

The territoriality of capital in the countryside: agribusiness and corporate use of territory in Ceará¹

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Abstract

With the expansion of the agribusiness in Ceará, we observed the installation of big agribusiness companies that has a large-scale production of several agricultural genres. This contributes to the territorialization of capital in the rural space, linked to the permanence of the latifundia and monoculture, favoring the intensification's territorial disputes and the corporate use of the territory. However, the aim of this article is to discuss the territorialization of agribusiness in Ceará's rural space, evidencing the corporate use of the territory by the largest companies in the sector, which are among the main accountable for redefining the territorial dynamics and enlargement the disarticulation of peasant agriculture; increasing the exploration of the workers and the nature; water and land concentration; injustice and socio-environmental vulnerability. We hope to contribute with the research of the Ceará's agrarian question in the contemporaneity, that also passes for the understanding of the use of territory by the hegemonic agents of the agribusiness.

Keywords: Agribusiness; hegemonic agents; corporate use of territory.

A territorialidade do capital no campo: agronegócio e uso corporativo do território no Ceará

Resumo

Com a expansão do modelo produtivo do agronegócio no Ceará, observa-se a instalação de uma série de grandes empresas agrícolas e agroindustriais voltadas para a produção em larga escala de inúmeros gêneros agropecuários. Isso contribui para a territorialização do capital no campo, ancorado na permanência do latifúndio e da monocultura, favorecendo o acirrar das disputas territoriais e do uso corporativo do território. Nesse sentido, busca-se, com este artigo, discutir a territorialização do agronegócio no espaço agrário cearense, procurando evidenciar o uso corporativo do território pelas maiores empresas do setor, que estão entre as principais responsáveis por redefinir a dinâmica territorial e ampliar a desarticulação da agricultura camponesa, a exploração do trabalhador e da natureza, a concentração hídrica e fundiária, a injustiça e vulnerabilidade socioambiental, entre outros. Com isso, espera-se contribuir com a leitura da questão agrária do Ceará na contemporaneidade, que também passa pelo entendimento do uso do território pelos agentes hegemônicos do agronegócio.

Palavras-chave: Agronegócio; agentes hegemônicos; uso corporativo do território.

La territorialidad del capital en el campo: agronegocio y uso corporativo del territorio en Ceará

Resumen

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Con la expansión del modelo productivo del agronegocio en Ceará, se nota la instalación de una serie de grandes empresas agrícolas y agroindustriales dirigidas a la producción de gran escala de innumerables géneros agropecuarios. Esto contribuye a la territorialización del capital en el campo, anclado en la permanencia del latifundio y del monocultivo, favoreciendo el agravamiento de las disputas territoriales y del uso corporativo del territorio. En este sentido, el presente artículo busca debatir sobre la territorialización del agronegocio en el espacio agrario cearense, evidenciando el uso corporativo del territorio por las mayores empresas del sector, siendo las principales responsables en redefinir la dinámica territorial y ampliar la desarticulación de la agricultura campesina, la explotación del trabajador y de la naturaleza, la concentración hídrica y agraria, la injusticia y vulnerabilidad socioambiental, entre otros. Por lo anterior, se espera contribuir con la lectura de la cuestión agraria de Ceará actual, que pasa por el entendimiento del uso del territorio por los agentes hegemónicos del agronegocio.

Palabras clave: Agronegocio; agentes hegemónicos; uso corporativo del territorio.

Introduction

A rapid expansion of the agribusiness productive model is currently observed in Brazil, representing the advent and consolidation of a new paradigm in the countryside, now conceived under the productive precepts of the big capital, which necessarily aims for profit regardless of the costs associated with the voracious exploitation of both nature and labor. As a result, there was an intense restructuring of both the Brazilian agrarian space and the traditional agricultural production systems, which had to adapt to the new demands imposed by the globalized market economy and the capitalist logic increasingly ubiquitous in the countryside, causing drastic changes in socio-spatial and economic organization hitherto prevailing, thus considerably reshaping, sometimes irreversibly, the uses of the territory.

Thus, in general, the territories allocated for the operation of big capital in the countryside, since the dissemination and territorialization of the agribusiness productive model, are now tightly controlled by hegemonic agents that are exogenous to the places of production, and are represented by large agricultural and agro-industrial companies that settle in some places only aiming to expand its production capacity and its income, hardly taking into consideration the impacts generated by their corporate use of the territory. Therefore, these corporations are in control of the rearrangement and dynamization of the uses of the territories where they are located, which are increasingly susceptible to the dictates of globalized agribusiness and the impositions of large corporations that seize control of the sector.

The state of Ceará, in particular, also undergoes those changes imposed by the advent of agribusiness, although on a scale that differs from that observed in the rest of the country and presenting some peculiarities inherent to its geo-environmental context and its own process of socio-spatial formation, associated with a favorable political and economic environment. In Ceará lands, a greater dynamism in the development of a properly large-scale commercial agriculture is observed as of the 1990s, especially in large irrigated areas, whether public or private. Among the main crops that adhered to the capitalist logic and started to be

produced under the agribusiness standards, the increase and dynamization of fruit growing activities stand out (focusing on production of melon, banana, cashew/nuts, coconut, watermelon and papaya, among others), as well as bovine livestock (especially dairy), industrial poultry (fowls and eggs), shrimp farming and flowers (especially roses).

Generally, these are the main branches of agribusiness in Ceará², which account for significantly changing the way the territory had been historically occupied and used. Among the most significant agents operating in the diffusion of agribusiness in Ceará, besides the decisive and active participation of the State, large agricultural and agro-industrial companies stand out, whose share capital origin is either local, national or international and which foment the territorialization of capitalist farming in the countryside by introducing a business logic aimed for optimizing profits through maximum exploitation of available resources. Thus, a new and intense use of the territory by these agribusiness companies is witnessed, which is based on strategies designed solely to expand their power of coercion and control of this land.

