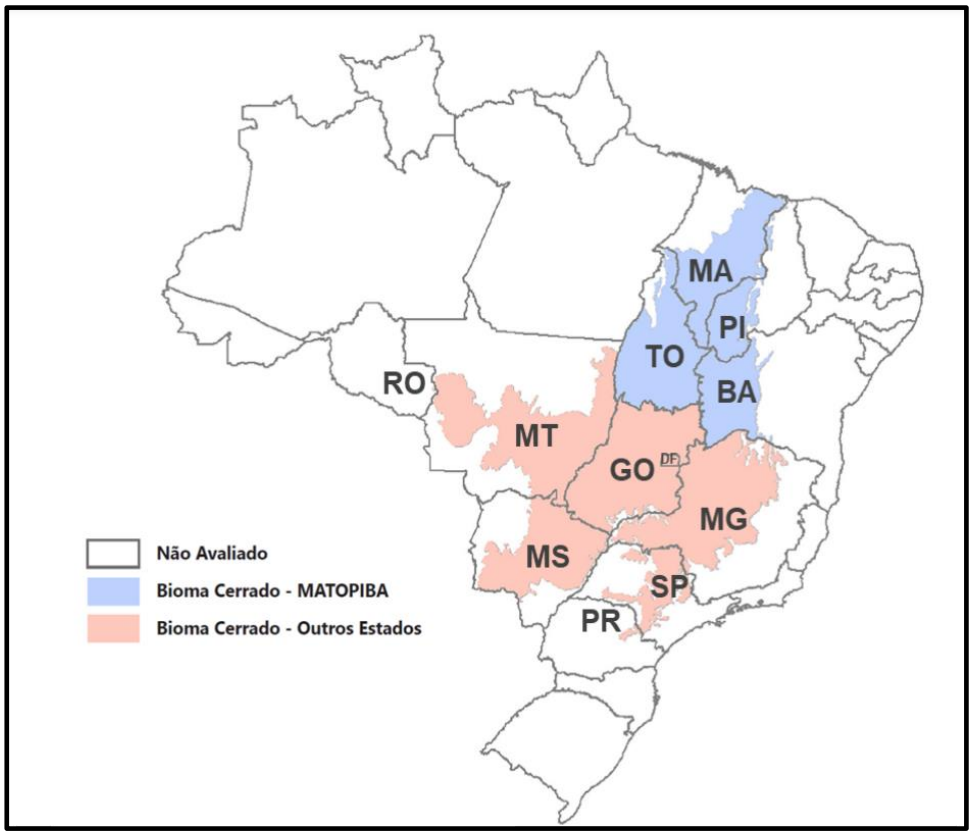
It is in this broader framework that the transformation of the Cerrado into an agricultural frontier is inserted, a process that acutely highlights the contradictions of globalization. The selective advancement of agribusiness is concentrated in Matopiba, a region responsible for 44.61% of the cultivated area in the country (IBGE, 2020), where intensive mechanization converts the biome into a production zone of commodities through the direct replacement of native ecosystems, a process Busca (2024) identifies as "creative destruction[3]". While large producers and agents integrated into global marketing circuits benefit, family farmers and traditional communities are progressively marginalized, deepening social and territorial inequalities. Shaped by technical networks, logistics infrastructure, and subsidized credit (Busca, 2024), this expansion accelerated the conversion of native vegetation, currently preserved in only about 50% of the Cerrado biome (MAPBIOMAS, 2023). As Santos (1996) warned, the heterogeneity of these processes is decisive: in Matopiba, expansion via deforestation predominates, while in other areas of the biome, productive intensification is observed over previously anthropized regions, revealing an unequal appropriation of technologies and the expansion of land stocks without corresponding democratization of access.

With the aim of explaining the spatial framework adopted and the analytical distinction between consolidated agricultural regions and new frontiers of agribusiness expansion in the Cerrado, Figure 1 presents the delimitation of areas classified as "Matopiba" and "other states" within the biome. The map shows that Matopiba is mostly concentrated in the northern and northeastern portions of the Cerrado, covering areas of the states of Maranhão, Tocantins, Piauí and Bahia, while the "other states" correspond to regions where mechanized agriculture has a higher degree of historical consolidation, such as Mato Grosso, Goiás, Mato Grosso do Sul and Minas Gerais. This spatial differentiation is central to the analysis developed throughout the

[3] Busca (2024) analyzes the effects of agricultural expansion in the Cerrado, particularly in the MATOPIBA region of Bahia, where the advance of monocultures profoundly transforms the organization of the territory. Its central argument demonstrates how capitalist accumulation in agribusiness is based on destructive processes – from the expropriation of natural resources to the intensive exploitation of the soil. This model, according to the author, simultaneously generates concentration of wealth, territorial inequalities, and environmental degradation. Busca (2024) also problematizes the economic rationality of this system, evidencing its negative impacts: both the exclusion of traditional populations and the accelerated destruction of ecosystems.

article, as it allows us to understand that the recent processes of expansion of soybean cultivation, deforestation and territorial conflicts are not distributed homogeneously in the biome. On the contrary, they are selectively concentrated in Matopiba, a region marked by more recent dynamics of border opening, intense conversion of native vegetation and institutional weaknesses in territorial governance. Thus, Figure 1 not only locates the empirical framework of the research, but also supports the comparison between different patterns of use and appropriation of the territory in the Cerrado.

Figure 1 – Highlight for the regions "other states" and "Matopiba" in the Cerrado biome



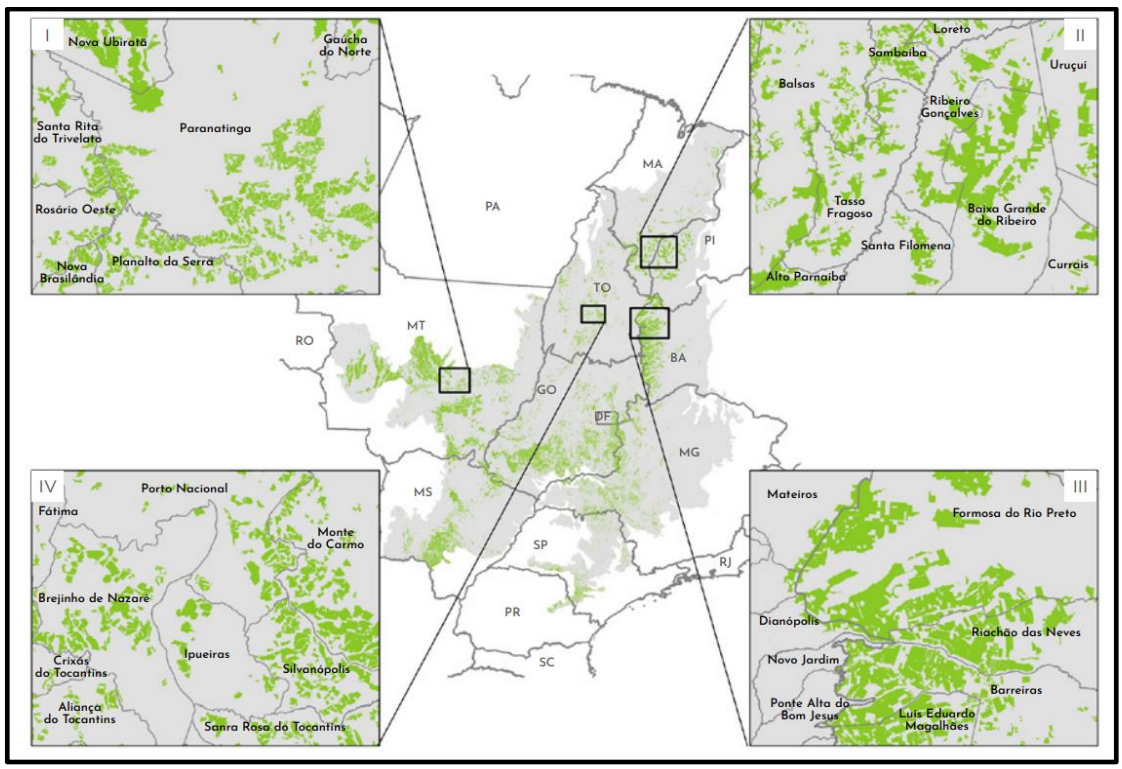
Source: Agrosatellite (2021).

