Abstract:
The article establishes a critical analysis of development and dependency and the forms of appropriation of common goods and extraordinary profit as centralities of the monopolistic capital’s activities in the Brazilian countryside. From a reflection on the elements of dependency, the article identifies the main territorial determinations which arise from the productive internationalisation that is internalised in peripheral economies. The empirical basis of analysis is the extreme west of Bahia, the most intensive area of water extraction for soybean production in the Matopiba region. It is evident that the main territorial determinations of dependency in the context of appropriation of common goods are established based on the expansion of the productive matrix, landscape homogenisation, land speculation, water grabbing, violence and conflicts in the field, which, on the one hand, check the concept of development and, on the other hand, make the character of the dependency explicit.

Expressions of dependency: Green crimes and the phantasmagoria of ‘development’ in the extreme west of Bahia, Brazil

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Introduction

This article makes critical reflections on development and dependency based on the forms of spoliation of common goods and appropriation of extraordinary profit as central features of a monopolistic capital and its territorial determinations on the agricultural frontier. Such determinations are expressed as effects of commodity production, extractive withdrawals and socio-environmental damage that configure severe green crimes in regions of the accumulation frontier (Long et al., 2014; Lynch, 2020; Lynch et al., 2018). It is understood that these determinations are established on two scales: supra-state and intrastate. The first refers to the imposition of a logic of development that is constituted in the production and perpetuation of dependence in a game of forces of subordination to the world market and the internalisation of the internationalisation of monopoly capital (Marini, 2000; Santos, 1998); the second refers, in particular, to the process of spoliation of common goods (land and water; Ostrom, 1990) and its effects in the context of power relations that establish spatial conflicts and confrontations based on territorial constructs established by agribusiness and rural communities, the latter in fair opposition. These analyses have as an empirical base the extreme west of Bahia, which integrates the so-called agricultural frontier of MATOPIBA.

This reflection begins with the presentation of the main theoretical references on development and dependency and how their central categories of analysis demarcate the logics of production of space and territorial constitution which are linked to extractivist and neo-developmentalist logics (Milanez & Santos, 2013; Pitta et al., 2017; Svampa, 2013, 2019) and which gather to explain the capacity for green crimes to materialise in the studied area. These categories of analysis are here understood as: manufacturing, extraction of ‘common goods’, commodity production, production of value, labour exploitation and environmental sustainability.

In addition to the overexploitation of labour power and the structural elements of industrial transformation and consumption that characterise differentiation and the centre–periphery relationship in Marxist dependency theory (Amaral, 2012; Traspadini, 2016), the extraction of value from the control of common goods, such as water (water grabbing) and land (land grabbing), is considered to be foundational in the dynamics of internalisation of dependency given the central agrarian characteristics of the periphery which guide the composition of extraordinary profit and are geographically expressed in a set of territorial determinations (Souza & Borges, 2017) which arise from this logic of internationalisation of the internal productive structure. This process makes dependence not an external phenomenon but a manifestation of the internal (social, political, economic and cultural) structures of the country and highlights development as a phantasmagoria (Marx, 1980) of the capitalist centre imposed on the periphery.

Theoretical support

The discussion of developments that we present here has as its theoretical framework the studies on the analyses of the centre–periphery relations initiated in the years 1950–1970, which were at the time centred on development and underdevelopment. These studies consolidated theses and public policy incursions in the face of the flagrant social and economic inequality between countries which deepened in the framework of the imperialist relations that were being established.

From this debate derives the naïve and/or idealistic reflections on the forms of gradual resolution of this process among structuralists, Schumpeterians and institutionalists. In the case of the first, we will focus on the ECLAC structuralists (Frank, 1966; Furtado, 2007; Prebisch, 1949), according to whom endogenous economic policies would alter aggregate demand and promote the strengthening of domestic savings, thus favouring development and the resolution of central knots and dis-
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crepancies in the composition of value. The Schumpeterians supported their assumptions on the issue of innovation in sectors that still had comparative advantages (supply of common goods), thereby enhancing their internal transformation (manufacturing) and value addition. Finally, the (neo)institutionalists based their resolutions on an historical form of structuring of the state and, notably, factors such as corruption and lack of strength of stakeholders represent the delay. We take an extremely critical position towards these logics, sustained by the Marxist theory of dependency. Without the internal overcoming of capitalist relations, these inequalities find no resolution; their central elements are markedly supported in the forms of production of value and its appropriation; and technologies do not have an innovative character without structural changes in industrial and science and technology policies.

It is imperative to recognise that the institutional dimension is not a process of consolidation of internal strength but rather a reflection of external political impositions. Therefore, institutional weakness and even corruption are not endogenous and do not carry the dynamics of the interposition of stakeholder interests; in fact, the central condition of the periphery is mirrored in its capacity to allow the overexploitation of labour, the appropriation of common goods and unequal exchanges which perpetuate and deepen dependence (Marini, 2000; Santos, 1998).