This article³ seeks to discuss the territorialization of agribusiness in the agrarian space of Ceará, seeking to display the corporate use of the territory by the main companies in the sector located in the state, which greatly account for redefining the territorial dynamics and for deepening the disintegration of peasant agriculture, the exploitation of workers and nature, the concentration of water and land ownership, and socio-environmental injustice and vulnerability. Initially, we present a historical overview of Ceará's agriculture and then describe the context in which the expansion of agribusiness takes place. Next, we present some of the main agribusiness corporations located in Ceará, briefly discussing the corporate use of the territory by these companies. This work is intended to contribute to the interpretation of the current agrarian question in Ceará, which also involves the understanding of the use of the territory by the hegemonic agents of agribusiness.

Agriculture in Ceará: ruptures and continuities

Agriculture has historically played a very important role in the territorial occupation and socio-spatial formation of the state of Ceará, as indicated by Girão (1985) and Lima (2002). Since the beginning of the colonial period through the present times, this activity has been boosting the economy of the state by generating foreign currency and taxes, as well as promoting the reorganization of rural and urban spaces, contributing to the integration of

² Among the works focused on the analysis of one or more of these main branches of Ceará agribusiness, from the perspective of Geography, it is worth highlighting: Araújo (2006), Freitas (2010), Vasconcelos (2010), Bezerra (2012), Bomtempo (2014), Pinheiro (2014), Cavalcante (2015, 2016ab), Costa (2016), Sousa (2017) and Rodrigues (2018). Reading these works helped us deepen the discussion presented here.

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certain parts of the territory into the international division of labor, and especially ensuring the survival of thousands of families for whom the agriculture is the only source of income and food supply.

The territorial occupation of Ceará was, at first, strongly associated with the expansion of cattle ranching in the valleys of some of its main rivers, such as Jaguaribe and Acaraú, which contributed to the repopulation of Ceará's countryside. For Silva (1994, p. 81), Ceará, once recolonized by the migrant streams from the sugarcane production regions of Bahia and Pernambuco, found in cattle raising its main economic activity, associated with small subsistence crops within the farms. This extensive cattle ranching practiced in Ceará was closely linked to sugarcane cultivation, providing various inputs for the sugarcane region in the Northeastern Forest Zone.

Thus, as Girão (1985) points out, from the eighteenth to early twentieth centuries, livestock represented the most important economic activity of Ceará, also associated with small crops of beans, corn and cassava, which supplied the needs of the population involved in the animal raising activity. However, at the end of the eighteenth century, cotton production was introduced with great dynamism in Ceará, adding to the existing ones. Also according to Girão (1985), large-scale cotton crops started to be cultivated in Ceará lands, where this product was disseminated through extensive areas. Such production was mostly aimed for meeting the needs of the foreign market controlled by the textile industries, and driven by the first Industrial Revolution, in England.

The association of extensive cattle raising with cotton large scale crops, which became known as the "cattle-cotton dyad", became the main economic activity of Ceará until the mid-twentieth century, always associated with subsistence crops, especially beans, corn and cassava, and with other less representative crops, such as sugarcane and coffee. In addition to these crops, it is also worth mentioning the extracting and gathering activities related to the exploitation of fields occupied by carnauba, as well as others occupied by coconut and cashew trees. Nevertheless, as Silva (1994) asserts, the cattle-cotton dyad expressed, for a long time, the economy of Ceará, directly impacting on the development of cities and other economic sectors, such as industrial and commercial sectors. However, such hegemony of the dyad cattle-cotton as the main element of the economy and the organization of Ceará's agrarian space lasted until the mid-twentieth century, declining after successive crises.

Thus, in general, until the mid-1980s, Ceará's agricultural economy was based on the sectors of extensive livestock (cattle, sheep and goats), subsistence/own consumption agriculture (beans, corn and cassava) and extractivism (cashews, carnauba wax, and dried coconut), and a sparse production of cotton, sugarcane, rice, coffee, and fruits in some isolated parts of the state. According to Elias (2005), most of this agricultural production was done

extensively with the use of traditional techniques characterized by low productivity, without access to major technical-scientific and agronomic innovations that could guarantee the prolonged continuity of the activity, thus preventing its horizontal growth through the occupation of new spaces. In other words, until the early 1980s, it was not known how to achieve globalized agribusiness in Ceará, except for the cultivation of cashews, already carried out by large companies.

However, as Elias (2005) also notes, Ceará has not escaped the adoption of several strategies to respond to the challenges posed by the profitability of capital in this new cycle of capitalist accumulation, marked by economic globalization. Thus, the economic and territorial restructuring of Ceará is visible in recent decades, especially in the “increase in public policies aimed at making the state viable to globalized production and consumption, opening up to exogenous influences and to new contemporary signs” (ELIAS, 2005, p. 438). Also according to the author, the intensification of capitalism in the countryside of Ceará is an ongoing process, especially since the 1990s, characterized by the modernization of agricultural production, the diffusion of the agribusiness productive model and the territorialization of large companies.

A major driver of Ceará's agriculture integration into the context of agricultural productive restructuring observed throughout the country has been the State Government, always associated with private interests. The milestone in this process was the so-called “Government of Change”, linked to a purely neoliberal and developmental political project launched by Tasso Jereissati in his first term as governor of Ceará⁴, began in 1987, which was focused on three lines considered indispensable for the economic development of the state: promotion and encouragement of mass tourism, attraction and interiorization of industries and installation of infrastructure to support agribusiness, as shown by Monte (2008) and by Elias and Pequeno (2013). This led to a significant economic and territorial restructuring of Ceará, which, on the other hand, has deepened the state's blatant socio-spatial inequalities by increasing the concentration of income, land and capital.

Thus, the fulfillment and development of agribusiness in Ceará was clearly a result of the direct action of the State Government, added to the efforts of the Federal Government, by means of implementation of specific public policies for the sector, construction of hydraulic and transport infrastructures, financing and tax incentives, provision of research, extension services and professional qualification, creation of several governmental agencies and departments, attraction and/or set up of large companies in the countryside, among others. According to Elias (2005), the State Government functioned as the main driving force for agribusiness in Ceará, completely reorganizing the agricultural sector and making room for the

⁴ Tasso Jereissati was governor of Ceará for three terms, from 1987 to 1991 and from 1995 to 2002.

development of a purely commercial agricultural activity, thus becoming, in the author's view, a major agent of expansion of the agrarian space in Ceará.

