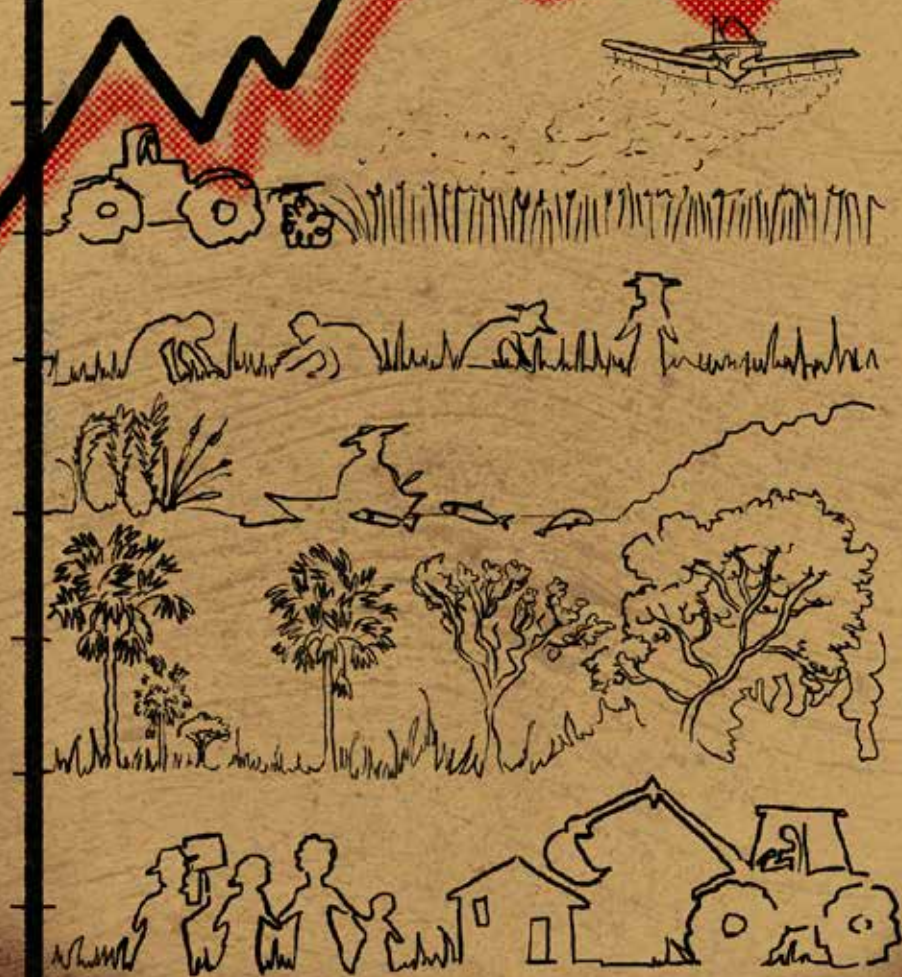


# Land speculation in the Matopiba region and socio-environmental impacts



Network for Social Justice and Human Rights  
&  
Centre for the Political Economy of Labour



**Land  
speculation in  
the matopiba  
region and socio-  
environmental  
impacts**

*Network for Social  
Justice And Human Rights  
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Economy of Labour*



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*Network for Social  
Justice And Human Rights  
with Centre for the Political  
Economy of Labour*

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
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## Preface

**T**he pandemic caused by Covid-19 and the current economic and environmental crises demand a deep reflection on the use of land and the urgent need for the protection of biodiversity and ecological agriculture that produces healthy and affordable food in local markets. This conjuncture demands transformations in labour relations across the domains of economic production and social reproduction, the protection of rights to food, land, education and health. The expansion of agribusiness is causing the destruction of biodiverse habitats hosting wild species, and accentuating genetic mutations. Rural communities have long denounced the negative effects of industrialised agriculture that not only compromises their livelihoods but also aggravates the climate crisis and thus poses a risk to our entire society. In recent years, widespread fires in the Amazon, in the Pantanal and in the Cerrado biomes were unprecedented in their number and scale. In August 2020, there were approximately 46 thousand fires in the Cerrado, approximately one third of all those observed in Brazil. The impacts are devastating.

In this report, based on the work of the Network for Social Justice and Human Rights, the role of agricultural land speculation in social and environmental destruction is highlighted. One of the Cerrado regions that suffer the greatest impact from this predatory speculation is Matopiba, which includes the states of Maranhão (MA), Tocantins (TO), Piauí (PI) and Bahia (BA). National and international agribusiness companies form alliances not just with oligarchies in rural areas but with financial companies and pension funds. In recent decades, the financialisation of agriculture facilitated the entry of foreign capital into the agricultural land market.

Buritizal palm trees in the community of Baixão Fechado, in Santa Filomena (PI).



Photo: Daniela Stefano

This trend has been accentuated since the global economic crisis in 2008 and companies like Cosan, SLC Agrícola, Insoło, GBE and Granflor and Brasil Agro have started to operate in the Brazilian land market. Pension funds linked to global brands, such as TIAA and Harvard University, have cashed in on this land rush, while the futures market has invited further speculative bets on agricultural production linked to the commodification and financialisation of land. As is demonstrated here through the testimonies of those struggling to sustain their livelihoods in the face of these pressures, the insatiable appetite for lands encroaches, often illegally, on the food producing fields, plateaus and wetlands of traditional communities.

The violations of the right to land and degradation of the environment are echoed in the exploitative work conditions synonymous with agribusiness, a fate resisted by those who are determined not to, “sell my labour, enslave myself”, as one resident puts it. The accounts of slave like work compound the economic, social and environmental crises brought to these communities via land speculation. The testimonies of the communities in this vital biome merit attention and understanding at a time when it is becoming increasingly clear that their loss of habitat and livelihood increases the likelihood of new pandemics and the rate of climate change with social and environmental consequences that humanity can ill afford.

**Margins of the Parnaíba River, close to the quilombola community of Artur Passos, in Jerumenha (PI).**



Photo: Daniela Stefano.

**Community of Baixão Fechado, in Santa Filomena (PI).**



Photo: Daniela Stefano



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# 1. The historic occupation of Matopiba and the 21<sup>st</sup> century expansion of agribusiness

The Matopiba region is referred to in official documents from the mid 2000s.<sup>1</sup> The contemporary dislocation of traditional communities and the acute tensions in land, capital and labour relations; however, have their roots in enslavement, colonial encroachments and the agricultural projects that date back centuries.

The paucity of good quality, pastoral land near the coast explains the early expansion of cattle rearing into the backcountry, or ‘sertão’, of Brazil (Furtado, 2005). This began in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, with the crossing the river São Francisco, reaching the Tocantins River and extending to Maranhão, occupying the southern region of this state in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The more

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<sup>1</sup> News about the region appears in the media under the names of Mapito, Mapitoba and Bamapito. In the works of Julia Adão Bernardes and in the collection of articles from the book *Geografias da Soja II* (2009), researchers already called the region BAMAPITO – referring chronologically to the advance and consolidation of the border, firstly in the west of Bahia, then in the south of Maranhão and south of Piauí and Tocantins. In the media the region is also referenced in mid-2000s and again in 2010; see <https://www.canalrural.com.br/noticias/regiao-mapitonova-fronteira-desenvolvimento-pais-diz-dilma-32400/>; <https://www.canalrural.com.br/noticias/novaagri-vence-licitacao-primeiro-loteterminal-graos-maranhao-com-proposta-milhoes-5138/>

cattle raising was interiorised, the more it was costly to transport its products to the coastal regions. With profits falling, the interest in animal husbandry decreased and, at the same time, the labour relations diversified among sharecroppers, indigenous and enslaved populations in the interior of Brazil. Cattle related activity continued to serve the immediate livelihoods of communities of the sertão who took advantage of everything the cattle offered to guarantee survival, while the trade of the surplus went to the coastal regions. For Valverde (1985, p. 163), it was through breeding farms that the colonization of the state of Piauí was realized, extending to southern Maranhão and to the eastern banks of the Tocantins River. The cattle farms eventually crossed the Tocantins river in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and occupied the north of Goiás (where today is the state of Tocantins).

Slavery and compulsory labor are closely linked to the historic composition of this recently demarcated region of Matopiba. Systematic violence appears in mining activity,<sup>2</sup> which expanded to Goiás, to the current state of Tocantins and to Bahia from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The paying of tributes, the physical, material and immaterial violence formed the Brazilian “modernity”, and the escape from this reality explains the migration of runaway African-descendants, or ‘quilombolas’ from the mines of Chapada da Diamantina towards to the west of Bahia and to Jalapão, in today’s Tocantins.

Along this path, it is possible to notice the presence of traditional communities and quilombos, which reside in these places to this day. Thus, quilombos and mocambos<sup>3</sup> were spaces where it was possible to build a new dwelling beyond the slave relations of the farm and the mine: mobility was a strategy of resistance and war. It was common to change the location of houses, to rotate the food producing gardens and the extractive activities, which permeate tens of thousands of hectares. The landscape is adorned with a record of stakes, walls and ‘false’ roads, which were built to prevent attacks and allow escape. The use of typically indigenous weapons was common among the Black residents, in addition to firearms acquired through

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<sup>2</sup> The armed force mobilized, the population lived in terror; private homes were violated at any time of day or night, prisons multiplied. This often lasted for many months, during which any personal guarantee disappeared. Everyone was subject to suddenly losing his possessions, his freedom, if not his life. (PRADO JR, p.40, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> Mocambos were small villages of runaway and rebelling slaves; quilombos are larger settlements that may originally have hosted various mocambos.

commercial exchanges or raids. According to Lopes Oliveira (2009), the Blacks from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries fled and travelled by canoe along the Araguaia and Tocantins rivers. The rivers of the Tocantins-Araguaia basin, Parnaíba and San Francisco were fundamentally important, both for the translocation between communities and for dispersion throughout the territory.<sup>4</sup> Yet, even after the end of slavery, freed blacks had the obligation to be in possession of a work permit, at the risk of being arrested and condemned to compulsory work.