Until the 1980s, the territory currently recognized as Matopiba was predominantly occupied by extensive livestock, organized under landowner logic and with low technical density (Santos, 1996). From the insertion of globalized agribusiness, this region is progressively reconfigured as an agricultural frontier, a process marked by accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2005) and by the state legitimization of a technical-marketing rationality oriented to the valuation of capital. The expansion of large-scale monoculture materializes, in this sense, a hegemonic project of space (Lefebvre, 1991), in which traditional

ways of life are replaced by global corporate circuits of production and circulation of commodities (Alves, 2020). Soy farming thus becomes a concrete expression of the tension between globalization and local dynamics, converting the territory into a fluid space of advancement over biomes and communities (Santos, 2000). This movement approaches what Haesbaert (1999) defines as violent deterritorialization, to the extent that developmental projects dissolve identities, weaken territorial ties, and impose an exclusionary logic of space use.

To deepen the spatial analysis of this process, Figure 2 presents the distribution of soybean culture in the Cerrado in the 2020/21 crop year, highlighting areas that registered significant growth in activity. The map shows that soybean expansion does not occur continuously, but is organized by discontinuous patches and selective axes of advance, especially concentrated in the central and northern portions of the biome. In this pattern, areas associated with the new agricultural frontiers of Matopiba stand out, where land incorporation occurs in an accelerated manner and is often articulated with logistical investments, rural credit and soil correction technologies.

Figure 2 – Map of soybean cultivation in the Cerrado for the 2020/21 crop year, highlighting regions that showed significant expansion of soybean cultivation



Source: Agrosatellite (2021).

In this context, the incorporation of areas such as “Novo Ubrado” and “Bozoiro Oeste” symbolizes the expansion of new agricultural frontiers guided by a selective modernization (Busca, 2024), which prioritizes logistics infrastructures and productivity gains at the expense of socio-environmental sustainability. The standardization of space, evidenced by sequences numbered as “M1” to “M626”, expresses the homogenization imposed by the logic of commodities, reducing the complexity of the Cerrado to abstract and functionalized productive units to the global market (Egger, 2024; Sassen, 2016; Haesbaert, 2004). This process, however, does not develop in a linear or consensual way. Land conflicts mapped by the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT, 2021) and the loss of 7,340 km² of native vegetation in 2020 (MAPBIOMAS, 2023) reveal deep contradictions between economic growth and socio-environmental justice, highlighting the limits of the developmental discourse associated with agribusiness.

The quantitative dimension of this advance is deepened in Table 1, which demonstrates the territorial reconfiguration of soybean cultivation in the Cerrado between 2000 and 2021. States such as Mato Grosso, Goiás and Mato Grosso do Sul have consolidated themselves as hegemonic poles of production, with growth exceeding 1,000% in the period, reflecting the verticalization of space through technologies and transnational capital. At the same time, the rise of the Matopiba, whose area cultivated with soybeans jumped from 970,227 to 4,716,951 hectares, highlights the agricultural frontier as a space of contradictions (Busca, 2024), where economic rationality overlaps environmental and social sustainability. As Silva (2012) points out, Brazilian regional planning has privileged integration into global markets to the detriment of productive diversification and the strengthening of local economies, reinforcing territorial asymmetries. The expansion of soy in the Cerrado constitutes, therefore, a complex geographical process, imbricated in networks of power, technique, and capital, which redefines the territory under the aegis of agribusiness and produces a spatial roughness marked by persistent inequalities (Santos, 2000).

Table 1 – Soybean area in hectares in the Cerrado biome, by state and for the regions "other states" and "Matopiba" for crops 2000/01, 2006/07, 2013/14, 2016/17, 2018/19, 2019/20, 2020/21

Estado	2000/01	2006/07	2013/14	2016/17	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
	ha	ha	ha	ha	ha	ha	ha
DF	39.862	55.101	80.211	88.572	93.496	85.447	84.867
GO	1.678.199	2.323.737	3.472.889	3.644.519	3.954.372	4.106.060	4.379.545
MG	683.194	803.508	1.267.109	1.531.541	1.778.323	1.789.656	1.953.439
MS	694.317	959.161	1.375.051	1.652.907	1.848.181	2.020.460	2.166.916
MT	3.019.902	3.982.035	5.524.610	5.630.600	5.636.978	5.780.725	5.883.555
PR	50.909	64.819	70.952	79.499	91.831	94.532	96.070
SP	389.653	242.462	402.992	496.431	618.544	646.924	719.162
RO	0	0	0	431	489	453	476
Outros Estados	**6.556.036**	**8.430.823**	**12.193.814**	**13.124.500**	**14.022.214**	**14.524.257**	**15.284.031**
MA	221.542	434.510	680.550	748.482	816.521	831.302	902.364
TO	76.905	256.767	675.835	914.009	1.018.243	1.089.381	1.171.582
PI	57.711	223.587	617.219	653.375	718.304	718.562	799.638
BA	614.069	771.528	1.433.741	1.627.367	1.629.217	1.669.201	1.843.368
MATOPIBA	**970.227**	**1.686.393**	**3.407.345**	**3.943.233**	**4.182.285**	**4.308.446**	**4.716.951**
TOTAL	**7.526.263**	**10.117.215**	**15.601.159**	**17.067.733**	**18.204.499**	**18.832.703**	**20.000.982**