As a result, Ceará takes on a new role in the social and territorial division of labor in Brazil, based on the implementation and diffusion of the agribusiness productive model, including the expansion of monocultures and large estates, introduction of modern production techniques, rural wage labor and the interconnection of agricultural capital with agroindustrial capital, resulting in the development of a markedly capitalist agriculture, aimed at the accumulation of capital. Thus, the agricultural profile of Ceará and the social relations of production previously predominant in the rural areas change considerably. Therefore, a new agricultural context emerges in Ceará with the spread of agribusiness, making room for the territorialization of big capital in the countryside and for the expansion of capitalist agriculture, thus increasing the corporate use of the territory by the main companies in the sector regardless of the interests of the rural population that remained marginalized from the so-called "modernization".

However, it is important to underline that Ceará agriculture is still strongly based on the cassava-bean-corn triad, demonstrating the strength of peasant production in the state, as noted by Oliveira and Pereira (2011), which resists despite the expansion of agribusiness and the power of large agricultural and agro-industrial companies. One may infer, therefore, that agribusiness does not proceed in a hegemonic and homogeneous manner, failing to encompass all fractions of the territory or to acquire full control of social relations of production in the countryside, which resist in a process of peasant recreation. In addition, by analyzing the geography of agribusiness in Ceará, it becomes clear that the *sertão cearense* (Ceará's outback) is still a reserve space for the expansion of agricultural capital, since the sector's greatest dynamism is concentrated in the valleys of the main rivers, wetlands and coast, which are the regions most targeted for intensive exploitation by large companies.

Agribusiness expansion and new uses of the territory in Ceará

As already mentioned, agribusiness has experienced substantial expansion in Ceará, notably in the fruit sector, especially, irrigated orchards. For Cavalcanti (1997) this sector is one of the most dynamic and competitive segments of national agriculture, since, as noted by Ramos (2006), fruits show a great potential in the agribusiness scenario, with expanding trades in the world market, contributing to change the Brazilian trade balance. Ceará is currently one of the main producers and exporters of tropical fruits in the country, whether in the forms of fresh and dried fruits, or processed (juices and pulps). It is a major producer of cashews, melons, passion fruit, coconut, banana, papaya, watermelon and acerola cherry, holding national prominence in the cultivation of these fruits, according to data from IBGE/PAM (2016).

This fruit production is aimed for local and regional markets, the national market, especially the Southeast region (mostly São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro), and the international market, especially European countries as Netherlands, England, Spain, Italy, Poland, Ireland, Germany, Portugal and France, but also exporting to the United States, the Middle East, Latin America and Asia.

This boost in fruit production in Ceará is often motivated by the demand from the international market. Large agricultural, agro-industrial and retail companies, both national and transnational, are the main responsible for regulating and impelling this activity, integrating Ceará into the network of globalized circuits of production and consumption of agricultural products, especially tropical fruits. This can be illustrated by MDIC/SECEX⁵ data for 2016: Ceará was the largest national exporter in value of fresh, dried and processed fruits, holding a prominent position in exports of cashew nut, melon, coconut water, watermelon, banana, papaya and concentrated juices, thus ensuring a central place in the Brazilian agricultural context, especially regarding the trade balance of fruits.

Large-scale fruit production in Ceará⁶ is carried out in different regions, which specialize in the cultivation of certain fruits according to local geo-environmental specificities and/or through introduction of technologies aimed at overcoming them. Agribusiness cashew cultivation by large companies is concentrated in the East Coast and the Metropolitan Region of Fortaleza, and is mainly intended to supply the foreign market, while coconut cultivation is concentrated in the West Coast and aimed at processing the fruit for export of coconut water. The cultivations of acerola cherry and passion fruit are carried out by large companies mainly in the Ibiapaba Plateau, characterized by its milder climate. In turn, banana, melon, watermelon and papaya crops are concentrated in public and private irrigated areas installed in the valleys of the main rivers of the state, such as Jaguaribe and Acaraú, occupying large plots of land. There is also important production, especially of bananas, in the humid mountains and in Cariri.

In addition to fruit growing, industrial poultry and shrimp farming are also noteworthy, as well as cattle raising, which has recently shown signs of a production restructuring, with a focus on milk and dairy products. Industrial poultry, whose activities are mainly concentrated in the Metropolitan Region of Fortaleza, is increasing in Ceará under the strong mediation of large companies focused on indoor bred chicken for meat and egg production. As for shrimp farming, it has undergone a substantial expansion in Ceará in the last two decades and is mostly concentrated in the Jaguaribe and Acaraú riverbeds, though not only. Shrimp production is aimed at supplying the growing national market. Together these three sectors –

⁵ Ministério da Indústria, Comércio Exterior e Serviços – Secretaria de Comércio Exterior (Ministry of Industry, Foreign Trade and Services - Foreign Trade Department).

⁶ It is worth noting that fruit production in Ceará is not restricted to agribusiness, since most of the cashew, coconut, banana, papaya, acerola and passion fruit productions, for example, come from peasant agriculture.

poultry farming, shrimp farming and cattle raising – favor the spread of agribusiness in Ceará beyond the agricultural activities focused on fruit production, standing out for their intense interaction with the agro-industrial sector, responsible for the processing of poultry, shrimp and milk, and considerably expanding the control of capital under the countryside.

Another highlight in Ceará's agribusiness is the floriculture sector focused on the production of roses and other tropical flowers aimed for export and carried out by large national and international companies located in the Ibiapaba Plateau region, which places Ceará as one of the largest flowers producers and exporters in the country. In addition, sugarcane agribusiness focused on the production of spirits is quite dynamic in Ceará, being concentrated in the Metropolitan Region of Fortaleza and the Maciço de Baturité, where the main companies in the sector cultivate sugarcane and produce *cachaça*, some of which is exported. There is also cultivation of sugarcane aimed at the production of *rapadura*, very strong in the regions of Cariri and Ibiapaba. The large-scale production sectors of honey, tilapia (captive), shellfish (especially lobster), sheeps and goats, among others, also play an important role in the state's agribusiness scenario, attracting the interests of large companies that have invested in these branches in recent years.