This was one of the Empire's strategies to maintain control over freed slaves and those who fled westwards. In this way, the Empire created an "economy of punishment" over a labour force in favour of the large farms for coffee, cotton, cane and for the gold mines.

*From the expulsion of traditional communities to the formation of farms*

Through and during colonization, villages and "sedentary occupations" were formed within Brazil. The nomadic and semi-nomadic ways of life that had sustained the traditional communities of the Cerrado over the centuries were decimated. As Pedro Puntoni (2002) explains, the expansion of cattle rearing effectively imprisoned the indigenous peoples. The colonisation of the sertão was *always* a violent process against these populations and their places, but one that was presented as a "pacification" and progressive occupation of "empty space", with the image of the "cordial man" presented as pillars of Brazil's formation (HOLANDA, 1996). Indigenous and black peoples were, and continue to be, expelled from their lands, but they consistently have resisted colonisation, and defended against the violence incursions on the territory.<sup>5</sup> The Karajás, Kayapós, Xavantes, Xerentes and other indigenous peoples tried to prevent, in various ways, the entry of colonisers along the rivers. The strategies to colonize the interior of Brazil, which territorially corresponds to the states of Tocantins, Maranhão, Bahia and Piauí, included: a) the idea that it was necessary populate "empty spaces"; b) the control and repression of indigenous peoples through of Christianity; and c)

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<sup>4</sup> The rivers were also used as a means of interiorisation of European expeditions since the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the Tocantins basin and river São Francisco (LIMA, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> The destruction of the Military Prison of Santa Maria do Araguaia, by the coalition of the Xerentes, Xavantes and Karajás indians, in 1813, is evidence of the dissatisfaction with the strange attitudes coming from "outside" (CARVALHO, 2008, p. 59).



the exploitation of indigenous labour. Marivone Chaim (1974) explains that such overarching strategies served to justify and facilitate the exploitation of natural assets by settlers and their commercial projects.

The arrival of “outsiders”, that is, the non-Indians, by the rivers had caused ethnicities of the Timbira group<sup>6</sup> to move away from the banks of the Tocantins and Araguaia rivers and take refuge in the babassu forests, the Cerrado and Amazon in the region of Bico do Papagaio, in Tocantins.<sup>7</sup> The lands close to the big rivers were called the “edge”, a place where peasant communities located (VELHO, 2013). They were places of fertile land where these practiced flood-dry season agriculture and fishing. It was common to rotate areas for the cultivation and seasonal uses of sites for rituals, festivals, extractive activities and planting. Through history, however, the rotation of semi-nomadic areas and activities have been suppressed, restricting communities traditional to the increasingly smaller areas where they are encountered today.

Forms of expropriation acquired new strategies in the 19th century, when the abstract dimension of land ownership and value became decisive to the local and national economies. In this century, the expansion of cattle ranches and with it the expropriation of traditional communities intensified. There was resistance in the lands of the Timbiras indigenous people and their various groups in Tocantins and southern Maranhão; the Aroaquizes, Carapotangas, Acoroás, Rodeleiros, Beçudos, Precatizes in the south of the Piauí,<sup>8</sup> and the Xacriabás in western Bahia. The fixation of the capitalist economy in the region, from western Bahia onwards, occurred when housing nuclei were raised to the status of municipalities.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See: <https://pib.socioambiental.org/pt/Povo:Timbira>

<sup>7</sup> Interviews with agents of the Pastoral Land Commission and the Indigenous Missionary Council indicate that some knowledge of canoeing and fishing of some Timbira villages and groups were lost after generations that were not directly connected to the rivers.

<sup>8</sup> In Piauí, the Genipapos, Guaranis and Gamelas indigenous peoples also lived on the banks of the Parnaíba River and the Guajajara people between the banks of the Uruçuí and Gurgéia, between the current states of Maranhão and Tocantins (Chaves, 1953). Chaves also points out the conflicts and massacres that took place in the 17th century, showing the scale of assault on, but also resistance by, the indigenous people of Piauí. It is noteworthy that some communities that partner this work, such as the territory of Vá do Vico, seek recognition as indigenous Gamela.

<sup>9</sup> The following municipalities were formed; Cotegipe (1820), Carinhanha (1832), Santa Rita de Cassia (1840) and Angical (1890) was annexed from the territory of Barra; Correntina (1866) and Santa Maria da Vitória (1880) set themselves up independently of Carinhanha; Barreiras, from Angical; and Santana (1890) from Santa Maria da Vitória (Oliveira, 2014).



There was at the same time a displacement of populations from various regions of Bahia in the direction upstream from tributaries of the São Francisco river and its sub-tributaries in the general region of western Bahia.

In the initial phase of violent colonial encroachments, there did exist other paths and vacant lands- in other words other opportunities- for these peoples to create another home and guarantee familial existence by planting and rotating crops, using the flat top hills, or 'chapadas' for raising cattle, and reproducing the wild grass, typical of the Cerrado. It is still possible to observe the hallmarks of this occupation by communities that have been in the region for over 100 years in the recent field visits undertaken to understand the contemporary challenges they face.

From the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it is evident that agricultural expansion has occurred more intensely with State support for the systematic implementation of large projects of agribusiness. The moment of high commodity prices generated an expansion of monocultures and it was in this period that soybean production reached Matopiba. Between 2000 and 2014, the area planted with soy and sugar cane in Matopiba increased 253% and 379% respectively (ActionAid, 2017). In the case of soybeans, the planted area increased from 1 million to 3.4 million ha in the same period. In the 2019/2020 harvest, the area planted was 4.451 million ha (CONAB, 2020). The state with the greatest expansion of agribusiness is Piauí, which registered a 4% increase between 2018 and 2019. The process is result of the accumulation of financial assets, promises of lucrative expansion with price inflation in the derivatives markets, and the continued agribusiness discourse and treatment of the rural environment as "empty space", despite the territories, livelihoods and resistance of the communities of the sertão. In what follows the social and environmental dynamics and implications of the related land grabs, speculation and expropriation are explored.

### **Commodity production**

The expansion of agribusiness in the region occurs mainly with soybeans and, in a lesser scale, with transgenic corn and cotton (in Bahia), with eucalyptus (in Maranhão and Tocantins) and with the advancement of sugar cane.

The expansion of agribusiness in Matopiba. Soybean harvest operated by SLC Agrícola in Balsas (MA).



Photo: Andressa Zumpano.

Operating in Matopiba are trading companies, commercial agents, seed producers, processors, importers and exporters of soy. An interesting factor is the participation of companies that we routinely associate with other agricultural sectors in the markets for soy. This is the case of Cutrale, Votorantim and companies of the sugar cane sector, such as Usina Açucareira São Manoel SA, Usina Conquista do Pontal SA, Usina de Açúcar Santa Terezinha Ltd in São Paulo, Usina Eldorado SA (owned by Odebrecht in Mato Grosso do Sul), Usina Frutal Açúcare Álcool Ltd (owned by Bunge in Minas Gerais), Usina Guariroba Ltd and Usina Ouroeste Açúcar e Álcool Ltda (both owned by Bunge in São Paulo), Usina Itajobi Ltd Sugar and Alcohol (São Paulo), Usina Itapagipe Açúcar e Álcool Ltda (owned by Bunge in Minas Gerais), Usina Moema Açúcar e Álcool Ltda (São Paulo), Usina São José S/A (Pernambuco). The majority of the plants that participate in the sector have their headquarters in the state of São Paulo and were acquired by Bunge. According to Income Statements Year (DRE), made available by Conab for the 2006-2019 period, such companies retain about half of the investment realised by soy production, even without being directly linked to its cultivation.

In recent decades, the rules of the agricultural market are increasingly complex and the financialisation of agriculture has facilitated the entry of national capital and international organizations that were not asso-

ciated with agricultural activities, such as companies in the automotive, oil, construction and banking sectors. In addition, the futures market generated a fictionalization of capital with future bets on production, speculation on the market exchange rates and other financial mechanisms such as derivatives (Network for Social Justice and Human Rights 2017). Yet, even with all the financial advantages, logistics, land grabbing and federal government and state subsidies, the monoculture of soybeans has faced difficulties in maintaining profitability (Castillo, 2011; Frederico, 2017). More than half the cost of soy production per hectare is related to expenditure on inputs such as transgenic seeds, fertilizers, chemicals and pesticides, marketed by companies like Monsanto, Syngenta, Bunge, Du-Pont and Pioneer. In 2019, the cost of the technological ‘package’ of sterile seeds represented 69.58% (R\$ 2,029.94) of all input costs in Tocantins. This value was 56.96% (R\$ 1,746.65) in Maranhão and 52.87% in Bahia (R\$ 1,584.08) (CONAB, 2020).

Soy production costs per hectare in the states of Maranhão (MA), Tocantins (TO) and Bahia (BA), 2006-2019.