These theses lead to an important analytical element in referring to the Latin American economies and their forms of insertion into the world order which concerns the availability of ‘common goods’. In this area, reflections reverberate on a kind of curse known as the ‘resource‒curse literature’ which tends to establish and/or determine the path of economic development in these countries (Brunnschweiler & Bulte, 2008). These reflections are also treated by structuralists, Schumpeterians and institutionalists and are flagrantly dismissed in Marxist analyses of dependency.

The bias of structuralists with respect to this debate is that the abundance of ‘common goods’ and their specialisation would become an obstacle to development (Frank, 1966; Hirschman, 1958; Prebisch, 1949). This view gained force with the research of Sachs and Warner (1995, 2001) who searched for empirical evidence of this curse. This debate has regained strength since the commodities boom and the enactment of neo-extractivist and/or neo-developmentalist policies that have wrecked popular governments in Latin America in the first quarter of this century (Milanez & Santos, 2013; Wanderley, 2017). These policies further denote the subservience of popular governments and their ‘only way out’ in the formation of foreign exchange and the financing of income policies once the governments have abandoned concrete strategies to counter the imposing neoliberal policies which turn them into puppets.

The Schumpeterian matrix analyses would cancel the curse with respect to investments that renew and would expand the extractive bases of natural resources with innovations that reverberate (spill-over effects) in order to produce a productive diversification and to consolidate linkage effects (forward or backward; Ville & Wicken, 2012; Wright & Czelusta, 2004) without recognising the limits of patents and public investment in research, development and innovation (RDI). Finally, the neo-institutionalists seek more notorious reasons for why the curse is not realised or actually does not exist, given that the factor inhibiting development is linked to the weakness of institutions and, in this process, marked by a liberal logic which suggests that the answer lies in the constitution of a minimum state. This current or reflected understanding that the control and regulation structures are corrupt presents the absence of a strategy of ‘grabber friendly institutions’ which favour rentierism and the reproduction of wealth outside of productive activities and denote the absence of an entrepreneurial model that could only be produced by consolidating an essentially competitive environment (Mehlum et al., 2006).
All of these views blur the characteristics of the monopoly and the imperialist political–economic actions of its constitution. A set of anachronistic readings on the understanding of the state and its role in the production of value affiliate with the analytical logics of control, regulation and domestication of capitalism in its stage of greatest monopolistic deepening: imperialism.

In the light of these analyses, we highlight three central elements that bring together these discourses of ‘development’ in our empirical research base. The first is that the centrality of the transformation of industry would carry out this process by consolidating, in a manner close to the Schumpeterians, the capacity to contain the deterioration in the terms of trade and increase the supply of labour and remuneration, establishing resolutions in the fields of the mass of salaries and internal demand. The second element relates to the institutionalists, who would point to the strengthening of regulatory agencies in a profound contradiction between strong state and minimum state at the expense of an idealistic perspective that the state is not embodied in a structure linked to the production and reproduction of value (Braunmühl, 1983; Hirsch, 2010). The third is also ideologically established in the understanding of a domesticated capitalism in which a new relationship between society and nature, for which innovation is the way out, as well as between economy and ethics would give rise to a new (green) economy that would produce positive effects on development in a horizontal and ecologically sustainable manner.

In antithesis, we follow a critical perspective which is marked by the assumptions of historical and dialectical materialism, that is, the Marxist Theory of Dependence, by which it is imperative to recognise that the characteristics of this development are not established as linear and staged processes. Rather, the centre–periphery relationship is marked by a dimension of dependence that expresses the subordination between formally independent nations in which the relations of production, also subordinated, ensure an expanded reproduction of this condition (Marini, 2000, p. 4). In this process, the analysis should always be relational and reveal that the demand for primary products (in our analysis, agricultural products) by the large central industry consolidates its manufacturing specialisation and determines the peripheral specialisation in the production of commodities. Such mechanisms consolidate the extraction of extraordinary profit in the face of the technical progress of their economies, the inequality of exchanges and the monopolistic control they have over the production and circulation of goods.

According to Luce (2018), this process is materialised by a profound ‘non-identity’ between the production of value (produced surplus value) and the appropriation of value (appropriated surplus value) and is marked by low-cost production based on the overexploitation of labour and the national intensity of labour as a unit of measurement of value generated and appropriated by social formation. Our observations bring into this debate the processes of control and appropriation of common goods at low cost, while considering territorial determinations as reflexive contributions to extraordinary profit.