In view of the foregoing, what is observed in Ceará is a rapidly expanding agribusiness that did not keep apart from the process of territorialization of big capital in the countryside observed in all Brazilian regions. Besides modifying Ceará's agricultural production profile and the previously predominant social production relations, agribusiness is also contributing to a major change in the use of the territory, now at service of the reproduction of capital that applies various strategies to increase its power of territorial domination (RAFFESTIN, 1993). This is carried out through the operation of large agricultural and agro-industrial companies, which expend efforts to promote the development and diffusion of agribusiness in Ceará and to definitely demarcate the capitalist rationality in the countryside, what presupposes the accumulation of capital.

In general, the fulfillment of this agribusiness in Ceará means, above all, the territorialization of such capitalist rationality in the countryside, making room for the development of market agriculture and causing impacts that selectively reach spaces and producers with the sole objectives of expanding Ceará's agricultural potential and spreading the business production logic across all sectors, making them able to meet the demands of a heated consumer market, whether internal or external. Hence, *what, when, how, and where* to produce are increasingly imposed on producers by the hegemonic agents who hold capital, also transforming the rural environment into the “space of capitalist rationality” (SANTOS, 1996, 2009). In this regard, Martins (1995, p. 160) highlights that the tendency of capital is precisely “[...] to dominate everything, to subordinate all production sectors and branches; and, gradually, it does so”.

The large companies, which hold hegemonic control, each in its priority branch of activity, are the main responsible for boosting productivity indexes of Ceará agriculture, expanding the productive area, connecting and merging agricultural, industrial and financial capital, boosting the state's trade balance, employing a large number of workers in the countryside and in the city, daily moving huge amounts of goods, capital and information etc. On the other hand, they generate a heavy environmental, social and territorial burden, as a result of their operation, which further aggravate the picture of deep inequalities that historically characterize the agrarian space of Ceará. Thus, according to Elias (2005, p. 451), beginning with the installation and expansion of these large companies, the territorial and social division of labor is intensified, leading to the change of functions in the agricultural space and the dissemination of productive specializations, thus indicating a significant selectivity in the organization of production and space.

Through the interference of these corporations, the rural areas of Ceará are now heavily controlled by hegemonic agents that determine the paths of Ceará territory, with the purpose of further expanding the reproduction of capital. In addition, through the integration of local production into the globalized circuits of production and consumption, the local/global nexus also change and Ceará emerges as a fraction of the world space, increasingly open to exogenous influences and new signs of the present (ELIAS, 2005). Its economic dynamism is spurred by the strong endorsement of the State and by the power of large business groups that channel investments and state policies in favor of their particular objectives and to the detriment of the needs of the rural people.

Among the main agribusiness companies that operate hegemonically in Ceará, which control more than one stage of the productive space circuit and have a size far above the state average, we highlight: Agrícola Famosa, Itaueira, Del Monte Fresh Fruit, Frutacor, Meripobo, Banesa/Tropical Nordeste, JS Tropical/PTLA, WG Fruticultura, Melão Doçura, Mata Fresca, Sítio Barreiras, Brazil Melon, Terra Santa, Agrocoura, UGBP, Fruticultura Frota and Frutobras (melon, banana, watermelon, papaya and mango); Amway Nutrilite (acerola cherry); Cione, Iracema, Resibras, Cascaju, Usibrás and Amêndoas do Brasil (cashews); Ducoco, Paragro, Adel Coco, Unique and Cohibra (coconut and derivatives); Betânia, Maranguape and Jaguaribe (milk and dairy products); Cialne, Regina, Avine, Emape and Tijuca (chickens and eggs); Compescal/CELM, Artemisa/Aquacrusta, Cina, Seafarm and Bomar (shrimp and fish); Jandaia/Sucos do Brasil and Maguary/Ebba (fruit juices); Sucus Brasil, Frutã, Pomar da Fruta and Frute (fruit pulp); Cearosa, Reijers, Flora Fogaça, Swart and CBC (flowers); Ypióca, Sapupara and Colonial (*cachaça*); Syngenta, Faedo and Ibernon (seeds); Hope, Esperança, Nectar Floral and Floema (honey).

These companies, among others, command the dissemination of agribusiness in Ceará. Together they control hundreds of hectares in the most diverse regions of the state,

where their agricultural production units are concentrated and/or their suppliers are located. Many of them also carry out the industrial processing of their products, thus controlling an important part of the agricultural productive space circuit in Ceará. The analysis of the territorial strategies of these companies helps us reveal the intense operation of big capital in the countryside through dissemination of the agribusiness productive model based on large scale monocultures and on the maintenance and expansion of the large estates, the use of modern inputs and agricultural implements and the close relationship with other productive sectors. Strategies that are responsible for reshaping the uses of the territory and causing impacts that demonstrate how damaging and inconsequential can be the territorialization of these large corporations.

The hegemonic agribusiness companies and the territoriality of capital

Agribusiness companies located in Ceará do not have the same proportions as large corporations operating in Brazil, with few exceptions, and are at disadvantage regarding invested capital, production and occupied hectares, for example. This, however, does not prevent the uses of territories under their domain to bring impacts to the peasant communities and to the environment as a whole. Therefore, we can say that the hegemonic agents of agribusiness do not need necessarily to be large global food corporations, such as those studied by Ploeg (2008) and McMichael (2005) and can assume their own nuances depending on their scale of production and operation. The companies installed in Ceará have, therefore, their own particularities, which give them an economic and political power that ensures their hegemonic operation in the territory.

Among the above-mentioned agribusiness companies installed in Ceará, some are worth highlighting for the impacts of their corporate use of the territory. The identification of these main companies was based on information about different variables, such as: branch of activity, period of activity, hectares occupied, production volumes, number of employees, location of production units, exports, supplier network, destinations of the company production etc. This survey points to the hegemony of the following companies: Agrícola Famosa, Ducoco, Del Monte, Cialne, Cione, Compescal, Betânia, Reijers, Ypióca and Amway Nutrilite, whose characteristics are presented further on⁷. From the analysis of their practices, it is possible to raise a debate, however brief, about the corporate use of the territory, taking as an example these ten main companies that, although few, have already left their marks by causing

⁷ All information presented here stem from a data compilation based on bibliographic and documentary surveys, searches on the websites of companies, journals and newspapers, as well as on the systematization of primary data obtained during field work by the author in some of these companies and/or in the localities where they are installed.

impacts of different intensities on the places where their productive units are located, as discussed in the following topics.