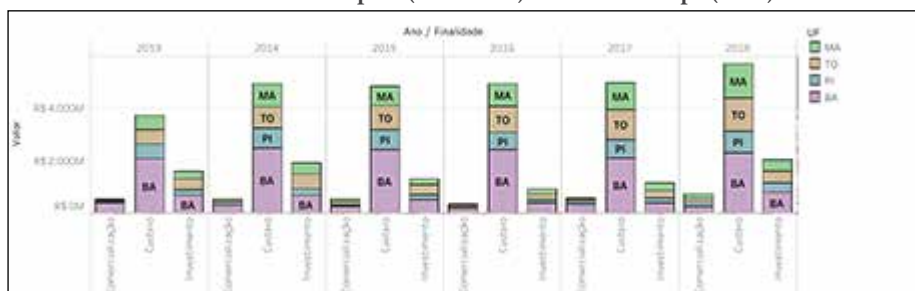


Source: Conab (2020).

Data organized by Débora Lima. Note: there is no data available for the State of Piauí. Production costs involve a greater number of production variables, distributed as follows: 1. Expenditure on crop; 2. Other Expenses, such as transportation, technical assistance, administrative and storage expenses; 3. Financial expenses, such as interest payments; 4. Depreciation of machinery; 5. Other fixed costs, such as social charges; 6. Rent, remuneration on fixed capital, land owning and leasing.

The cost of labour (permanent, temporary work and employee contributions) had a variation of 0.24% to 6.5% in the costs of production in Matopiba between 2006 and 2019. The greater labour participation in the region occurred in 2015 in Pedro Afonso (TO), during the expansion of the farms, for which there was contracting for excavating tree roots. In 2019, labour represented 0.36% of the total cost in Bahia, or R\$ 10.92 per hectare of production. In Maranhão in the same year, labour represented 0.08% (R\$ 2.39) and in Tocantins 1.2% (R\$ 35.00). In addition to overexploiting work as a way to decrease production costs, the State as a financier and forgiver of debts is fundamental to the generation of new cycles of accumulation, as pointed out by the reports of the Network for Social Justice and Rights Human Rights (2018) that show that agribusiness is linked intimately to the land speculation process.<sup>10</sup>

Rural credit in Matopiba (2013-2018) Source: Embrapa (2020).



Available at <https://www.embrapa.br/geomatopiba/sistemas/credito-rural>

One of the facets of speculation closest to the point of production is credit. Historically, the state has prioritized access to credit for landowners. Rural properties of over 1,000 ha concentrate 43% of the rural credit, while between 13% and 23% is made available to smallest properties (less than 10 ha) that constitute 80% of all rural properties (BCB,2020). In 2018, rural credit made available for agribusiness totaled R\$ 8,408,460,317. According to data from Banco do Brasil,<sup>11</sup> however, credit contracts fell by 25% between

<sup>10</sup> According to the agrarian reform institute, INCRA, there are 729 individuals and companies in Brazil who claim to own rural properties each with debts to the Federal Government of over R\$ 50 million. . On the back of the Labour Reforms approved in 2019, the Bolsonaro government discussed the debts amnesty of R\$ 11 to 40 billion from the Rural Fund.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.bcb.gov.br/estabilidadefinanceira/micrrural>

2014 and 2018, demonstrating an increase in selectivity and concentration of the sector (BCB, 2020). The southern region of Maranhão, south Piauí, Tocantins and western Bahia have been the target of exploitation of natural resources to favour the foreign market and, more recently, from land speculation. In the mid-2000s the region had an abrupt growth of land grabbing and land purchases. Matopiba became the target of expansion of agribusiness with Brazilian and foreign participation. Between 2015 and 2019 the value destined for this expansions was R\$ 85.98 billion and the acquisition of land by national financial companies and foreign companies continues to strengthen the power of agribusiness.

### **Financialisation as a more aggressive form of land speculation**

Since the global economic crisis in 2008, the financialisation of agricultural land has been accentuated revealing the domino effect caused by capital mobility. Companies like Cosan (through the international pension fund, TIAA), SLC Agrícola, Insolo, GBE and Granflor (through Harvard University funds) and Brasil Agro, started to operate in the Brazilian land market. In some cases, such as Cosan and SLC Agrícola, publicly traded companies are constituted in the form of *holding* companies and have created agricultural real estate to negotiate land – Radar Agricultural Properties and SLC LandCo – in partnership with international financial institutions. Such a mechanism is a form of “outsourcing” in land deals in order to create several subsidiary companies with same administrators, but with the appearance of different owners (Network for Social Justice And Human Rights, 2017; 2018).

Speculation has led to an increase in land prices and an expansion of agribusiness in Matopiba. Between 2007 and 2019, prices of agricultural lands rose sharply in the region. In the municipality of Pedro Afonso (TO), the increase was 420% in this period; in Bom Jesus and Uruçuí (PI) it was 415% and 519% respectively; in Balsas (MA) it was 398%; in Luís Eduardo Magalhães, in Bahia, it was 260%. In the latter cities where agribusiness is more consolidated, Luís Eduardo Magalhães and Balsa, the increase was smaller. Between 2017 and 2019 there was a stabilization in the price of land, with an increase only in the Bahia cities of by Luís Eduardo Magalhães and Formosa do Rio Preto: R\$ 21,167.00 per hectare, 3.3% more than in 2018.

In western Bahia, the areas of the Cerrado experienced a price increase of up to 635% in Santa Maria da Vitória. Jaborandi and Formosa do Rio Preto recorded rises in land prices from 2007 to 2019. Between 2003 and 2007, prices for land in Jaborandi (around R\$ 150 per hectare) were very low in relation to Formosa do Rio Preto, where the hectare cost about R\$ 1000. In Piauí, the Cerrado and Caatinga areas in the Floriano region had the highest increase in the price of land: 900% in the last 15 years. One hectare in this region cost, in 2003, around R\$ 44. In 2019, the hectare of this Cerrado was traded at R\$ 800. In Maranhão, the areas of sandy soils and flat lands have increased by 526% in the last 15 years, and in Imperatriz, where the Cerrado transitions into the Amazon biomes, the land prices increased by 1150% (FNP, 2020). The increase in land prices shows the ‘heating’ of the farmland market in Matopiba, whether in high-productivity lands or in lands not exploited by agriculture as in the case of Cerrado and Caatinga lands. These have shown an increase in prices due to speculative processes linked to green grabbing, themselves related principally to controversial environmental strategies and formation of legal reserves.

Speculation causes expulsion of peasant farmers, Indigenous and Quilombola (rural Afro-Brazilian) communities that have land rights through their common usage. Other impacts are the destruction of natural resources, important sources of water, biodiversity and the production of food for local consumption.

### **Corporations that operate in Matopiba**

In Brazil, it is estimated that foreign acquisition of lands reached 2,250,000 ha or 3.8% of agricultural land (Lima, 2019). Local impacts are devastating as they increase environmental destruction and the concentration of land. The process of forming large farms consists, in general terms, of the purchase of land at low prices, most of the time illegally through land grabbing, causing deforestation of the native Cerrado. When the farm is formed towards commodity production, land prices go up. The incorporation of new areas of soybean production, for example, serves as the basis for the speculative expectation of price and inflates the portfolio of companies, as a strategy for accessing credit and subsidies (Network for Social Justice and Human Rights, 2018). In what follows, we present a brief history of financial corporations that are active in Matopiba.

## *Radar*

The United States Pension Fund TIAA (Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association) is being investigated by the Federal Public Ministry for using complex corporate structures to circumvent the law that limits the acquisition of land by foreign companies. TIAA, with its representative in Brazil, Mansilla Participações, and together with Cosan S / A, owns Radar Imobiliária Agrícola S / A. Created in 2008, Radar was a pioneer in the process of forming agricultural real estate transactions in Brazil<sup>12</sup> as shown by the report by the Social Network or Social Justice and Human Rights (2015).

After regulatory restrictions on land acquisition by foreign corporations, Cosan and TIAA established Tellus Brasil Participações to acquire land. Tellus raises funds to purchase agricultural land through negotiations with Radar and other subsidiaries, such as Terra Viva Brasil Participações and Nova Gaia Brasil Participações. According to the quarterly TIAA statement, more than 20 companies are listed as directly or indirectly owned and/or administered by Radar and Tellus in Brazil. These companies conduct financial operations related to land acquisition, clearing, preparation, rental and sale of properties. The company Nuveen manages assets of TIAA worth 1 trillion dollars and unified the management of all assets in a single company, Westchester Group Investment Management. Westchester controls rural properties in the United States, Australia, Brazil and Chile. The map of farms made publicly available by Nuveen<sup>13</sup> lists 58 properties in Brazil, of which 15 are in Matopiba. Fieldwork carried out in 2019 by the Network for Social Justice and Human Rights in partnership with Chain Reaction Research and correlated with INCRA data revealed another 11 properties in Matopiba. According to INCRA, Radar and affiliated companies appear registered as owners of a total 111,703 ha of land. The properties of Radar can be linked to land grabbing and cause social, economic and environmental impacts in rural communities in Matopiba. At least 22,834 ha of six Radar areas were purchased from corporations linked to Euclid de Carli. De Carli's properties are the target of investigation by the Federal Public Ministry, which suspended 124,000 ha property titles related to him in Piauí and Maranhão.