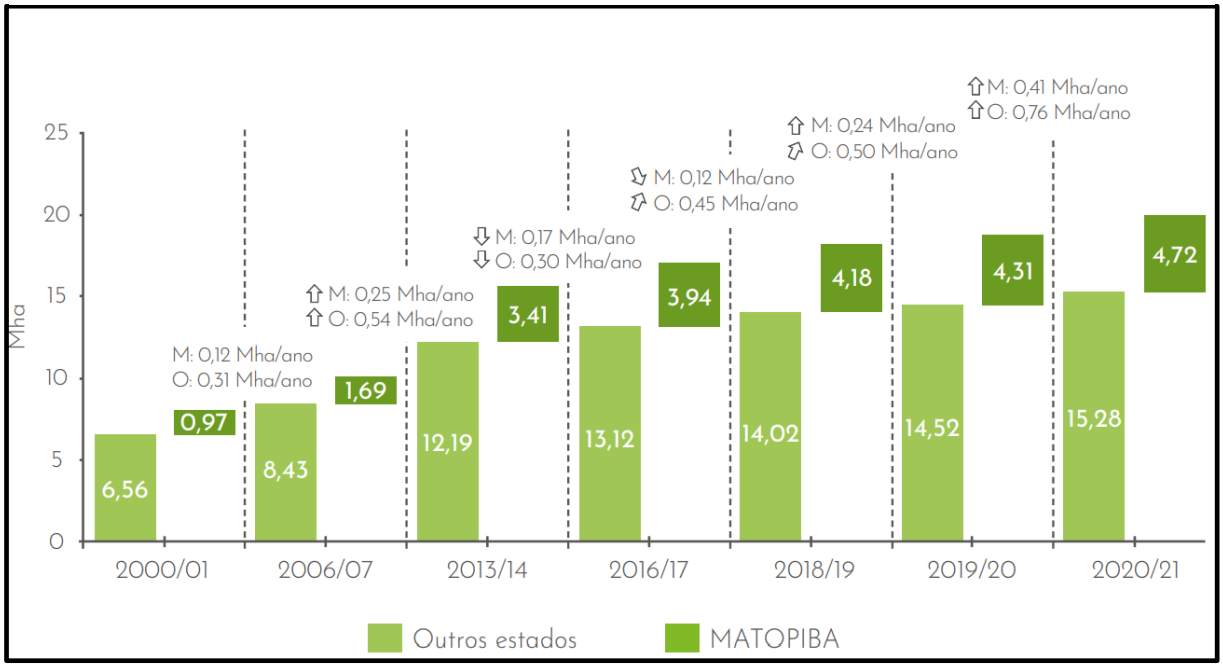
Source: Agrosatellite (2021).

In order to analyze the temporal dimension of soybean expansion in the Cerrado and deepen the distinction between consolidated agricultural regions and new frontiers of expansion, Figure 3 presents the evolution of the area cultivated with soybeans between the 2000/01 and 2020/21 harvests in the "other states" and in Matopiba. The data reveal territorial dynamics marked by different rates of growth, expressing the duality between historically consolidated areas and regions of recent incorporation into agribusiness. While the "other states" showed more moderate increases at the beginning of the period, with average rates of 0.12 Mha/year between 2000/01 and 2006/07, Matopiba stood out for a significant acceleration of expansion, reaching rates of up to 0.54 Mha/year between 2006/07 and 2013/14. This behavior reflects what Gomes (2020) calls the contemporary frontier, characterized by accelerated occupation processes mediated by soil correction technologies and by insertion subordinated to agro-export logics.

The rise of soybean cultivation in the Cerrado, evidenced by the peaks of cultivated area throughout the historical series, such as the 15.28 million hectares registered in 2018/19, expresses the growing insertion of Brazil in the global geopolitics of commodities, illustrating the socially unequal and spatially selective modernization of agribusiness (Busca, 2024). This

dynamic echoes the observations of Ab'Sáber (2003) about the transformation of fragile ecosystems into productive poles under the myth of territorial emptiness, a narrative that disregards the presence of traditional populations and tends to intensify socio-environmental conflicts. This territorial selectivity is clearly manifested in Matopiba, a region planned for the expansion of globalized scientific agriculture, where the technical-scientific-informational environment (Santos, 1994) confers high technological density to the productive regions of agribusiness (Elias, 2011). In this context, the expansion of logistics infrastructures and the growing external demand, especially from the Chinese market, reinforce the productive space circuits (Santos, 1988), transforming the region into a strategic link of transnational chains that impose the corporate use of the territory through the replacement of natural formations by monocultures.

Figure 3 – Evolution of the soybean area between the 2000/01 and 2020/21 harvests in other states and MATOPIBA



Source: Agrosatellite (2021).

However, the productive integration of the Cerrado into global agribusiness chains accentuates regional and social disparities by reproducing historical patterns of dependence and primary specialization (Busca, 2024). As Caio Prado Júnior (2011) warned, the Brazilian economy maintains its peripheral character and is subordinated to the export of monocultures, a pattern that, in the contemporary context, is now covered by the intense technology of agribusiness. This conservative modernization systematically excludes agents from the lower

circuit of the economy, such as family farmers and traditional communities, resulting in land concentration, often associated with land grabbing, impoverishment, and worsening socio-environmental conflicts (Busca, 2024). Although soybean expansion rates have slowed in more recent periods, such as the increase of 4.18 million hectares between the 2019/20 and 2020/21 harvests, such a movement may indicate both the saturation of available areas and the effect of regulatory pressures, without, however, changing the structural logic of the model. Thus, the environmental and culturally devastating impacts remain, expressed in the advance of deforestation, water contamination and the destruction of socio-biodiversity. As Diniz (2002) argues, regional planning should articulate productivity and sustainability, preventing economic growth from deepening territorial inequalities. In this sense, Figure 3 synthesizes the contradictions of a model that redefines territories as a function of global capital, persistently tensioning economic growth and socio-environmental justice (Gomes, 2020). This dynamic aligns with the understanding that nature is progressively converted into a resource for flexible accumulation, reproducing what Silva (2022) and CPT (2022) identify as the "development of underdevelopment".

The expansion of agribusiness in the Cerrado, especially in Matopiba, highlights the contradictions inherent to the model of development of productive forces based on capitalist accumulation and peripheral globalization. The accelerated conversion of complex ecosystems into monocultures commodities supported by state policies and agro-industrial technologies, it reconfigures the territory as a fluid space of transnational interests, deepening socio-spatial inequalities and environmental degradation. Land conflicts, loss of biodiversity and the marginalization of traditional communities expose the violence of accumulation by dispossession, which subjugates local horizontalities to the verticalities of the global market. Given this, it is urgent to rethink modernization paradigms, integrating critical regional planning, ecological-economic zoning and the valorization of traditional knowledge, to transcend the dichotomy between production and preservation. Only in this way will it be possible to reconcile socio-environmental justice with a development that respects the roughness of the Cerrado-not as a resource to be exploited, but as a space-world of coexistence between humans and nature.