- **Agrícola Famosa:** a Ceará-based company, with national share capital, which is in operation since 1995. It operates in the production and marketing of tropical fruits, especially melon and watermelon. It also produces, to a lesser extent, papaya, bananas and cocoa. It has farms and production units in Ceará (municipalities of Icapuí, Aracati, Limoeiro do Norte, Russas, Quixeré, Tabuleiro do Norte and Alto Santo), Rio Grande do Norte, Piauí, Pernambuco and Alagoas. Altogether, its own farms and leased lands occupy about 26 thousand hectares. It is reportedly the largest world producer of melon and is mainly focused on the foreign market.

- **Ducoco:** A Ceará-based company with local share capital, in operation since 1982. It produces green coconut and dried coconut, besides processing these fruits. In Ceará it operates with production units (farms and factories) in the municipalities of Itapipoca, Amontada, Acaraú, Itarema and Camocim, whose farms occupy a total area of 10,000 hectares. It has also units located in São Paulo and Espírito Santo. It is the second largest company in the coconut industry in Brazil, and stands out in the production of grated coconut, coconut milk and coconut water. It is one of the leading exporters of coconut water in the country. Part of the share capital of the company was recently acquired by a Brazilian investment fund (BRZ Investimentos).

- **Del Monte:** A US-based multinational company with American share capital, in operation since 1889. It is one of the world's largest producers and traders of fruits, with farms located in several countries of Central and South America, where their fruits are grown. It arrived in Brazil in the 1990s, in Rio Grande do Norte, and set up a subsidiary in Ceará in the mid-2000s. It has farms in municipalities of Rio Grande do Norte and Ceará (in Quixeré and Limoeiro do Norte). It currently grows only bananas and green coconut but has already had a large production of pineapple and melon, occupying an area of approximately 6,000 hectares considering only its farms installed in Ceará. Its whole production is intended for export, notably to the United States and Europe.

- **Cialne:** A Ceará-based company, with local share capital, established in 1966. It operates in the poultry and cattle industry, specializing in the production of eggs, live and slaughtered chicks and chickens, as well as producing and marketing cow's milk and dairy products. It has more than 50 production units (farms and factories) located in Ceará, Piauí, Maranhão and Paraíba. In Ceará, it has units in municipalities such as Fortaleza, Aquiraz, Guaiuba, Umirim, São Gonçalo do Amarante, Paracuru, Paraipaba, Russas, Ubajara, Cascavel, Caucaia,

Maranguape, Maracanaú and Irauçuba, totaling an area of 12,000 hectares. It is one of the main eggs and chicken producers in the Northeast. In addition to slaughterhouses, it also has its own fodder factories and distribution centers.

- **Cione:** A Ceará-based company, with local share capital, established in 1962. It operates in cashew production and processing and marketing of cashew nuts and LCC (nuts oil). It was one of the pioneers in Brazil to cultivate cashew and process the nut. It has farms and factories in Piauí and Ceará, especially those located in Fortaleza, Caucaia, Pacajus, Chorozinho, Cascavel, Ocara, Barreira and Beberibe. It occupies a total area of approximately 70 thousand hectares. Most of its nut production is focused on the international market, and the company is the largest cashew nut exporter in the country.

- **Compescal:** A Ceará-based company, with local share capital, established in 1982. It operates in the production and processing of shrimp. It was one of the pioneers in Brazil to invest in shrimp farming. It also goes by the name of CELM and resells its products under the brand name Maris. It has its own laboratory, fattening farms and processing plant located in Acarati and Beberibe, which occupy around 2,600 hectares in total, as well as farms located in Rio Grande do Norte. It has the capacity to produce and process 25 tons of shrimp per day. It was one of the country's leading shrimp exporters, but currently its production is entirely aimed for the domestic market. It also operates in fishery and lobster processing.

- **Betânia:** A Ceará-based company, with local share capital, established in 1971. It operates in the cattle raising for milk production. It processes and sell milk and dairy products such as butter, yogurt, cheese, curd, dulce de leche, cream and condensed milk. It operates mainly in the Northeastern milk and derivatives market. It includes industrial units installed in Ceará, Pernambuco, Paraíba and Sergipe, as well as farms located in Morada Nova, Tabuleiro do Norte, Russas and Limoeiro do Norte, in Ceará, totaling around 5,000 hectares in total. It was acquired by the multinational Parmalat, but the share control later returned to its founding family, being purchased again by a fund of US investors (Arlon Latin America Partners).

- **Reijers:** A São Paulo-based company, with national share capital, established in 1972. It operates in the production and exportation of mainly red roses. It settled in Ceará in 2001, with production units in the Ibiapaba region, in the municipalities of São Benedito and Ubajara. Its two farms in Ceará occupy a total area of about 200 hectares. In addition to these, it owns nine other farms installed in Minas Gerais and São Paulo. It is the largest company in the country focused on the production of roses and is also the largest company operating in the flower sector in Ceará.

- **Ypióca:** A Ceará-based company, initially of local share capital, established since 1846. It operates in the production of sugarcane and the manufacture of *cachaça*, being the country's oldest brand of *cachaça*. It also owns Naturágua, which bottles and sells mineral water, and Agropaulo, which is dedicated to the production of ethanol. In 2012, Ypióca was acquired by the British group Diageo, the world's largest manufacturer of spirits and owner of brands such as Smirnoff and Johnnie Walker. The company has production units installed in Fortaleza, Maracanaú, Maranguape, Pindoretama, Paraipaba, Itaitinga, Aquiraz, Redenção, Acarape, Aracoiaba, São Gonçalo do Amarante, Caridade and Jaguaruana, in Ceará, as well as in municipalities of Rio Grande do Norte and Tocantins. Its farms in Ceará occupy an area of at least 20 thousand hectares.

- **Amway Nutrilite:** A multinational US-based company operating since 1934. It is the leading brand in the sale of vitamins and dietary supplements in the world. Specializing in the sale of supplements, beverages and cleaning and toiletries, among others. It has farms installed in the United States, Puerto Rico, Mexico and Brazil. In Brazilian lands, it chose to settle in Ceará in 2001, in the municipality of Ubajara, where it produces acerola cherry, occupying a total area of 2,350 hectares. Its whole production in Ceará territory is aimed for the extraction of vitamin C, directed entirely to the foreign market.