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<sup>12</sup> See: <https://social.org.br/files/pdf/RevistaREDE2015paranet2.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> See: <https://www.nuveen.com/global/strategies/alternatives/farmland-map>



Unlike other companies that first are formally constituted and then they go to the stock market to raise more resources (such as SLC Agrícola and Vanguarda), Brasil Agro started to operate in financial markets without assets. Only with a proposal to purchasing and selling agricultural properties, the company raised US\$ 270 million in its initial stock offering in April 2006. The company was created in 2005 from the interests of Argentine businessman Eduardo Elszteinto in expanding the model of rural land speculation he has applied since the 1990s in Argentina through the company CRESUD (Sociedad Anónima Comercial Inmobiliaria Financiera e Agropecuaria) (Nascimento et al, 2018).

After five years of forming large farms at a time when the production of soybeans started to have positive yields and good rates of productivity, the company started the liquidation of properties. In total, the company invested approximately US\$ 250 million in the acquisition of 319 thousand ha, including a 110 thousand ha plantation, raising more than US\$200 million with the sale of just 77 thousand ha. Currently, the company has about 240 thousand ha (BRASILAGRO, 2016).

The company's net sales revenue was R\$ 17.907 million in the third quarter of the 2018 crop year, with an increase of 19.8% in the year on year comparison. Revenue from the sale of grains totaled R\$ 18.096 million in the third quarter, with an increase of 91.6% in the annual comparison. Brasil Agro declared net revenue of R\$ 50.4 million, more than triple in the same period of 2017. There were also gains from transactions totaling R\$ 14.4 million, 32% less than in the third quarter of the year 2016/17 harvest (VALOR, 2018). On May 3 of 2018, Brasil Agro sold 956 ha of the plateau area (660 working ha) of Fazenda Araucária for R\$ 61.6 million. This sale represents a profit of R\$ 36.1 million and an Internal Rate Return (IRR) of 16.5%. (VALOR, 2018). According to the company's report of February 2019, 40.69% of its shares belong to Cresud and 59.31% float on the Novo Mercado Bovespa stock market. Generally, Brasil Agro acquires large land extensions at a relatively low price. Then, it seeks to "add value", introducing livestock or flex crops. After five or six years, the company performs partial or total sale to make a profit. In the first half of 2019, net revenue from sales was R\$ 317.2 million, an increase of 141.1% over the same period of the previous year. This is mainly the result of sales revenue of R\$ 123.3 million (present value) from Fazenda Jatobá and R\$ 6.9 million (present value) of Fazenda Alto Taquari.



Brasil Agro has subsidiaries that control and operate their properties in Brazil: Imobiliária Cajueiro, responsible for Chaparral e Preferência; Imobiliária Ceibo (fazenda São José), and Jaborandi Propriedades Agrícolas (fazenda Jatobá). In the areas of Matopiba, the company has the following farms: Chaparral(BA), Preferencia (BA), Parceiro II (PI), Parceiro IV (MA) and São José (MA).

#### *SLC Agrícola S / A*

The Schneider Logemann Company Agricola S / A is the largest soybean producer in Brazil, having as main buyers Cargill, Amaggi and Bunge, according to the SLC. It was founded in 1977 with an initial focus on tractor production. Then it started to produce soybeans, corn and cotton and went public on the stock exchange, Bovespa in 2007 (OLIVEIRA, 2016). In 2012 it constituted an agricultural real estate arm, SLC Land Co, in partnership with the English investment fund Valiance Ltd. SLC Land Co's business consists of acquiring, forming and selling farms. In addition to its own areas (approximately 236 thousand ha) and areas of SLC Land Co (approximately 86 thousand ha), SLC Agrícola leases other areas and has partnerships with other companies, such as SLC-MIT, in partnership with Mitsui, which controls about 500 thousand hectares of land.

Headquarters of Fazenda Parnaíba in Tasso Fragoso, Maranhão, the largest farm of SLC Agrícola, with 68,737 ha, 41,598 of which own ha, 10,200 ha from Land Co. and 27,139 ha leased. The farm currently produces soybeans and cotton.



Photo: Débora Lima.

The University Asset Fund of Harvard has about one million hectares of land in the United States, Brazil, Eastern Europe, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. In Brazil, farm businesses of Harvard are orchestrated through three structures involving local operators that are outlined below.

Insolo is run by the family Ioschpe, which has become one of the largest owners of farms in Piauí over the last two decades with soy and cotton plantations. In 2008, Ioschpe transformed the company into a vehicle to channel money from the Harvard University heritage fund for the acquisition of large extensions of arable land in Piauí. This company, called Insolo Agroindustria S / A, belongs to Harvard (95.8%) through the fund management company, Phemus Corp, and several subsidiaries in the state of Delaware in the United States, and in Brazil. Between June 2008 and June 2016, Harvard injected at least \$ 138 million into Insolo when acquiring at least six farms distributed over 115,000 hectares in Piauí.

Gordian Bioenergy, known as GBE , is a private equity company (funded through private investments) administered partially by the Greek-Brazilian Diomedes Christodoulou, former CEO of operations at Enron South America, along with some of his former Enron colleagues. In 2007, Christodoulou and his group sought Europeans and Americans to invest in sugar cane plantations and production of ethanol, in a plan of 150 million dollars. In connection with Harvard, GBE acquired an area called Grupo Guadalupe in the city of Guadalupe, Jerumenha and surroundings in Piauí, with the objective of operating with sugarcane and tomato plantation for production of tomato sauce. Between June 2008 and June 2015, Harvard transferred approximately 246 million dollars for land acquisitions by GBE. GBE's operator is Terracal, which acquired about 30 properties in five different states in northeastern Brazil, totaling 168 thousand hectares. Terracal arrived to deforest the land for the preparation of a massive irrigation project that would cover 45 thousand hectares in Jerumenha, Piauí. A great part of these farms is located on land that ancestrally form part of the community of remnants of Arthur Passos quilombos (African-slave descendent populations and territories). In 2015, Harvard stopped this project and withdrew the \$350 million investment that was planned. The University Fund advised that its Brazilian administrators to sell the property as quickly as possible,

according to information contained in a case against GBE filed by a former company administrator.

Two communities close to the areas of Terracal, one in Barra (BA) and another in Jerumenha (PI), were visited in October 2019 by the Network for Social Justice and Human Rights. It appears that Harvard continues looking for buyers. The only presence of the company are the security guards who threaten the residents of these locations. According to documents attached to the legal action previously mentioned the area of Barra possesses the requirements for the projects of the company, but a document states that the area needed would be 36,700 ha, that is almost 10,000 hectares more than the company claims to own. In mid-2017, the company made a new petition to annex an area of pasture belonging to seven communities, where more than 400 families live, including the community of Baixão do Aleixo, visited during the fieldwork for preparing this report. There are 40 thousand hectares of land for collective use, which borders the company farm area. With the petition, Terracal wants to take over the entire area of pasture fund, excluding only the areas where families own their homes.

Harvard's entry into agribusiness investment was preceded by investments in timber. Some of these businesses were orchestrated by two Brazilians from the eucalyptus sector, Romualdo Maestri and Victor Hugo Silveira Boff, co-founders of Granflor Agroforestal. In 2008, Harvard and these two entrepreneurs established a company in Porto Alegre called Caracol Agropecuária. This company, 100% in the hands of Harvard, received approximately 60 million dollars from Harvard fund management company, Blue Marble Holdings, between June 2008 and June 2016 for land acquisition, primarily in the state of Bahia.

Caracol acquired 140 thousand hectares of lands in Cotegipe (BA), but the area continues without any type of cultivation plantation. The property has a history of conflicts and the Attorney General's Office of the state of Bahia is investigating complaints of land grabbing. Even so, Caracol received an authorization from the Institute of Environment and Water Resources to deforest approximately 5,000 hectares of native forest in October 2019.

### **Legal cases in Brazil**

An investigation by the Public Prosecutors Office and the National Institute for Agrarian Reform (INCRA) in Brazil exposed how Harvard

University and TIAA avoided a Brazilian law that limits foreign ownership of land to acquire farms in regions from where local communities have been displaced.

TIAA and Harvard are the largest foreign buyers of farmland in Brazil. Since 2008, they have amassed a combined total of around 750,000 hectares, most of it in the Northeastern part of Brazil, within the country's biodiverse Cerrado savannah region. These companies use opaque corporate structures, running through offshore jurisdictions, to conceal and evade Brazilian legislation restricting foreign ownership of farmland.

INCRA's details how all of the lands acquired by TIAA after 2010 were done in violation of Brazilian laws governing the acquisition of farmlands by foreign entities. In INCRA's view, TIAA's land purchases, which were conducted via the Brazilian company Radar Propriedades Agrícolas and numerous other Brazilian subsidiaries, should be considered together, as part of the same economic group. As a result, the INCRA recommends that all of the lands purchased via TIAA's subsidiaries since 2010, covering more than 150,000 ha, be annulled and void.

In October of 2020, the State Court of Bahia issued a sentence blocking the registration of lands for one of Harvard's largest farmland acquisitions in Brazil – a 107,000 hectare agglomeration of lands known as Gleba Campo Largo. The court also reopened an investigation into Harvard's acquisition of the Campo Largo lands, based on evidence provided by the state prosecutor that these were public lands that had been illegally transferred to private ownership.

In order to avoid the consequences of these legal cases, Harvard endowment fund has decided to spin off<sup>14</sup> its farmland division into an independent private equity corporation called Solum Partners, which has AIG insurance group as a partner. However, as INCRA's position on the TIAA case explains, under Brazilian law foreign corporations and their subsidiaries should be considered as part of the same economic group.