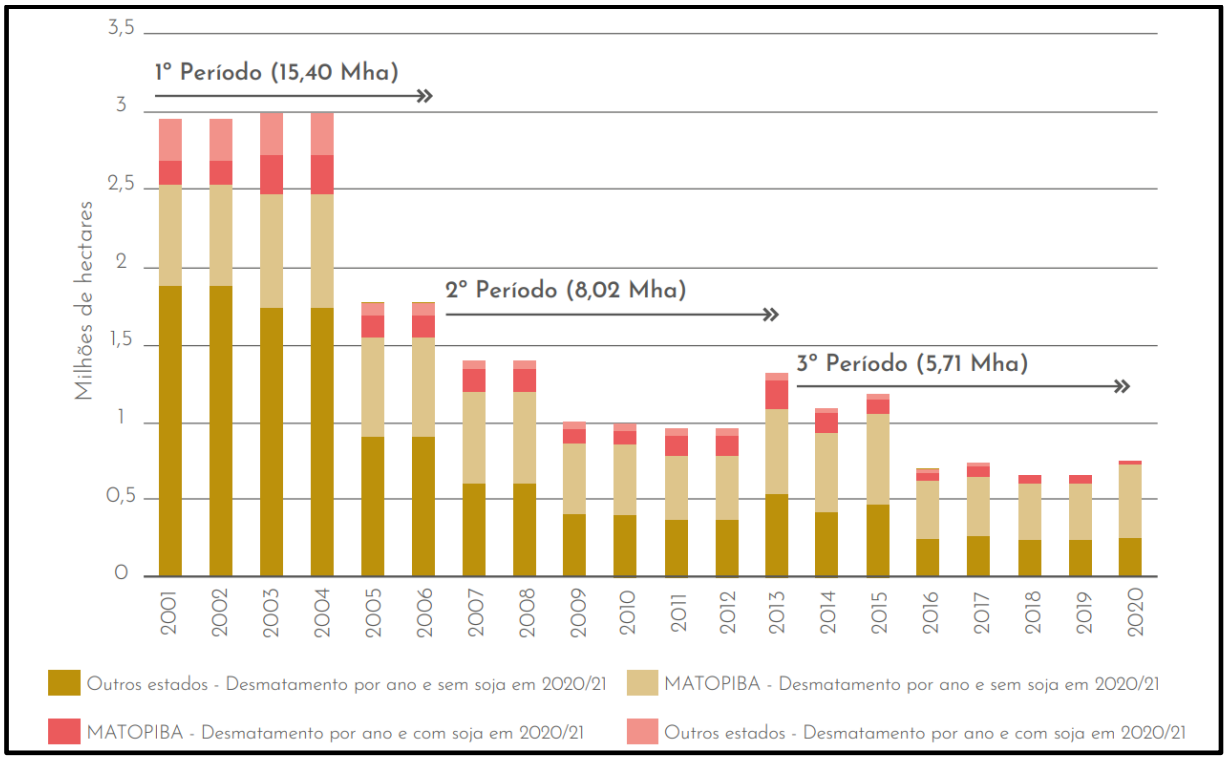
Contradictions in the dynamics of Cerrado deforestation: spatial concentration, agro-industrial expansion, and socio-environmental conflicts in Matopiba

Between 2001 and 2020, deforestation in the Cerrado showed a general decline in annual rates, but with an increasing spatial concentration. While the average deforested area has fallen from 3 Mha/year to 0.7 MHA/year, the Matopiba—which corresponds to only a third of the biome—accounts for two thirds of the recent devastation. This selective expansion of agribusiness[4] (Alves, 2022) reveals a contradiction: the apparent numerical reduction masks the regional intensification of degradation. Growth policies hegemonically oriented by agribusiness have promoted the replacement of native ecosystems by monocultures, deepening socio-environmental conflicts and stressing the sustainability of a model that dissociates economic growth from territorial justice and ecological balance. This process, however, is not absolutely imposed, being permanently confronted by a diversity of agendas, practices and territorial projects mobilized by peasant, Indigenous and traditional communities in the Cerrado (Araújo; Araújo Sobrinho, 2025b)

The reduction in the "other States" (Figure 4), may reflect saturation of traditional agricultural borders, while the Matopiba, soy pole, symbolizes the commodification (Harvey, 2005), where the biome is converted into an economic asset. The sum of 29.13 Mha deforested in two decades evidences the persistence of an extractivist model, aligned with what Becker (2009) calls the geopolitics of occupation, which subordinates regional planning to sectoral interests. Despite the quantitative slowdown, the concentration in Matopiba demands critical reflection on socio—environmental sustainability, since soy—the main local vector-is associated with land conflicts and biodiversity loss, as studies by the Amazon Environmental Research Institute (IPAM, 2025) warn. Thus, the data not only illustrate statistical changes, but reveal tensions between economic growth and territorial justice, requiring interdisciplinary approaches.

[4] According to Alves (2022), the selective expansion of agribusiness refers to the process by which the movement of technical and economic modernization of the territory privileges only specific areas with greater potential for the development of capitalized agricultural activity. This dynamic deepens spatial differentiations by ensuring that only certain portions of the national territory, endowed with favorable technical and organizational conditions, receive the contribution of modern productive capital. Consequently, this phenomenon induces a high spatial selectivity that tends to marginalize other pre-existing economies and ways of life, such as agro-extractive peasant production and traditional livestock farming.

Figure 4 – Annual deforestation rates in the Cerrado biome from 2001 to 2020 (29.13 Mha) and in each of the three periods considered in this study with emphasis on the portion annually deforested and converted to soybeans based on the 2020/21 crop



Source: Agrosatellite (2021).

The transformation of land use and land cover in the Brazilian Cerrado, driven by the expansion of soybean cultivation, reveals itself as a complex phenomenon that demands a dialectical analysis between economic agents, territorial dynamics and environmental vulnerabilities. Following Aziz Ab'Sáber (2003), for whom the Cerrado constitutes a unique morphoclimatic domain, the categorization of the observed changes was structured in three interdependent axes: 1) direct replacement of native vegetation by soy (expansion with deforestation); 2) conversion of pre-existing anthropized areas (expansion without deforestation); and 3) productive retraction, characterized by the temporary or definitive abandonment of crops. This typology, elaborated from historical series of soy mapping (Agrosatélite, 2021) and data from PRODES-Cerrado (INPE, 2024), not only quantifies impacts, but dialogues with the notion of geographical space as a process proposed by Milton Santos (1996), in which the territory is configured as a stage of conflicts between productive logics and sustainable development.

The relationship between soybean expansion and deforestation in the Cerrado is examined in Figure 5, which presents the evolution of soybean area with and without

deforestation in the "other states" and Matopiba in three different periods between the 2000/01 and 2020/21 harvests. The analysis of soybean expansion in the Cerrado between 2000 and 2021 reveals a fundamental contradiction in the Brazilian agricultural model. Although 43% of the recent expansion occurred in already anthropized areas—suggesting potential for sustainable intensification, 57% advanced over native vegetation (Agrosatélite, 2021). This dynamic is particularly critical in Matopiba, where 58% of the expansion (2.7 million ha) between 2013 and 2021 occurred via deforestation. The data confirm Harvey's (2005) thesis on the capitalist transformation of nature into a commodity, where socio-environmental externalities are systematically neglected.