Regarding the location of these companies, there is a spatial concentration of their productive units – both agricultural and industrial – in some specific regions of the state, such as the Jaguaribe valley, East Coast, Metropolitan Region, West Coast and Ibiapaba. These are the regions that concentrate agribusiness capital investments in Ceará and are attractive for the territorialization of large companies in the sector, especially the Jaguaribe Valley, where there are units of 6 of the 10 companies presented here: Agrícola Famosa, Del Monte, Cialne, Compescal, Betânia and Ypióca. As shown in the map presented next (Figure 1), which shows the spatial distribution of some of the main agribusiness companies operating in Ceará, there is a large capacity for dispersion and territorial branching of these corporations, which settle in those places with greater potential to exploit available resources and, therefore, to make a profit. The 10 featured companies are installed in 41 municipalities, considering only their agricultural and industrial production units installed in Ceará, with a higher concentration in the municipalities of Limoeiro do Norte, Russas, Ubajara and Fortaleza, each of them having three of these enterprises installed in its territory.

These main companies located in Ceará, among others that could have been mentioned, are clearly hegemonic agribusiness agents. These “hegemonic companies” (SANTOS, 2003) have control over the productive space circuits, occupying large areas and having countless productive units and daily mobilizing a huge amount of capital, raw materials

and workers. Such agents have a greater capacity for “territorial alienation” (SANTOS; SILVEIRA, 2003) and subjugate entire territories according to their needs, provided with the inevitable support of the state. These agents are the main responsible for making a corporate use of the territory, whose interests conflict with the needs of the so-called “non-hegemonic or hegemonized agents” (SANTOS, 1996), represented by the workers and by all those who live in communities that are in the wake of the rationality and destructiveness of capital.

The issue of (corporate) use of territory

Numerous studies conducted throughout the country make it clear that the dissemination of agribusiness promotes a reconfiguration of the forms of use and appropriation of territories and of the organization of social relations of production, which change as a result of the operations of large companies. These can bring about consequences that go beyond the productive process, even invading interpersonal relationships and territorial configuration, as stated by Santos (2003). According to Purseigle and Chouquer (2013), agricultural companies (but not only these) cause vast socio-spatial recompositions where they settle, being able to draw new – and problematic – geographies in the field. Undoubtedly, such socio-spatial recomposition caused by these companies is expressed on the territory, where we observe a series of impacts arising from the hegemonic operation of these agents.

Hence, we must discuss the use of territory by agribusiness companies, so that to understand their impacts, since, as Gras and Hernandez (2013, p. 59) suggest, it is necessary to know and analyze the “territorial translations of agribusiness” in order to facilitate the understanding of the contemporary rural world and to devise strategies to confront this devastating productive model comprised by agribusiness. In the same vein, Santos and Silveira (2003, p. 292) and Silveira (2007, p. 20) agree that a geographic analysis focused on the “territorial logics of companies” is essential for identifying how they conceive and use the territory. In this sense, authors such as Dicken and Malmberg (2001), Maskell (2001), Taylor and Asheim (2001), Zimmermann (2005) and Bailoni *et al.* (2010) demonstrate how complex and difficult to be fully grasped are the relationships established between companies and territories.

It is well known that the operation of these companies greatly contributes to a series of territorial and socio-spatial impacts on the regions where agribusiness is spread, a foreseeable consequence, especially since the entry into “the world of competitiveness leads to the deepening of new technical relationships and new capitalist relations” (SANTOS, 2009, p. 304). By means of the establishment and operation of these hegemonic companies in the territory, a whole new territorial configuration is forged, now at the service of agribusiness’ capital reproduction. By means of the effective appropriation of the territory by these agents,

“everything that existed prior to the establishment of hegemonic companies is invited to adapt to their ways of being and operating, even if it causes great distortions in the pre-existing environment, including the rupture of social solidarity” (SANTOS, 2003, p. 85). Therefore, according to Santos and Silveira (2003, p. 293), “the result, as regards the territory, is again the exercise of partial control over certain points by logics that are concerned only with particular aspects”.

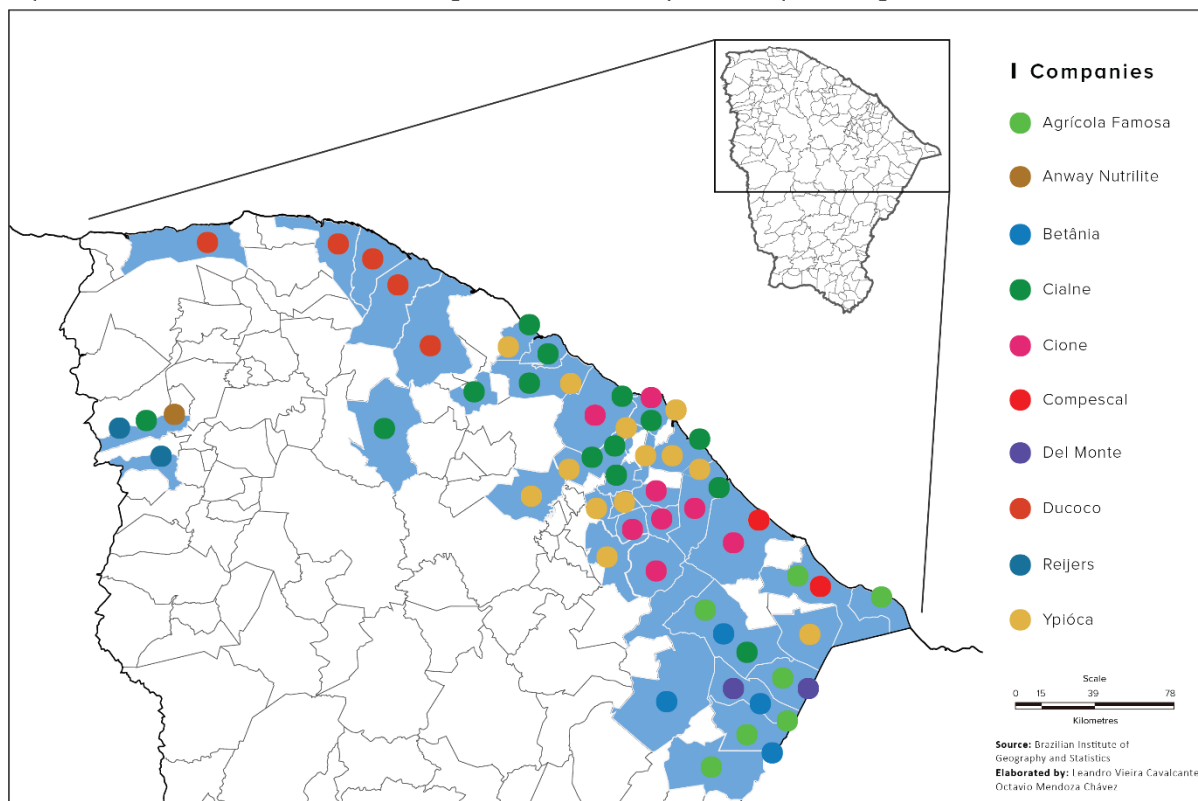
In such diffusion of agribusiness, we can observe a control over the territory by the capital, which becomes territorial and dictates its set of rules and impositions. As already highlighted, among the main agents that contribute to the territorialization of capital in the countryside are the agricultural and agro-industrial companies, based on their own territorial logics, as stated by Santos and Silveira (2003). Thus, these companies should be understood as some of the main signs of the influence of big capital on agricultural production, since the territory where they settle starts to be selectively and corporately organized and used according to their own interests and, as Santos (1996, p. 128) asserts, “each firm uses its territory according to its own power”. This is much more emblematic than it seems, since “the territory of large corporations is the world” (SILVEIRA, 2007, p. 17), it is not restricted to a local or regional scale of operation, but encompasses the whole planet and produces a surplus value that is now universal, as discussed by Santos (2003).