Local communities in Brazil are organizing to guarantee their land rights, demanding that Harvard and other financial corporations give their land back and pay reparations for social and environmental damage. In the

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.farmlandgrab.org/post/view/29894-harvard-spins-off-natural-resources-team-to-remain-partner>

US Divest Harvard<sup>15</sup> are also organizing to raise the issue with Harvard Management Company in solidarity with Brazilian rural communities.

Notably, amidst this adversity, in June 2021, the riverside community Brejeira Salto of Matopiba had its collective title granted. The granting of collective domain is an important step for rural communities in the region to protect land rights, livelihoods and ecological food production.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2019/10/22/hmc-divest-protest/> ; <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2019/8/29/amazon-fires-divestment/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.social.org.br/en/articles/articles-english/281-ribeirinha-community-conquers-collective-right-to-land>



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## 2. Social and environmental impacts

**D**iverse are the communities whose territories are threatened by speculation with land and the advancement of agribusiness, which causes deforestation, burning, contamination of water by intensive use of pesticides. These communities defend public policies that prioritize food production for local markets and environmental preservation. Conflicts involving land, labour and water tripled in the last 20 years, according to data from the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT). In comparison to previous years, violence against communities again increased in 2019.

Between 2000 and 2019 there were 2,338 conflicts over land in Matopiba, with the majority in the state of Maranhão and the following municipalities: Alegre (54), Balsas (57) and Codó (128). In the West of Bahia, the municipalities of Correntina (31) and Santa Maria Vitória (11) exhibit the largest numbers of conflicts. In Tocantins, conflicts occurred on the Belém-Brasília highway axis. In Piauí, the highest number of records were concentrated in Bom Jesus (18) and Baixa Grande do Ribeiro (15) during this period. Conflicts over water started to be registered by the CPT in 2002 and include impediment of access to water sources to communities, pollution and private

appropriation of water resources. In 2019, the CPT registered 130 conflicts over water in Matopiba (CPT, 2020).

All of the people we talked to in the communities visited by the Network for Social Justice and Human Rights in 2019 believe that the threats they have suffered have increased in 2020 compared to previous years. In 2019, Agrarian Reform in Brazil suffered the greatest retraction in history: no new settlements were created and there were no land made available for this purpose. A formal designation of public land for agrarian reform has been commonly replaced by ‘concession of use’ contracts that are of further benefit to the commercial land market and maintain an insecurity for traditional communities. Some 14,868 concession contracts were issued of use from January to September 2019 in Brazil (Fernandes *et al.*, 2020). In addition to the paralysis of the Agrarian Reform, bills of law are pending in the National Congress to ‘regularise’ land in way that makes land grabbing more viable.

The weakening of agrarian laws<sup>1</sup> has allowed for those who have illegally grabbed land to claim ownership through self-declarations, a popular tool alongside the presentation of Rural Property Registration Certificates as feature below.

As can be seen in the certificate, the Piqui farm, one of the divisions of Radar’s umbrella company farm, Fazenda Ludmila in Santa Filomena (PI), is certified and viable to buy and sell despite being an unproductive property and not having a formally registered certificate. The implications of these processes on community residents are highlighted below.

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<sup>1</sup> Law 13.465/2017. <https://legis.senado.leg.br/norma/17723904> . Regarding MP 910; see also <https://www12.senado.leg.br/publicacoes/estudos-legislativos/tipos-de-estudos/textos-para-discussao/td-114-aquisicao-de-terras-por-estrangeiros-no-brasil-umaavaliacao-juridica-e-economica>





## Certificate of Rural Property Registration

### CASA CIVIL DA PRESIDÊNCIA DA REPÚBLICA INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE COLONIZAÇÃO E REFORMA AGRÁRIA - INCRA CERTIFICADO DE CADASTRO DE IMÓVEL RURAL - CCIR EMISSÃO EXERCÍCIO 2018

DADOS DO IMÓVEL RURAL		2ª VIA - PÁG.: 1 / 1			
CÓDIGO DO IMÓVEL RURAL 950.165.108.162-0		DENOMINAÇÃO DO IMÓVEL RURAL FAZENDA PIQUI			
ÁREA TOTAL (ha)	428,2454	CLASSIFICAÇÃO FUNDIÁRIA Média Propriedade Improdutiva <sup>6</sup>	DATA DO PROCESSAMENTO DA ÚLTIMA DECLARAÇÃO 11/02/2018	ÁREA CERTIFICADA 0,0000	
INDICAÇÕES PARA LOCALIZAÇÃO DO IMÓVEL RURAL 35 KM SEDE		MUNICÍPIO SEDE DO IMÓVEL RURAL SANTA FILOMENA UF PI			
MÓDULO RURAL (ha)	30,0136	Nº MÓDULOS RURAIS 10,66	MÓDULO FISCAL (ha)	75,0000	Nº MÓDULOS FISCAIS 5,7099
SITUAÇÃO JURÍDICA DO IMÓVEL RURAL (ÁREAS REGISTRADAS)					
SITUAÇÃO JURÍDICA DO IMÓVEL RURAL (ÁREAS REGISTRADAS)		DATA REGISTRO	CNS OU OFÍCIO	MATRÍCULA OU TRANSCRIÇÃO	REGISTRO
UF/MUNICÍPIO DO CARTÓRIO PI/SANTA FILOMENA		03/05/2013	79517	991	R-1
LIVRO OU FICHA		ÁREA (ha)			
428,2454		428,2454			
ÁREA DO IMÓVEL RURAL (ha)					
REGISTRADA	428,2454	POSSE A JUSTO TÍTULO	0,0000	POSSE POR SIMPLES OCUPAÇÃO	0,0000
				ÁREA MEDIDA 428,2454	
<b>DADOS DO DECLARANTE</b>					
NOME Tellus Brasil Participações S.A.				CNPJ/CPF 12.955.763/0001-75	
NACIONALIDADE BRASILEIRA				TOTAL DE PESSOAS RELACIONADAS AO IMÓVEL 1	
<b>DADOS DOS TITULARES</b>					
CPF/CPF		NOME		CONDIÇÃO	
12.955.763/0001-75		Tellus Brasil Participações S.A.		Proprietário Ou Possuidor Individual	
				DETENÇÃO (%) 100,00	
<b>DADOS DE CONTROLE</b>					
DATA DE LANÇAMENTO 05/11/2018	NÚMERO DO CCIR 21095779194	DATA DE GERAÇÃO DO CCIR 29/01/2019	DATA DE VENCIMENTO: **/**/****		
<b>TAXA DE SERVIÇOS CADASTRAIS (R\$)</b>					
DÉBITOS ANTERIORES	0,00	TAXA DE SERVIÇOS CADASTRAIS	39,14	VALOR COBRADO	39,14
		MULTA	0,00	JUROS	0,00
		VALOR TOTAL		*** QUITADO ***	
<b>OBSERVAÇÕES</b>					
1. ESTE DOCUMENTO SÓ TEM VALIDADE APÓS A QUITAÇÃO DA DEVIDA TAXA. 2. TAXA DE SERVIÇOS CADASTRAIS DO EXERCÍCIO JÁ QUITADA.					
<b>ESCLARECIMENTOS GERAIS</b>					
1. ESTE CERTIFICADO É DOCUMENTO INDISPENSÁVEL PARA DESMEMBRAR, APRENDER, HIPOTECAR, VENDER OU PROMETER EM VENDA O IMÓVEL RURAL, E PARA HOMOLOGAÇÃO DE PARTILHA AMIGÁVEL OU JUDICIAL "SUCESSÃO CAUSA MORTIS", DE ACORDO COM OS PARÁGRAFOS 1º A 3º DO ARTIGO 22 DA LEI 8.476/92. 2. SEMPRE QUE OCORREREM ALTERAÇÕES NO SEU IMÓVEL, SEJA POR COMPRA, VENDA, PERMUTA, DOAÇÃO, ETC. OU NAS CONDIÇÕES DE UTILIZAÇÃO E EXPLORAÇÃO, REALIZE DECLARAÇÃO DE ATUALIZAÇÃO ATRAVÉS DA DECLARAÇÃO ELETRÔNICA DE PROPRIEDADE (DOP) OU PROCEDURE INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE COLONIZAÇÃO E REFORMA AGRÁRIA - INCRA OU A DISTRICA MUNICIPAL DE CADASTRAMENTO - DMC, PARA ATUALIZAR O SEU CADASTRO RURAL. 3. AS INFORMAÇÕES DESTES CERTIFICADOS SÃO EXCLUSIVAMENTE CADASTRAIS, NÃO LEGITIMANDO DIREITO DE DOMÍNIO OU POSSE, CONFORME PRECISITA O ARTIGO 9º DA LEI 8.476/92. 4. A TAXA DE SERVIÇOS CADASTRAIS FORNECIDA COM BASE NAS LEGISLAÇÕES LEI 8.476/92, DECRETO LEI 1.875/96, LEI 8.476/92, DECRETO DE RENDITA E CANCELAMENTO DE RENDITA LEI 8.516/93. 5. O TERMO "IMPRODUTIVO" NO CAMPO "CLASSIFICAÇÃO FUNDIÁRIA" INDICA QUE O IMÓVEL RURAL NÃO ATINGIU OS ÍNDICES QUE O CLASSIFICARIAM COMO PRODUTIVO, DE ACORDO COM O ESTABELECIDO NO ARTIGO 9º DA LEI 8.476/92. 6. R\$ - FRACÇÃO MÍNIMA DE PARCELAMENTO DE ACORDO COM O ESTABELECIDO NO PARÁGRAFO 1º DO ARTIGO 9º DA LEI 8.476/92. 7. ÁREA CERTIFICADA CONFORME DISPOSTO NA LEI 10.257/01 E SUAS ALTERAÇÕES.					
<b>TAXA DE SERVIÇOS CADASTRAIS</b>					
1. O PRESENTE DOCUMENTO SÓ PODERÁ SER PAGO NO BANCO DO BRASIL. 2. O CCIR COM A TAXA DE SERVIÇOS CADASTRAIS NÃO QUITADO ATÉ A DATA DE VENCIMENTO DEVERÁ SER REEMITIDO PARA ATUALIZAÇÃO DOS CÁLCULOS DE MULTA E JUROS - LEIS 8.026/90, 8.947/94 E 8.889/91. 3. O CCIR NÃO É VÁLIDO COM A QUITAÇÃO DA TAXA. 4. A COBRANÇA DA TAXA DE SERVIÇOS CADASTRAIS OBEDECERÁ OS SEGUINTE CRITÉRIOS: A) PARA OS IMÓVEIS RURAIS CONSTANTES NO SNCR ANTES DO ÚLTIMO LANÇAMENTO MASSIVO, O VALOR DA TAXA É RELATIVO A TODOS OS EXERCÍCIOS NÃO LANÇADOS; B) PARA OS IMÓVEIS RURAIS INCLUIDOS NO SNCR APÓS O ÚLTIMO LANÇAMENTO MASSIVO, O VALOR DA TAXA REFERE-SE AOS EXERCÍCIOS NÃO LANÇADOS, A PARTIR DO EXERCÍCIO DE INCLUSÃO; C) O VALOR DE DÉBITOS ANTERIORES REFERE-SE ÀS TAXAS DE EXERCÍCIOS ANTERIORES AOS EXERCÍCIOS CORRESPONDENTES AO ÚLTIMO LANÇAMENTO MASSIVO, CUA COMPROVAÇÃO DE PAGAMENTO NÃO FOR PRESENTADA ATÉ A DATA DE EMISSÃO DESTES CERTIFICADOS.					