Figure 5 – Expansion of soybean area with and without deforestation in the Cerrado biome, in other states and in Matopiba in three periods: 2000/01 to 2020/21

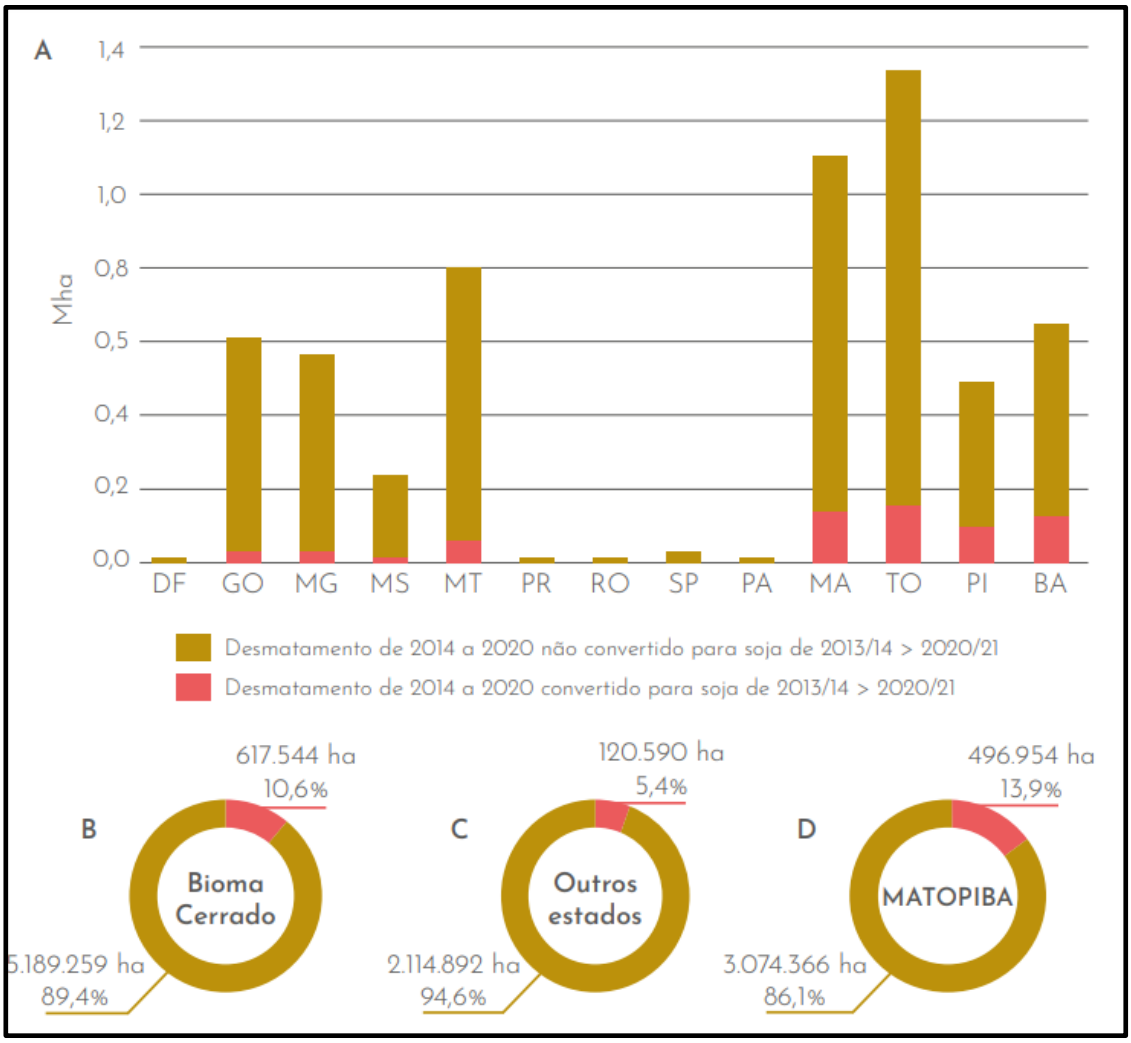
Source: Agrosatellite (2021).

The apparent duality between deforestation and productive intensification in the Cerrado masks a structural contradiction of the Brazilian agro-export model. The expansion

without deforestation (53.2% between 2006/07-2013/14) may suggest efficiency, but often hides processes of land concentration and exclusion of traditional communities (Cerqueira *et al*., 2020; Araújo; Araújo Sobrinho, 2025b). In Matopiba, where deforestation persisted at 39.6% in the same period, the subordination of environmental policies to the interests of capital is evident (Santos, 1996). This dynamic is accelerated by the international demand for commodities, which transforms land into a financial asset and intensifies land grabbing (Oliveira, 2020)—a practice historically facilitated by legal milestones since the Land Law of 1850. The result is a spiral of agricultural real estate speculation, expropriation of traditional populations and ecosystem destruction.

Understanding the territorial and socioeconomic dynamics associated with deforestation and soybean expansion in the Cerrado between 2014 and 2020 is fundamental, as illustrated in Figure 6. Data from PRODES-Cerrado/INPE reveal that, in the biome, 89.4% of the deforested area (5,189,259 Ha) was not converted to soybeans in the 2020/21 harvest, while 10.6% (617,544 ha) underwent this transformation. This disparity suggests a complexity in the relations between deforestation and commercial agriculture, not always linear, as discussed by Becker (2009) when addressing the mobile border in the Amazon, a concept applicable to the Cerrado. Soy, while commodity (Harvey, 2005), acts as a vector of spatial reorganization, but other factors, such as land speculation and livestock, also influence plant loss.

Figure 6 – Deforested area in the period 2014 to 2020 (PRODES-Cerrado/INPE) with and without conversion to soy, based on the 2020/21 crop for: a) states in its portion contained in the Cerrado; b) Cerrado biome; c) Other States; d) and Matopiba



Source: Agrosatellite (2021).