Therefore, it is noted that agribusiness has greatly favored the territorialization of capital in the countryside through direct mediation by agricultural and agro-industrial companies that behave hegemonically in this sector and that use the territory exclusively according to their interests, in an essentially corporate manner. Thus, by getting territorialized in the countryside, this capital starts to appropriate and control certain portions of space, as Raffestin (1993) notes, using them according to their needs, so as to end in direct confrontation with local populations, and in almost unrestricted control of the various stages that make up the productive space circuit, leading to a “corporate use of the territory”, as evoked by Santos and Silveira (2003) and Silveira (2007, 2008, 2011).

According to Santos and Silveira (2003, p. 291), in view of this context, it would not be an overstatement to say that “we are facing a real command of economic and social life and of the territorial dynamics by a limited number of companies. Thus, the territory can be qualified as a corporate territory”. Moreover, it can be said that the “power of these corporations is directly related to their ability to dominate parts of the space and thus impose their logic of production” (GOLDFARB, 2015, p. 27), giving rise to a corporate territory at the service of agribusiness regulated by large companies. A territory that is deemed by these corporations as merely a resource, so they are not concerned with measuring the intensity of the impacts produced through its corporate use that completely disregards the environmental costs and the value of lives that are daily ruined for the sake of the interests of the capital.

Figure 1: Spatial distribution of the main agribusiness companies operating in the state of Ceará

Spatial distribution of the main agribusiness companies operating in the state of Ceará



The use of territory by hegemonic agribusiness companies

Finding out the ways in which the aforesaid hegemonic agribusiness companies operating in Ceará use the territory is not an easy task, since there are many variables and processes that can effectively indicate and prove this corporate use by such agents. This is due to the nuances of the power of big capital, which leave marks in the countryside that go beyond its material presence in the space and are expressed even in the symbolic territoriality that capital ideologically imposes on subjects and territories. Whether concretely or symbolically, the territory starts to be regulated and used according to the particular interests of such companies, through practices solely designed for this purpose, according to Raffestin (1993).

Among the practices that reveal a corporate use of the territory – and several others could be mentioned – we highlight: territorialization of capital; state co-optation; reconfiguration of productive dynamics and of land use and occupation; monopolization of agricultural and agro-industrial productions; oligopolization of the agrarian space, expansion of large estates and land grabbing in public areas; privatization and control of access to water; aggravation of land and socio-environmental conflicts; increasing environmental, social and territorial

vulnerability. Each of these practices illustrates processes that may indicate a corporate use of the territory, by analyzing the impacts produced by agribusiness companies. In order to elucidate this scenario, following we provide some brief examples taken as empirical evidence of corporate use of the territory by the ten main hegemonic agribusiness companies in Ceará, which we selected for analysis.

Territorialization of capital occurs insofar as companies take possession of the territory, based, initially, on the control of the land. This process of territorialization by companies can be one of the most damaging impacts on territories, as they often settle in places occupied by peasant communities, giving rise to dramatic expropriations that definitely alter the lives of the subjects. This is what happened with the installation of Del Monte in Limoeiro do Norte, and of Ducoco in Itarema, for example, when entire communities disappeared following the invasion of their territories by agribusiness firms. In Del Monte's case, a community called KM 69 was progressively replaced by pineapple plantations because of the exorbitant use of sulfur, which was disposed of near the peasants' crops and homes. In the case of Ducoco, a significant part of the Tremembé de Almofala indigenous community was wiped out to make room for coconut monoculture.

In turn, associated with this territorialization of capital, state co-optation happens when companies use their capital and political influence to obtain certain benefits, such as: access to financial resources and tax incentives, ease in obtaining environmental licenses, construction and reform of roads and other ways for production outlets, price regulation guarantees, release of licenses for water abstraction, etc. This is the case of all ten companies mentioned above, which work closely with the State to make their projects of corporate use of the territory viable. And this becomes much clearer when the governor himself personally participates in the attraction and inauguration of these companies, as Tasso Jereissati did with Del Monte, Amway Nutrilite and Reijers, a practice repeated by all his successors who routinely visit the mentioned companies.