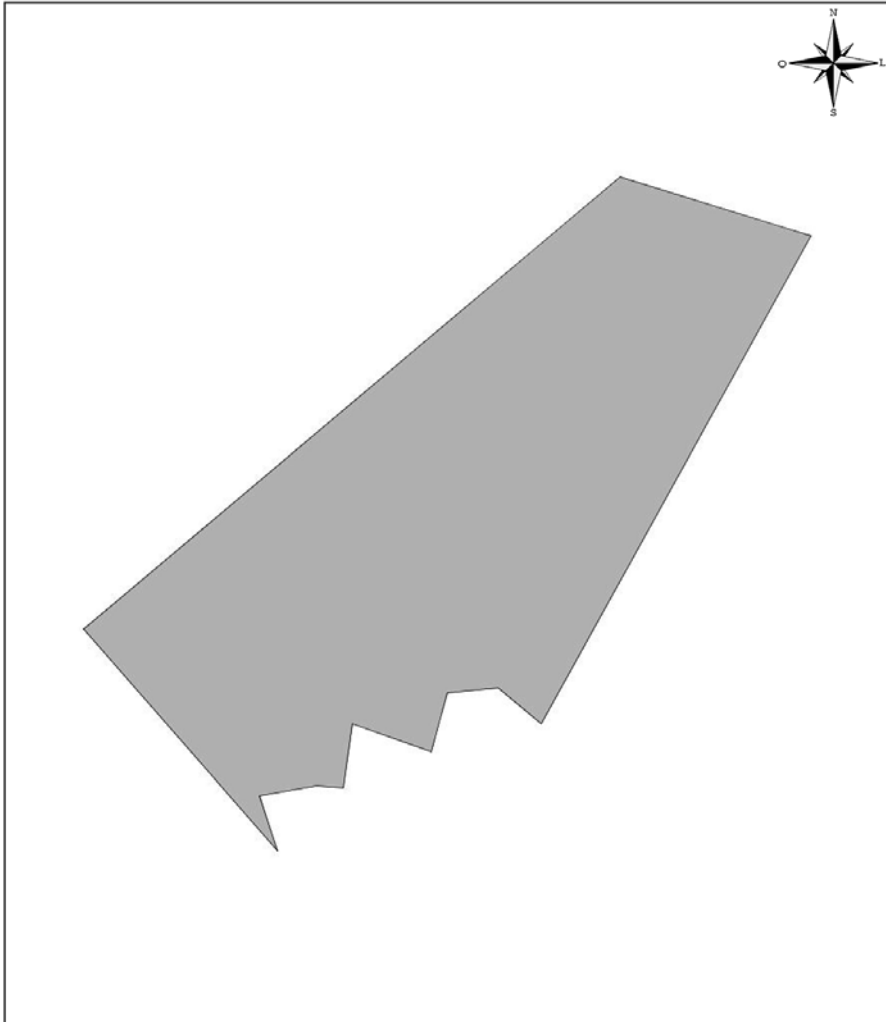


CASA CIVIL DA PRESIDÊNCIA DA REPÚBLICA  
INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE COLONIZAÇÃO E REFORMA AGRÁRIA - INCRA  
CERTIFICADO DE CADASTRO DE IMÓVEL RURAL - CCIR  
EMIÇÃO EXERCÍCIO 2018

CROQUI DO IMÓVEL RURAL: 950.165.108.162-0

ÁREA: 428.0042 ha

Escala: 1:20977 Formato: A4



Número de Autenticidade  
09210.06500.08417.02284

## Land titling and demarcation

The titling and recognition of collective territories of traditional communities is a fundamental mechanism for guaranteeing the security – legal, cultural and productive-necessary for these people to live on their land. In the south of Piauí, communities produce food for their existence; planning the planting to face droughts and keeping small stocks of pequi seeds and oils and buriti. As most communities in Piauí do not have official documents of land title, concession of possession nor a Declaration of Aptitude of the National Program for Strengthening Family Farming, they are unable to access public agricultural policies. While this restricts their production of surplus to local markets, agricultural livelihoods are fundamental to their economy and a guarantee of the right to food.

Even though some communities are already in possession of anthropological reports, as is the case of the territories of Melancias, Salto and Brejo do Miguel,<sup>2</sup> the titling processes are not progressing. The Settlement Project of Rio Preto, located in the municipality of Bom Jesus, Piauí, has the collective title mediated by the Rio Preto Settlement Residents Association. The settlement is titled with a total area of 2,793 ha, despite the total area required by settlers for adequate production is 4 thousand ha.<sup>3</sup> Even though the settlement was regularised in 2012 and demarcated by INCRA, the families in the Rio Preto Settlement suffer constant threats and pressure to sell the land.<sup>4</sup> This pressure is augmented by a government proposal in 2020 to divide and parcel the territory, which would further facilitate land sales. Titling of individual lots in this way can serve to facilitate the entry of these lands into the speculative market. This is contrast to community-oriented settlements whereby land is recognized for its collective use by, and belonging to, families as occurs in the Nova Descoberta Extractivist Project (São Raimundo das Mangabeiras-MA) and Alegre Settlement (Riachão-MA) is not possible to sell the lots. In this case the entry of a new resident needs to be ap-

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<sup>2</sup> In relation to the Brejo do Miguel community, the information is gathered in the Civil Survey 1.27.005.000203/2017-11.12 See SEI 54380.002410 / 200813 <https://www.cptnacional.org.br/publicacoes/noticias/cpt/4754-nota-publica-sobre-conflito-de-terras-no-assentamento-rio-preto-sul-do-piaui>Page 22

<sup>3</sup> See: SEI 54380.002410/2008

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cptnacional.org.br/publicacoes/noticias/cpt/4754-nota-publica-sobre-conflito-de-terras-no-assentamento-rio-preto-sul-do-piaui>

proved by the assembly, different to the buying and selling relationships that involves real estate and speculative agricultural land market. These mechanisms enhance the fixing families on the land, together with conditions for production and access to public policy that are evidently not being secured for the communities outlined below.

### **Threats and repression of rural communities**

According to community residents of Baixão do Aleixo in Barras (BA), since 2010 representatives of Terracal (Harvard) threaten them and demand that they sell their land to the company at a negligible price or that they abandon the land. The residents of Baixão do Aleixo claim that the company uses violence and intimidation, and that they encircle land even after the determination of judicial action in favour of the community. Terracal built fences on land in common use of residents and a masonry house that served as a guardhouse for security guards. In addition to the presence of security guards, company lawyers continue to “visit” areas of common use and intimidate the community. The same strategy was used by Terracal in Jerumenha (PI). In 2010 the community of Arthur Passos, in Jerumenha (PI), was certified as a quilombo remnant and until 2013 lived peacefully and preparing for their land demarcation. In 2013, when Terracal entered the areas, the threats began. Families are prohibited from accessing the area that ancestrally it was used for hunting, fishing, planting, to let the cattle roam, to harvest fruits such as pequi and cashew or medicinal herbs. These activities are prohibited by Terracal (Harvard) and the community was left with only the space of their homes. Families continue on the area with the hope of re-accessing the land where they have always worked and where they have their roots and livelihoods.