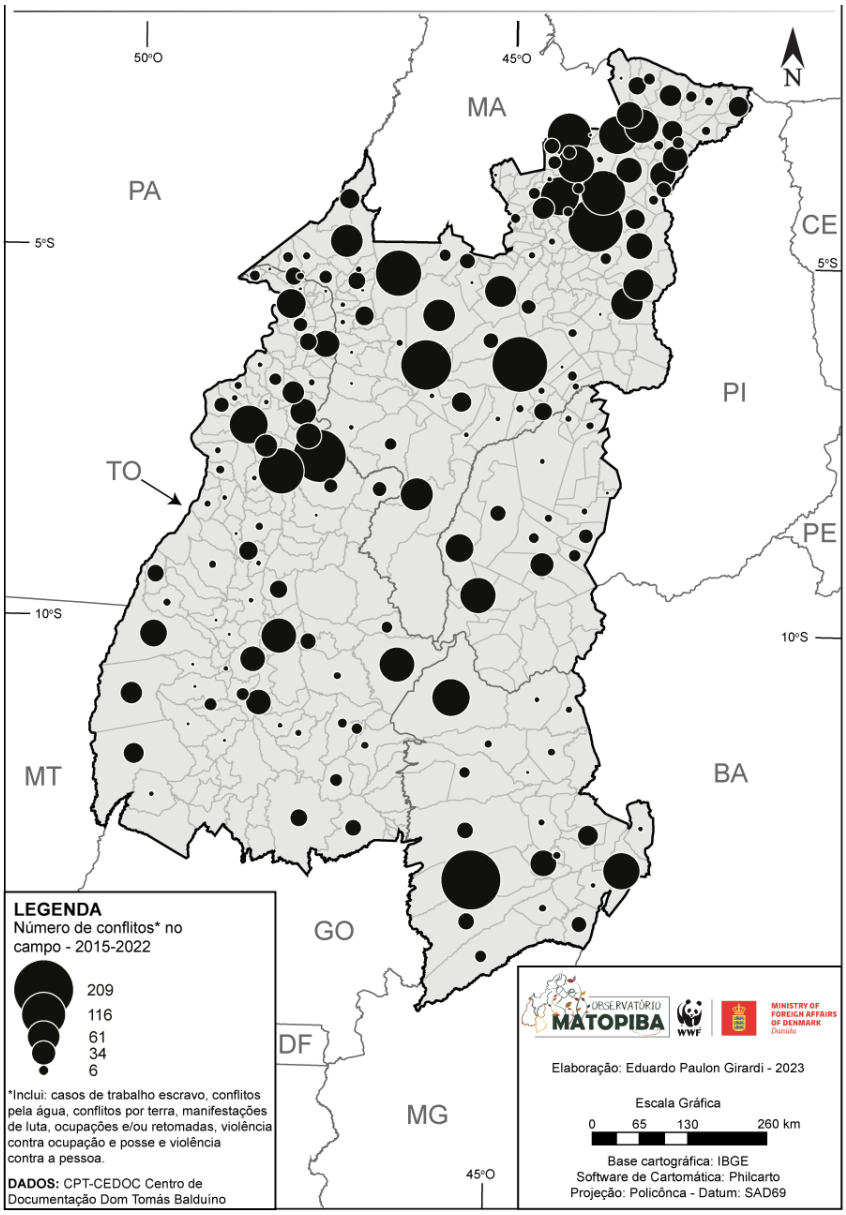
In Matopiba, the epicenter of recent agricultural expansion, 13.9% of recorded deforestation, corresponding to 496,954 hectares, was converted to soybean cultivation, a percentage higher than the average observed in the Cerrado biome as a whole. This pattern reflects the intensification of agribusiness in transitional areas between Cerrado and Caatinga, where land grabbing and appropriation of public lands historically shape the land structure and uses of the territory (Cerqueira *et al*., 2020). In contrast, in the "other states", only 5.4% of deforestation, equivalent to 120,590 hectares, was later incorporated into soybean cultivation, indicating the predominance of other territorial Dynamics, such as urban expansion, extensive livestock and diversified agricultural systems aimed at self-consumption and local markets. The significant proportion of deforested areas not converted into immediate productive use—86.1%

in Matopiba and 94.6% in the other states—shows a structural disconnect between environmental degradation and agricultural productivity. This dynamic corroborates the thesis of speculative deforestation (Cerqueira *et al*., 2020), according to which the fragility of land governance sustains cycles of environmental degradation without clear economic return, deepening socio-environmental conflicts.

The rotational cultivation of maize and cotton (double cropping) exemplifies technological intensification that concentrates land and income, widening regional inequalities. Communities such as São Rezende da Mapeabana, Mandaba and Santa Florença represent spaces of resistance where collective practices and non-commercial relations persist under constant risk of expropriation. Deforestation associated with soy visible in Figure 7 corroborates the criticism of Cerqueira *et al*. (2020) and Araújo and Araújo Sobrinho (2025b) to predatory growth, which prioritizes short-term profits over socio-environmental sustainability. At the same time, the shrinkage of soybeans in areas converted to fallow or other crops reveals a cyclical dynamics of soil depletion, typical of large-scale shifting cultivation. This logic not only deepens inequalities, but also displaces rural populations and consolidates territorial control by transnational corporations, exposing the unsustainability of the hegemonic model.

The expansion of globalized agribusiness in Matopiba, intensified by the Agricultural Development Plan (PDA) of 2015 (Brazil, 2020), is reflected in the escalation of agrarian conflicts represented in (Figure 7). Data from the CPT (2023) show that, in 2020, the region registered 19 conflicts, with Maranhão concentrating 53% of cases, followed by Tocantins (27.7%), Piauí (11.2%) and Bahia (6%). In addition, the west of Bahia accumulated 140 conflicts between 2003 and 2020, reflecting the dynamics of corporate appropriation of the territory (Busca, 2024). This reality is aggravated by practices such as land speculation and land grabbing (Nascimento, 2020), which marginalize small producers and traditional communities.

Figure 7 – Matopiba -conflicts in the field – 2015-2022



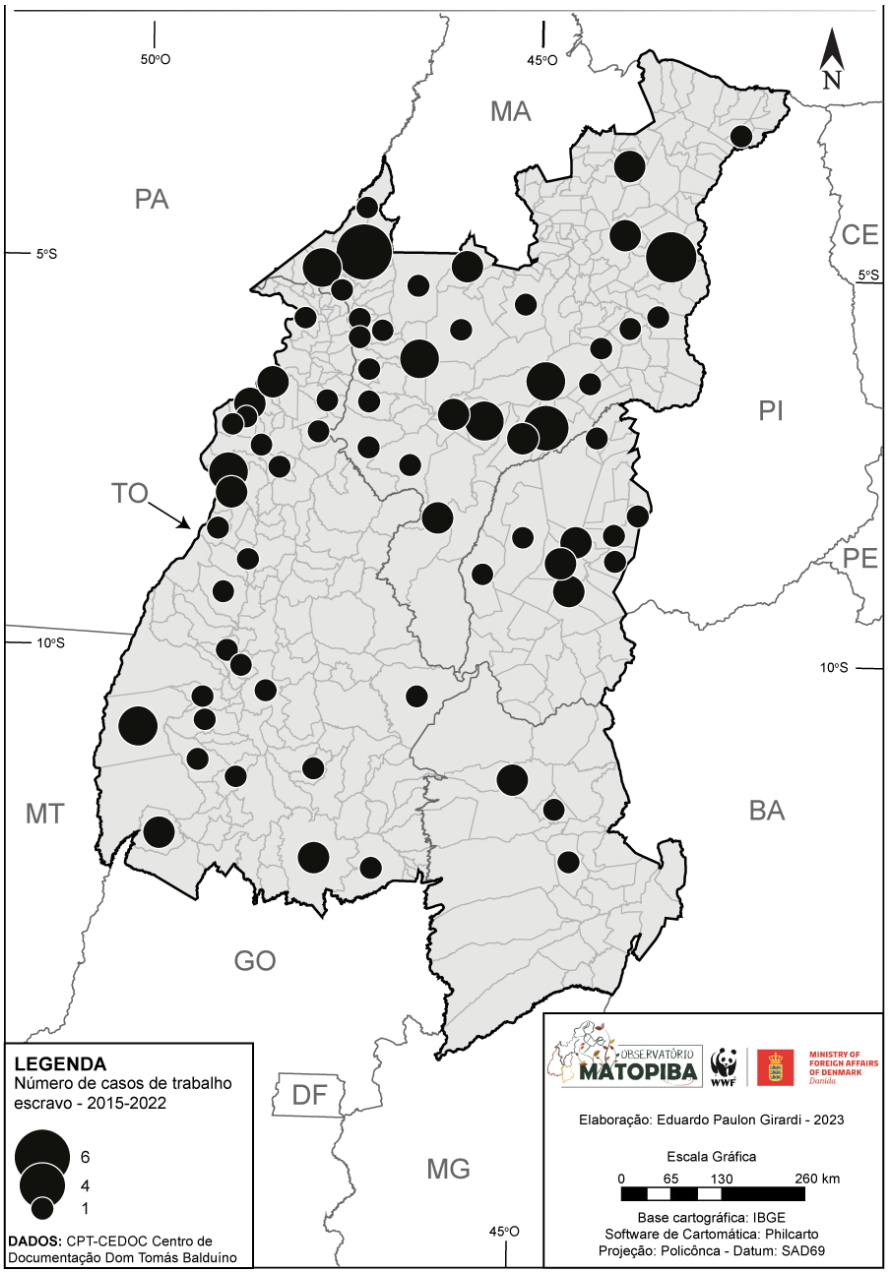
Source: Eduardo Paulon Girardi (2023).