In the short term, following these companies setting up in the territory, it is possible to notice a reconfiguration of the local productive dynamics and changes in the forms of land use and occupation, since a new production logic is assigned to that space and new technical instruments are applied aimed at the rationalization of production process. This occurs also because, as they set up in the territory the companies implement monoculture to the detriment of the old crops grown there, thus changing the productive configuration of the places where they operate and contributing to broaden the specialization focused on more profitable crops. This dynamic leads other producers located around the companies to also invest in monoculture, as it is possible to observe in the areas of operation of Ducoco, Amway Nutrilite, Compescal, Agrícola Famosa, Cione and Del Monte, even because these producers are, in many cases, co-opted by the firms to become their suppliers.

This process refers to the monopolization of production, which occurs when a given company directly controls the production process of other producers through the acquisition of what was produced, either by means of production supply contracts or through middlemen. By monopolizing production, there is also a control and corporate use of the territory, since *what* and *how* to produce is imposed by hegemonic agents despite the demands that govern peasant family farming, thus leading to a significant process of subordination of rent of land to agribusiness capital. This systematic practice of acquiring the production of smallholder farmers is commonly carried out by Cione, Compescal, Betânia, Ducoco and Amway Nutrilite, which always resort to peasants to ensure the viability of expanded capital reproduction.

Besides monopolization of production, there is also control over the land favoring the oligopolization of agrarian space in the areas where these companies operate. Over time, this entails a worsening in land concentration and large estates, associated with a dynamization of the land market and an aggravation of conflicts related to struggles for land. By concentrating land, companies ensure control over the territory. The expansion of large estates is a process closely associated with the territorialization of these companies, since the concentration of large plots of land is an intrinsic variable to the dissemination of agribusiness. Thus, the companies acquire thousands of hectares in their projects, as in the case of farms occupied by Ypióca, Cione, Agrícola Famosa, Ducoco and Del Monte, which are among the largest ones in Ceará.

In this regard, the analysis of the forms of land appropriation by companies reveals various nuances of the corporate use of the territory, since, as already stressed, concentrating land is also controlling the territory itself. In Ceará, one of the recurring forms is the appropriation of large plots of land in public areas, notably in irrigated federal perimeters, counting on facilities offered by the State to further legitimize this artifice of capital, revealing a private appropriation of a space that, in principle, should not be privatized. This is already the case for the irrigated perimeter Tabuleiro de Russas, where companies such as Cialne, Betânia and Agrícola Famosa have numerous lots, and the irrigated perimeter Jaguaribe-Apodi, where Betânia also operates and where Del Monte is responsible for grabbing one thousand hectares of public land. In this context, the corporate use of the territory is evidenced in the appropriation of State-owned lands, either through land grabbing or by legal occupation.

Furthermore, if there is a corporate appropriation of land and territory, there is also a whole scenario that points to the privatization and control of the forms of access to water in all regions of Ceará, especially in the face of a serious water crisis that has affected the Brazilian semiarid in recent years. A quest has been observed for ways to guarantee water supply for companies, such as the capture of ponds, dams and rivers and the unbridled drilling of deep wells, as jointly carried out by Agrícola Famosa, Ducoco, Del Monte, Cialne, Cione, Compescal, Betânia, Reijers, Ypióca and Amway Nutrilite. Thus, the situation of water injustice

is intensified, since it is known that the water that goes to the companies is the same that lacks to the peasant communities.

The aggravation of land and socio-environmental conflicts is also configured as a process resulting from the corporate use of the territory by agribusiness companies, given the impacts produced by these agents on all subjects who happen to be in their wake of destruction and who do not agree with the interference by these corporations. There are increasing conflicts over land, water and nature in areas occupied especially by Del Monte, responsible for expropriation of peasants and contamination of workers; Cione, which has had several of its farms occupied by landless peasants; Ducoco, which continues to make use of the Tremembé indigenous land; Compescal, which exerts significant pressure on the Cumbe quilombola community and over extensive mangrove forests; Ypióca, involved in a conflict situation in the Jenipapo-Kanindé indigenous territory; and Agrícola Famosa, responsible for deepening water injustice in Chapada do Apodi.

As the expansion of agribusiness in Ceará occurs mainly in places with strong peasant and indigenous traditions and in unstable environmental contexts, such as riverbeds and coastal areas, the worsening of environmental, social and territorial vulnerability through the agricultural corporate use of territory is latent. This is related to increased violence in the countryside and workers' exploitation; worsening of social inequalities and poverty; concentration of income, power, land and water; poisoning of nature and workers by the use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers; pollution and contamination of water, soil and air; deforestation and suppression of biodiversity, among other harms. By observing this situation of vulnerabilities, the corporate face of agribusiness turns out to be even more cruel, as highlighted by Rigotto (2011ab, 2012) when analyzing the perverse character of reproduction of capital in the countryside of Ceará and the cursed heritage left by these companies.

Final remarks

Throughout this article we brought some elements that may correlate the expansion of agribusiness with the corporate use of the territory in Ceará, paying attention to the territorialization of capital in the countryside and to what it represents. Taking as an example the large corporations that operate hegemonically in this sector, we sought to observe the new expression of Ceará's contemporary agrarian question. Nevertheless, we believe that only through an in depth study it will be possible to understand the repercussions of these hegemonic agribusiness companies, which are hardly noticeable at first because of the strong and well-articulated power network that masks the perverse action of these agents, which always rely on the connivance of the State.

In view of the presented scenario, apprehending the main processes underway based on the corporate use of the territory by such companies turns out to be not an easy task, thus requiring studies that can indicate in greater depth the scenario in which all these processes take place, providing subsidies for understanding and confronting them. Therefore, it is essential to know in depth how agribusiness companies are territorialized and how they make use of the territory, to corroborate the criticism of this predatory – capitalist – production model, which has not respected the rights of territories, subjects and nature and which has progressively usurped the survival conditions of the peoples of the countryside.

Therefore, it is necessary to understand how capital acts, to be aware of the forms of reproduction of agribusiness and to know in depth the processes related to the corporate use of the territory by large companies, even to foster the possibility of building paths to outline the various (territorial) resistance strategies, which have been able to lessen and even block the expansion of capital in the countryside. Only in this way, by raising awareness, it will be possible to significantly contribute to unveil the action of hegemonic agents that appropriate the space, and the social masks, as put by Moreira (2007), reaffirming the social criticism (which is still) produced by geographical science, especially in the context of Agrarian Geography.

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