Threats are also documented in the labour action promoted by a former Terracal administrator against Harvard University. A second exchange of emails, attached to the file, showed that R\$ 127,000 was budgeted for the placement of 17,740 km of fences on the banks of the Gurgueia River to “prevent access of animal breeders in the Community Artur Passos to the area.” Communities lost access to plateau areas, given that the Serra do Centro (Tocantins and Maranhão), Chapada das Mangabeiras (Maranhão, Piauí), Chapadas do Alto Parnaíba and Serrado Penitente (Maranhão and Piauí),

Chapadões do Alto Itapecuru (Maranhão), Formation Sambaíba (Tocantins and Maranhão),<sup>5</sup> are the sites of land grabbing and agribusiness expansion in Matopiba. Communities want to continue using the area for grazing their animals; “The area of conflict is exactly that which we used before these farms were there,” say the riverside people of the Chupé Territory .

Fazenda Alvorada, bordering the riverside community Melancias. Currently, the Melancias territory suffers constant threats.



Photo: Débora Lima.

This statement is echoed by all communities where field visits were undertaken. The farms that produce commodities use the plateau areas to their purposes and the “lowlands” – the planting areas inhabited by traditional communities – as environmental reserves,<sup>6</sup> even though, in some cases the areas are still under legal dispute. In Piauí, families from Barra da Lagoa plead for a collective riverside territory next to the Chupé community and complain of invasion by the company in lowland areas: “It has a lot of reserves in lowland lands, where previously lived a lot of people, [...] Here, as the land has highs and lows it is not of interest (for

<sup>5</sup> IBGE. 1995 Geographical Map of Brazil: Scale1:5.000.000. Rio de Janeiro: IBGE.

<sup>6</sup> Brazil Federal Legislation insists that a given percentage of agricultural land is held as an environmental reserve

the company to expand monocultures). So they think about putting it as a reserve.”

The Melancia Territory is composed of six communities; Passagem da Nega (Passaginha), Sumidouro, Brejo das Éguas, Riacho dos Cavalos and Melancias I and II. Situated 94km from the heart of the Municipality of Gilbués (PI), it consists of 38 families who live at the banks of the Uruçuí-Preto River and live from the extraction of buriti, mangaba, pequi and cultivation of cassava, beans, rice and corn, free-range cattle raising in collective areas, pigs, sheep and chickens. The community is in the Land Regularization project of the Government of the State of Piauí financed by World Bank, through the Piauí Pílares Growth and Social Inclusion Project. The families of the territory are impacted by Fazenda Alvorada, located in the lowlands, and that has prevented the use of grasslands for cattle breeding. In addition to Alvorada, the Fazenda Passaginha has deforested and destroyed part of the riparian forest of the Uruçuí Preto River and its source. The violence of companies against communities has been constant and has worsened since 2019. In November 2019, Fazenda Alvorada expelled families from their areas of collective grazing of cattle and lotes. With police participation, farm security guards displaced part of the herd of one of the families. The action was carried out with the presence of the police of Gilbués-PI. No official document was presented to justify this arbitrary, authoritarian and violent action.<sup>7</sup>

### **Burning and deforestation**

The advance of fire between 2018 and 2019 is notorious in the Matopiba region. According to the reference satellite of the ‘Queimadas’ (Burning) project, used to compose the time series and allow trend analysis since the beginning of 2019, there were around 41 thousand fires in the whole of the Cerrado, just over a third of the observed throughout Brazil. In August 2019, there was an episode that became known as “day of fire”, when those representing the interests of land grabbers and agribusiness formed a group to set fire to areas in the Amazon and the Cerrado. According to the monitoring of the National Space Research Institute

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cptnacional.org.br/publicacoes/noticias/geral/5195-nota-publica-os-conflitos-no-campo-nao-param-no-sul-do-piaui>

(INPE), eleven of the twenty most burned municipalities in the Cerrado are in the Matopiba region. At the top of the list of fires, four of the five hardest-hit municipalities are also in the Matopiba. The second most affected municipality in August 2019 it was Mirador in Maranhã, with 506 incidents. This municipality, which hosts Mirador State Park (PEM), is one of the twenty points that contain the largest remnants of Cerrado in Matopiba. Between 9 August 9 and 9 September there were at least 312 outbreaks within its 437 thousand hectares of park. During fieldwork, we found the presence of fires in the Ludmila Farms and Laranjeiras, of Radar, in Santa Filomena (PI) and in areas close to Marimbondo Engano in Tasso Fragoso (MA).<sup>8</sup>

Peasants extinguishing outbreaks of criminal fires, embarra do Ouro, Tocantins.



Photo: Débora Lima.

The fire outbreak captured by satellites, with information from Chain Reaction Research,<sup>9</sup> was proven during our fieldwork also in Jerumenha, Piauí. We found traces of the fire in the area of Fazenda São Pedro, from Terracal (Harvard). Residents of the Artur Passos community believe that the fire has been caused as a means of intimidating people in the community. The area is fenced and company watchdogs do not allow the presence

<sup>8</sup> See also farms grabbed by Harvard and TIAA funds implicated in the burning, <https://grain.org/e/6340>

<sup>9</sup> <https://grain.org/e/6340>



of residents of this community. The burnings in the Cerrado are part of a land grabbing cycle, speculation with land, environmental degradation and deforestation of the biome.

A resident of the local communities describes that, “the felling, the fire burned our field that gave a lot of income. It ended our palm trees. It set our house on fire and that of my brother’s. At the time, if we didn’t have this well everything would have ended.” Another resident adds, “we are very concerned with the burnings because the fire destroys all the flora, the pequi flower burns, the cashew burns, it burns the trees that provide food. The fires also cause damage to streams, our streams are no longer filling.”

Both deforestation and fires in the Cerrado intensified recently and are not unrelated. In January 2019 to August 2020 approximately eight thousand square kilometres of Cerrado have been deforested. The climatic effects are evident to one resident who explained, “It is completely burned. I think with each passing year it gets hotter and when it catches a fire it cannot control it any more. And with the wind, in an area such the Cerrado, the fire leaps far”.

Fires are often used to expel residents of these communities. Other probable cause of the fires is the flammability of pesticides used by agribusiness, “Pesticides dry everything, toast everything. The desiccant it is the most dangerous because it dries. It’s that desiccant stays in the soil, leaves everything dry and just sprouts when the rain comes. And because everything is dry, it causes the fire, which descends to our areas,” reports a young man from one of the communities visited in Piauí.

At the Rio Preto Settlement, located in Santa Filomena, fires increased considerably in 2019. One of the settlers is working at the IBAMA Fire Brigade. There were criminal fires in the Brejo areas, Santa Clara and part of the Rio Preto Settlement. For this settler, “They burn so that later they can pass the chain [to up root vegetation] and create pasture or plant soy. The problem when burning the marsh is it can no longer provide planting. Everything dies. Fires are also used as a strategy for demobilising communities. In September 2019, while the Toncantins Peasant Articulation meeting was being held, several outbreaks of fire occurred near the place where the encounter took place. The flames reached a few meters from some peasant houses.



**Burnings in the municipality of Gilbués (PI) in the vicinity of the Melancias community.**



Photo: Débora Lima.

Companies that speculate with lands and promote environmental destruction may face exposure to unrecoverable risks in the process.<sup>10</sup> Despite this, we found an area that Brasil Agro deforested and burned in 2019 for the expansion of sugarcane. The focus of deforestation is located between the plateau area of the São José farm and the limits of Mirador State Park, as well as in the part of the legal reserve area of Fazenda Agroserra, which was acquired by Brasil Agro. Brasil Agro deforested, between 2012 and 2017, 21,690 hectares of native vegetation in the Cerrado, according to Chain Reaction Research (2018).<sup>11</sup> Between June and December 2018 the Ludmila Laranjeiras farm, of Radar, deforested a large area, according to reports from residents of the region in October 2019. In the first quarter of 2020, SLC deforested a total of 5,200 hectares of Cerrado at Fazenda Parceiro, located in Formosa do Rio Preto (BA), according to the report published by Chain

<sup>10</sup> <https://chainreactionresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Farmland-Report-2018.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <https://chainreactionresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/BrasilAgro-5.069-Hectares-de-Floresta-do-Cerrado-em-Risco-Iminente.pdf>21 <https://chainreactionresearch.com/the-chain-slc-agricola-moves-forward-with-clearing-5200-hectares-of-native-vegetation/>

Reaction Research in April 2020.<sup>12</sup> In May 2019, SLC had deforested 1,355 hectares. The fieldwork of the Network for Social Justice and Human Rights in 2019 also passed by some areas that have been deforested in the last two years in São Raimundo das Mangabeiras, Balsas, Fortaleza dos Nogueiras and Loreto. Deforestation is undertaken to expand agribusiness monocultures. The chain practice in which the extreme ends of a chain are attached to two tractors to uproot trees is a recurrent scene and the bulldozer an ever present entity. The Melancias community is close to Fazenda Paineira with its 12,040.07 hectares that was rented by the company, Celeiro, of landowner José Tiecher. According to reports, there was deforestation of approximately 543 ha. This farm directly impacts communities do Salto, Rio Preto and Correntino Settlement.

Fire in Tasso Fragoso (MA).



Photo: Débora Lima.

<sup>12</sup> <https://chainreactionresearch.com/the-chain-slc-agricola-moves-forward-with-clearing-5200-hectares-of-native-vegetation/>

## **Pesticide contamination, water use and pollution**

Residents of communities in the south Piauí and southern Maranhão, close to the farms of the investigated companies, report that rivers are drying up, that their flow has decreased and that there is a change in the rains. With the construction of wells or dams by companies for irrigation of monocultures, communities face the extinction of springs and nearby wetlands, pollution of rivers, scarcity of fish and local fauna.