The municipalization of land regularization, by transferring attributions from INCRA to municipalities, creates a scenario conducive to irregular land appropriation. Self-declaration without adequate verification of conflicts or overlaps with public areas amplifies land disputes (Araújo, 2023). At the same time, initiatives such as Decree No. 10,592/2020 and PL 490/2007 facilitate the economic exploitation of lands by unlocking indigenous areas and conservation units. These policies, combined with the institutional fragility of the state—marked by incomplete registries and lack of accurate georeferencing—benefit landowners and agribusiness sectors (Alentejano, 2022; Araújo, 2023). The performance of the Parliamentary Front of Agriculture (FPA) illustrates this trend by promoting regulatory flexibility in the name

of competitiveness (Busca, 2024). This state collusion with the "landowner order" institutionalizes violent practices such as gun violence and invasions, consolidating a model based on exclusion and violence (CPT, 2022).

The Bolsonaro government (2019-2022) intensified land conflicts through an "agrarian counter-reform" (Alentejano, 2022; Araújo, 2023). Provisional Measure No. 910/2019 and normative Instruction No. 9/2020 legitimized irregular occupations on public lands (Brasil, 2019; CPT, 2023), while PL 490/2007, by proposing the time frame, increased the vulnerability of indigenous territories. These measures resulted in extreme violence: in 2022, 65.6% of rural murders occurred in the Legal Amazon, with 58.4% of victims being leaders (CPT, 2023). Between 2015 and 2022, the persistence of labor analogous to slavery in Matopiba—documented in Figure 8—reveals the continuity of this violation, with subjection mechanisms such as fraudulent indebtedness and violent coercion affecting vulnerable populations. The case of Lucas do Rio Verde (MT) illustrates the convergence between socioeconomic precariousness and predatory performance of intermediaries. This situation worsened after 2017 due to the labor reform and the dismantling of inspections, reinforcing the political dimension of exploitation (Araújo; Araújo Sobrinho, 2025a). Initiatives such as the campaign "with an open eye so as not to become a slave" (CPT, 1997) highlight the importance of social mobilization to combat the invisibility imposed by capital and the state.

Figure 8 – Matopiba -slave labor cases – 2015-2022



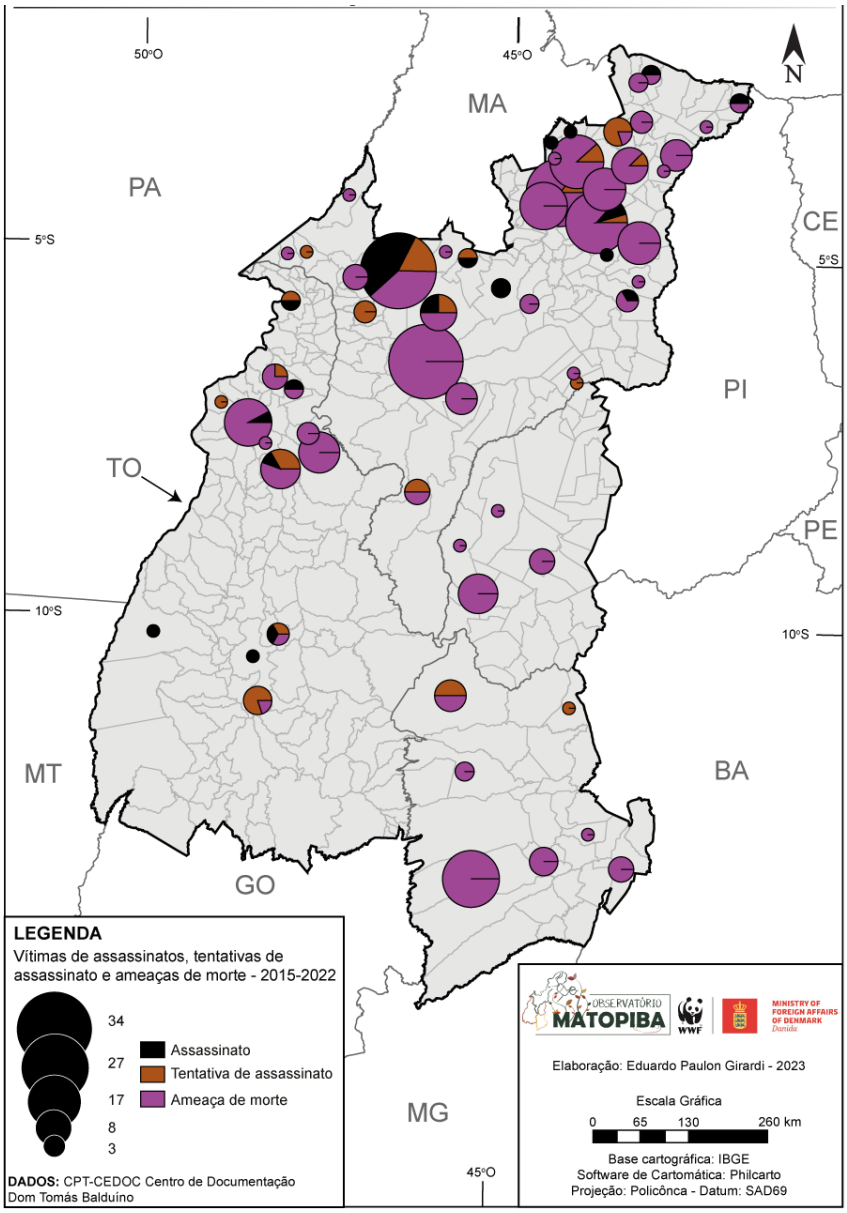
Source: Eduardo Paulon Girardi (2023).

