



## EDITORIAL

### **SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICTS: OBSTACLES TO POSTPONING THE END OF THE WORLD**

Activists, researchers, and holders of traditional knowledge come together, at this historic moment, to devise strategies for postponing the end of the world, following the paradigm and praxis proposed by Ailton Krenak. In his most recent writings, he offers reflections on how to confront the notions of “progress” and “development” that increasingly drive humanity toward collapse.

This editorial invite reflection on the outcomes produced by socio-environmental conflicts in Brazil and on how their deeply harmful consequences hinder efforts to postpone the end of the world.

Socio-environmental conflicts in Brazil are widely understood to reflect the country’s historical structure of inequality, in which land has become the central element in struggles for power. The complexity of these conflicts lies in the clash between two opposing conceptions of land: one that understands it as essential to life, and another that treats it as a commodity in the service of capital.

From this divergence in perspectives on land and territory emerges tension between distinct territorialities and, consequently, the intersection of agrarian, social, and environmental conflicts. Within this context, land grabbing, land concentration, the expansion of agribusiness, predatory mining activities, and other extractive models advance over traditional and rural territories.

In Torto Arado (2019, p. 262), a narrative that illustrates how art mirrors life, there is a passage borrowed here: “On the land, the strongest will always survive.” This statement gains renewed meaning when we observe that, despite the unchecked advance of capital, there is persistent resistance from those who understand that the relationship with land and territory is far more about “involvement” than about “development,” as demonstrated by the struggles and resistance of Nego Bispo and Maria Sueli.

For collective rural subjects—including Indigenous peoples, quilombola communities, traditional communities, and peasants—land is more than a means of production; it is the foundation of



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identity, culture, and subsistence. It is on the land that communities are formed, customs are sustained, and livelihoods are secured, forging a profound sense of belonging.

In contrast to this perspective, Brazilian history has consolidated land as a commodity of capital. The process of individualizing land and transforming it into private property was formally legalized through the Land Law of 1850. By conditioning ownership rights on purchasing power, this law restricted access to land and institutionalized land concentration.

How could rural populations, whose identities are deeply intertwined with land, compete with those who wield economic power? Capitalism, by continuously reinforcing purchasing power, transforms this situation into a self-perpetuating cycle in which those with greater capital invariably acquire more land. For this reason, land concentration remains one of the most significant impacts of agribusiness expansion.

Data from the 2017 Agricultural Census conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) illustrate the severity of this land crisis: large agricultural establishments (those exceeding 1,000 hectares) now control 47.5% of rural land, despite representing only 1% of all rural properties. By contrast, small establishments account for 50.2% of properties but occupy just 2.3% of the country's total land area.

The logic of land acquisition and concentration extends beyond social inequality, producing profound disruptions to ecosystems. The allocation of vast areas to the production of profitable commodities disregards the ecological and social functions of land. Environmental indicators are alarming: deforestation has already reached nearly 20% of the original Amazon rainforest. In the Atlantic Forest, only 12% remains, while biomes such as the Cerrado (51%) and the Pampa (46%) are also undergoing rapid conversion. Most recent deforestation has been concentrated in the Cerrado and the Amazon, driven by a production model that depends on forest clearing to expand.

The dispute over this essential resource, combined with the imposition of capitalist logic, generates persistent structural violence. The Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) recorded a total of 50,950 instances of rural conflict in Brazil between 1985 and 2023.

The majority of these conflicts (80.8%, or 41,109 cases) involve disputes over land. Importantly, 79.4% of rural conflicts stemmed from actions taken by hegemonic actors—both public and private—while most of the violence (60.9% of all recorded cases) targeted the occupation and possession of land by traditional peoples.



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In addition to land-related violence, significant labor conflicts are documented (10.09% of the total), with slave labor accounting for 4,332 cases and affecting more than 191,000 workers subjected to conditions analogous to slavery. Historical data reveal a marked escalation of rural conflicts, which increased by 444% between 1985 and 2023, with over half of Brazil's municipalities reporting at least one such conflict.

The agrarian issue in Brazil extends beyond the redistribution of land. A more fundamental question must be addressed: how can this essential resource—intrinsically linked to the identities of Indigenous peoples, traditional communities, and peasants—be removed from subordination to the concentration-driven logic of capital? What strategies can be employed to curb the advance of capital, prevent the invasion of traditional territories, and postpone the end of the world?

Accordingly, the recognition of land rights for peasants, Indigenous peoples, and traditional communities emerges as a central demand and a key strategy for restraining capital expansion and ensuring territorial and environmental protection. Land tenure regularization constitutes the formal legal process through which the constitutional right to land and territory is recognized. However, securing this right has proven to be a persistent challenge, resulting in recurring socio-environmental conflicts that expose these communities and their territories to ongoing legal insecurity and threats to physical integrity.

It can therefore be asserted that territorial protection is inseparable from the guarantee of the rights to land, identity, and culture of peoples who have, over centuries, developed ancestral technologies of territorial management and conservation.

Ensuring territorial rights through land tenure regularization is not merely a matter of social justice; it is also a strategic pathway to sustainability and to the reduction of socio-environmental conflicts. Given that traditional peoples and communities are historically recognized as the foremost stewards of nature, the demarcation and titling of their lands constitute an essential action for the future of humanity, serving as a means of postponing the “end of the world.”

It is urgent that Brazil advance in both understanding and guaranteeing socio-environmental and territorial justice. This requires the effective recognition and protection of the life territories of rural peoples, the containment of agribusiness and predatory mining, and the reversal of the historical legacy of the 1850 Land Law, which legitimized violence and environmental destruction through



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purchasing power. Only then will land cease to be a battlefield and once again become a source of life for all.

Goiânia, 12 dezembro de 2025.

Giovana Nobre Carvalho

Liliane Pereira de Amorim

Karla Karoline Rodrigues Silva

Isabel Christina Gonçalves Oliveira