One resident describes that, “There was a wetland that I had known since I was a child and it was the most beautiful in the world. But the farm called Insolo deforested 10,000 hectares and the marshes dried up. In the summer you go there and that’s the saddest thing”. Community residents are also impacted by the contamination of water of marshes and rivers, mainly by pesticides that contaminate the water used for drinking and food preparation. Deforestation and well construction by Insolo in the municipality of Baixa Grande do Ribeiro, in Piauí, close to the Salto communities, Morro D’Água and Rio Preto Settlement, caused enormous impact on the water level of rivers:

A farm next to Galilee, Insolo, deforested 10 thousand hectares and two marshes dried up. The deforestation it was at the head of the two marshes. Now there’s only water in the rainy season. Because before there were no wells on top of the mountains and today each large farm has a well. This causes our waters to dry out. Today we have more or less a track of three kilometers of the marsh that is drying up”, reports a community resident.

At the São José Farm, in São Raimundo Mangabeiras (MA), Brasil Agro has appropriated water with two four-kilometer dams, which decreased the capacity of recharge in the plateau areas. Itapecuru is already quite silted up from the abusive use of water by agribusiness, as researchers observed in a visit to a place known as ‘Desert Farm’, near to Fazenda São José. The amount of rain in the region fell by 8.4% in the last three decades, making Brasil Agro face operational and social risks.

**Irrigation ducts and channels of the São José Farm (Brasil Agro) in São Raimundo das Mangabeiras, close to the ParkState of Mirador.**



Photos: Débora Lima.

The increase in the use of pesticides in the region is notorious and its impact has been repeatedly reported by communities, both in the south of Maranhão and in the south of Piauí. Such increase coincides with the further release of pesticides for registration and commercialization in Brazil in 2019, when 502 new pesticides were released by the Ministry of Agriculture. Despite the serious public health crisis and a pandemic that is linked with the destruction of biodiversity, the government of Bolsonaro continues to approve the use and commercialization of new pesticides. The Ministry of Agriculture released 150 new pesticides between January and May 2020.<sup>13</sup>

Contamination by pesticides from agribusiness plantations in the Piauí's Cerrado is greater in communities of Salto, Morro d'Água and Settlement of Rio Preto, which are close to the Quilombo and Riozinho mountains, where there are several large farms, including Galilee and Insolo (Harvard). According to a resident of one of the communities visited in southern Piauí the farms use at least three types of poison:

They do aerial spraying, then use the worming agent directly on the ground and when the soybeans are already planted and ready for harvest they use a desiccant pesticide: 'And there is one more, which you can't endure with the headache, that they spray by plane'.

In southern Piauí there are riverside communities contaminated by agrotoxins, and the people suffer from skin deformities and respiratory problems. Another resident shows her foot and explains,

All I have to do is step on the mud of the river foot starts to crack. If I go a day without mud from the stream, I notice that it gets better. In a community here (Chupé) I met a lady with horrible feet. Everyone complains about pesticides.

Most companies located in the Matopiba performs aerial spraying that reaches, as a result of wind currents, the food planting areas of the communities. Families report that they often lose the food they plant because of contamination by pesticides;

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2020/05/13/mesmo-com-pandemia-governo-bolsonaro-ja-liberou-150-novos-agrotoxicos-este-anoPiauí>



When the plane turns around, the plane's tap is open and reaches the bottom. It falls on our plantations and burns our corn, beans, rice, broad beans. Before the large farms were in the mountains it didn't happen.

With the high application of pesticides by agribusiness in the plateaus, pests tend to seek more conducive places in the plantations of communities, further compromising food sovereignty and creating an environmental imbalance in the insect fauna. Besides grasshoppers and other animals like monkeys and rheas, which find less and less preserved areas of the biome for their food and reproduction there is a type of fungus that spreads rampantly throughout the territory of the Melancias and Chupé communities.

**Orange tree attacked by fungi in a family's yard Brejo das Éguas, in the Melancias community, in the municipality of Gilbués (PI).**



Photo: Débora Lima.

A community resident of Salto, in southern Piauí, reported that the water is poisoned during the October rainy season to April: “The water from the mountains goes down to the into the stream full of agrottoxins. Here we does not have a well or piped water; we just have water from the river and marshes to drink; we drink the poison that falls from the mountains in the river water.” Families are left with no alternative but to consume contaminated water to bathe, cook and plant during the rainy months. “We sense the smell of a squashed tick. It’s the smell I get when I take the glass in my mouth to drink. You get that smell and you just drink unfortunately, because he doesn’t have any other water“, reports the resident. “My godfather died of cancer of the lung two weeks ago. I think his death has to do with breathing pesticides. Never had I heard of cancer around here and now it’s something without limit”, reports another resident. “Also diarrhea is attacking with vomiting. Right now a little child of ten days I was so sick it was out of breath, only vomiting and crying. ” Another problem caused by agribusiness that affects the waters and lands of rural communities is the “open pit dump”, as the companies discard toxic materials like pesticide packaging, as explained by a resident;

There is the dump they make at the side of the mountain, which is another way for pesticides enter into our wetlands. Throw poisoned corn, agrottoxin barrels, all the rubbish from the farm the companies throw there. And its stays there. And the animals from the Cerrado consume the garbage and die, because everything is poisoned.

Animals also consume water from the same source in the rivers. “Cattle drink these waters and stay skinny, poisoned. It’s not hunger, because here for us it’s green. It is toxic water that is making us lose the cattle”. Residents of the Rio Preto Settlement note that there are few fish and in the rainy months they see dead fish frequently. Communities report that there has been a decrease in fish and in the months of rain they often see dead fish:

When we go fishing on the river, we see the small fish floating on top, dead. It’s because of the poison because before it didn’t happen. Before having this plantation that put poison with an airplane we didn’t see these small fish dead. Now we even see big fish killed because of the poison”.

Open pit dump in Chapada Piauiense.



Photo: CPT / PI file.

### **Precarious work and slave like labour**

Land speculation and expulsion of rural communities from their land generates greater exploitation of labour in the region, both on agribusiness farms and exploitation of the domestic work of women. Men usually work in planting, harrowing the land and driving the tractors, “Often people subject themselves to work to earn something. They pay 50 reais per day from 7:30 am to 5 pm”, reports a resident of south of Piauí. The performance of



agricultural real estate in the territories generates aggravating conditions for labor in the field when hiring services outsourced. With the new laws on outsourcing (13249 / 2017)<sup>14</sup> activities can also be outsourced without the obligation of Unions to track the sacking and hiring of workers.

According to documents from the company Brasil Agro in 2018 and research developed by Nascimento (2019), the company has 69 workers in Bahia and 125 in Maranhão, all on the São José farm. During a visit in 2019 to the São José and Parceira IV, we observed a direct relationship with Agroserra, the neighbouring farm, which shares various structures; for example, the housing of the workers. These two farms of Brasil Agro were acquired from the dismantling of Agroserra.

Brasil Agro worker who also provides services Agroserra. Nogueiras  
Fortress / São Raimundo das Mangabeiras (MA).



Photo: Débora Lima.

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil\\_03/\\_ato2015-2018/2017/lei/113429.htm](http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2015-2018/2017/lei/113429.htm)

In both cases, it is observed that the contracting of workers involves outsourcing through dozens of companies, in addition to outsourced machinery. Agroserra was assessed by the Ministry of Labour for slave-like labour in 2009 and 2012. Workers denounce the degrading conditions on agribusiness farms, as in the application of agrottoxins, “People here are going to work with the poison and have no experience, never worked with poison. The only protection they give is this mask that only covers the mouth”. They relate also a dramatic fatal case in soybean processing:

The last time I worked in the silo was carrying soybeans. There one guy died roasted, trying to unhook the silo. He was without safety equipment and died toasted. Soy is heated and it fell inside. It took three days to get him out of there. And what was done with soy? Nothing, they just took him.

The states of Matopiba are known providers of labour in contemporary slave networks in Brazil. Maranhão and Piauí also host slave labour as a function of the advance of agribusiness and in activities such as the extraction of carnauba wax and charcoal (CDVCH / CB and CPT, 2017: p. 20). In computing the denunciations of degrading working conditions – situations that endanger the health and life of the worker, exhausting workday, forced labour, bondage and debt – received by the CPT and other cases inspected in the Matopiba region, a 113 cases of slave labour are revealed, involving 1,358 people between 2003 and 2019. Livestock farms and soybean plantations are the main destinations for slave labour in Matopiba (CPT, 2020).

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## Conclusion

**P**easant, quilombola communities and indigenous people, whose existence in the Matopiba region dates back centuries, suffer continued and constant repression and violence with the expansion of agribusiness. Land speculation is linked to a recent weakening of labour and environmental protections and aggravates economic, social and environmental crises locally and more widely. The pronounced intensification and territorial expansion of commodity production in Matopiba causes destruction of biodiversity, land degradation and pollution of water sources. Deforestation and fires in the Cerrado have intensified recently. Matopiba communities demonstrate determination to retain their distinct livelihoods, food producing and cultural practices that depend on direct access to the soils, grasslands, wetlands and chapadas of the Cerrado. Their resistance to corporate capture sheds a new light on the violent transgressions on their territories and the fundamental need to guarantee their right to land in order to defend and preserve this precious biome.

São Pedro Farm, in Jerumenha (PI), close to the quilombola community, Artur Passos.



Photo: Daniela Stefano.

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