The exploitation of labor analogous to slavery is one of the most striking expressions of the social contradictions associated with the expansion of agribusiness in agricultural frontier areas in Brazil, being particularly relevant to the understanding of the ongoing process in Matopiba. According to Article 149 of the Penal Code, this practice is characterized by the submission of workers to degrading conditions, exhausting working hours and restriction of freedom through forced indebtedness or retention of documents (Brasil, 2003), evidencing the persistence of coercive relations within a highly technical production model integrated into

global markets. Although the country has structured important institutional instruments of confrontation, such as the Special Mobile Inspection Group, created in 1995, and the Register of employers known as the "dirty list", in force since 2003, the effectiveness of these policies has been systematically weakened by vetoes to the disclosure of the register and by recurrent attempts to make the legal concept of slave labor more flexible. This institutional weakening produces an environment of low accountability in which labor overexploitation practices become functional to the accelerated expansion of the agricultural frontier, especially in contexts marked by land fragility, informality and asymmetries of power.

This scenario of impunity and labor coercion is articulated to a broader territorial dynamic of violence in Matopiba, revealing that labor exploitation is not an isolated phenomenon, but part of a territorial control system associated with the expansion of agrarian capital. In 2022, the region recorded 47 murders and 206 threats related to conflicts in the countryside (CPT, 2023) (Figure 9), indicating that lethal violence operates as a recurring instrument of discipline and elimination of resistance. It is in this context that the notion of necropolitics (Mbembe, 2016) becomes operative for analysis, not as an abstract label, but as an interpretative key that allows us to understand how certain populations, especially Indigenous people, quilombolas and landless workers are systematically exposed to social and physical death as a condition for the reproduction of the agribusiness frontier. Articulated with the logic of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2005), this combination of land conflicts, labor analogous to slavery and lethal violence points to the consolidation of a territorialized state of exception, in which the suspension of rights and the elimination of opponents cease to be deviations and begin to operate as normalized strategies for the expansion of capital.

Figure 9 – Matopiba -murders, assassination attempts and death threats – 2015-2022



Source: Eduardo Paulon Girardi (2023).

The analysis indicates that the apparent reduction in global deforestation rates in the Cerrado hides a critical spatial concentration in Matopiba, revealing intrinsic contradictions to the agroindustrial model. Soy, the main vector of territorial transformation, advances simultaneously on native ecosystems and anthropized areas, deepening socio-environmental conflicts and historical inequalities. This dynamic obeys the logic of mobile frontier, where the commodification of space (Harvey, 2005) prevails over sustainability. Persistent degradation—often dissociated from immediate production-suggests speculative practices and structural governance failures, even after the implementation of instruments such as the soy moratorium. Land conflicts, labor analogous to slavery and lethal violence reveal the operation of a

necropolitics (Mbembe, 2016) that defines who can live or die in these territories. Such results deconstruct linear progress narratives and demand approaches that articulate territorial justice and ecological balance, as advocated by Santos (1996). The Cerrado thus consolidates itself as a symbol of the insoluble tensions between growth and conservation in contemporary capitalism.

Final considerations

The spatially selective dimension of agribusiness in Matopiba reveals an agricultural frontier built under discourses of modernization and attraction of migrants, especially from the south of the country, through cheap land and favorable climatic conditions. This modernization operates through the intense application of the technical-scientific-informational environment (TCIM), providing the region with high technological density, inputs and information, such as soil correction and motomechanization. Embrapa plays a central role in this process, developing technologies that optimize production and incorporate new areas, transforming the Cerrado into a global breadbasket of commodities like soybeans, corn and cotton. This functionalization of space results in the formation of productive agribusiness regions (RPAs) and reconfigures the local urban network to exclusively meet the demands of the sector.

The expansion of agribusiness and large industrial projects in Brazil prioritizes selected regions, imposing a "development" that advances over traditional territories with structural violence. Supported by government policies—such as tax exemptions and subsidized rural credit-these ventures generate "sacrificial territories" for peasant, Indigenous and quilombola communities, while being promoted as inevitable progress. This inequality reflects colonial heritages, manifested in land concentration, racial exclusion and labor precariousness. Data from the Pastoral Land Commission (1985-2021) confirm that the northern region is the most violent, with squatters, landless and Indigenous people as the main victims. According to Porto-Gonçalves (2006) and Mbembe (2018), this productivist logic operates as necropolitics, managing those who deserve to live or die, and simultaneously produces ecological death (deforestation, pesticide contamination) and social death (work analogous to slavery, expulsions, hunger). The state, by making inspections more flexible and neglecting agrarian reform, actively supports this structure. Alternatives such as agroecology and land demarcation exist, but they require breaking with the extermination policy (Araújo; Araújo Sobrinho, 2022).

Based on the evidence analyzed, this study recommends the reorientation of the development of the productive forces of agribusiness in Matopiba through the urgent

implementation of a participatory ecological-economic zoning (EEZ), which overcomes technical-bureaucratic models by incorporating traditional knowledge of local communities and indigenous peoples in territorial decisions. This measure responds directly to the discovery that 57% of soybean expansion in the Cerrado between 2000 and 2020 advanced on native vegetation (Figure 5) and should prioritize the protection of remaining ecological corridors and water recharge areas, critically threatened by the advance of the border.

In the technological field, it is essential to promote the gradual conversion of already anthropized areas to Filed-Livestock-Forest Integration Systems (ILPF) and low-carbon practices, through the creation of specific credit lines and differentiated certification programs. Institutionally, it is proposed to: (1) restructure the state environmental agencies with adequate budget allocation, a need evidenced by the high proportion (89.4%) of deforestation in the Cerrado not immediately converted to soy (Figure 6), which suggests the action of land speculation facilitated by weak governance; (2) radically revise the criteria for granting rural credit, linking it to effective compliance with environmental and labor legislation, as a counterpoint to the financialization of land and the "landowner-farmer order" identified as an engine and expropriation; and (3) establish a conciliation chamber to mediate land conflicts with the direct participation of affected communities, an urgent measure in the face of the triage of land conflicts-slave labor-lethal violence mapped (Figures 8 and 9), which consolidates a "state of exception" in the region.

Future studies should adopt interdisciplinary approaches that integrate participatory methodologies-such as social cartography and ethnography—to amplify the voices of traditional communities impacted by agribusiness in Matopiba, thus complementing quantitative geoprocessing analyses. It would also be relevant to investigate global supply chains. commodities through tracking techniques (such as blockchain), allowing to link local deforestation practices to international markets. The incorporation of predictive models based on artificial intelligence could help anticipate scenarios of socio-environmental conflicts, while multiscale governance analyses (local, national, and global) would identify failures and opportunities in public policies. Furthermore, research on the financialization of land and its impacts on land speculation, articulating perspectives from political economy and political ecology, would offer fundamental insights for the construction of territorially fair and ecologically resilient development models.

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- **Data and material availability**: The data used in this study are publicly accessible and come from institutional databases and materials published by other authors. The corresponding references are duly indicated throughout the article.
- **Authors' contributions**: Daniel Féo Castro de Araújo: conception and design of the study; definition of the theoretical and methodological framework; • Data collection, processing, and analysis; creation of maps and tables; drafting of the original manuscript and final revision of the text. Fernando Luiz Araújo Sobrinho: scientific supervision of the postdoctoral research; contribution to the theoretical discussion and interpretation of the results; critical review of the manuscript, with conceptual and analytical suggestions.