In this field, such dynamisms are associated with the concepts of ‘land grabbing’ and ‘water grabbing’ as proposed by several authors, among them Franco et al. (2012), Rulli et al. (2012), The Oakland Institute (2011), Mehta et al. (2012), Woodhouse (2012), Wolford et al. (2013), Souza (2016), Pitta et al. (2017) and Pereira and Pauli (2016). It is considered that this logic of control has left an indelible mark in Brazil that cannot be side-lined and, according to Oliveira (2020), it is the phenomenon of grilagem, not because it is expressed as a particularity of control but because its realisation implies the most violent face of peripheral and dependent capitalism. This brand results in control, the production of value and the realisation of extraordinary profit considering the levels of organic composition of capital, that is, in the degree of exploitation of labour (relative surplus value), in the expansion and intensification of land use (agricultural production and productivity),
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in the appropriation of water in the production process and in the social, environmental and economic crimes (socio-environmental dumping) that result from them.

Methodology

To carry out this research, we consolidated a detailed literature review of the central concepts of analysis that theoretically and methodologically respond to the assumptions of the dependency theory, as presented in the initial sections of this article. In the second moment, we established a critical reading of the processes of appropriation and territorial determination of large economic groups in the trajectory of commodity production in the region. These processes resulted in analytical frameworks of land and water conflicts demarcated by land grabbing and colonisation in the region. The data on water conflicts and land conflicts were prepared based on the records published by the Pastoral Land Commission between the years 2011 and 2020, given that in the years prior to this period, the data were not presented in individualised form (land conflicts and water conflicts; Alves, 2009, 2015; CPT, 2020). Based on data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics – IBGE (Municipal Agricultural Survey – PAM, 2019), we then produced the maps of the advance of the production matrix (soybean farming) in the far west of Bahia and the dynamics of water appropriation and use in the region by irrigation systems, data available from the National Water Agency (BRASIL/ANA, 2020). Prices and demands for land (2000–2016) were available only for this period in the Agriannual reports (FNP Consultoria & Negócios). Prices were corrected by the General Price Index – Domestic Availability (IGP – DI; Getúlio Vargas Foundation – FGV) for June 2021 and converted to dollars at the commercial exchange rate on the same date. The timeframe of the research is from 2000 to 2019, with reduced internal variations within this timeframe due to unavailability of some data.

It is worth noting that for the water use distribution map, in addition to the data made available by BRASIL/ANA (2020) cited above, the allocation data surveyed by Cunha (2017) were also used. The software used for the preparation of all maps was ArcGIS Version 10.8 (ESRI et al., 2020).

Results and discussion

The cerrado, Brazil’s second largest biome, has become the great stage for agribusiness. Low land prices, water potential for planting and the relief that favours mechanisation, including the illegal appropriation of public lands, explain the investments in the region, constituting the MATOPIBA agricultural frontier which covers the states of Maranhão, Tocantins, Piauí and Bahia. This logic of production and appropriation of value competes with a socio-spatial dispute as well as projects in territorial consolidation, considering that the qualitative change between space and territory refers to power as the ultimate epistemic centrality of this category. (Raffestin, 1993). In this sense, territory is always established a posteriori from a set of socio-spatial practices (Souza, 2009) that result in territorial determinations, understood as state (situation) and movement of class projects towards hegemony (Souza & Borges, 2017).

The materiality of this value logic therefore gains configurations of land use, occupation and control in which the State has effective centrality (Wolford et al., 2013), especially in the Brazilian case by establishing a credit policy that benefits oligopolistic sectors and that not only ratifies but gives consent to the processes of land grabbing in the country (Frederico, 2018; Jesus, 2020; Oliveira, 2020; Pitta & Mendonça, 2017).

This has been the configuration of soybean production processes in the far west of Bahia and it is expressed as a first determination, the consolidation of an agricultural commoditisation and the
territorial domination of its production relations. Map 1 shows the crop expansion trajectory in the region and Map 2 shows the absolute variation of territorial occupation in the period from 2000 to 2019.

Map 1
Territorial expansion of soybean cultivation in extreme West Baiano – Brazil/2000–2010–2019 (ha)

Map 2
Variation of territorial expansion of soybean production – extreme West Baiano – Brazil/2000–2009
The territorial expansion of the production matrix concurs not only with a set of environmental damages from the use of pesticides (Bombardi, 2017) but also with a change in labour relations and land use which expanded wage earning, leasing and conflict dimensions. In this sense, it is not only a dynamic of spatial domination but of the determination of the production of value and the appropriation of surplus value, followed by a process of income extraction which implies the imposition of systems of social control and economic power which are, therefore, territorial. Map 2 shows the variation in this growth over the period, reaching dizzying heights of over 400%, due to a dynamic of monoculture productive specialisation which consolidates one of the deep territorial determinations of dependency and the hegemony of a productive matrix and the destruction of cerrado areas.

The expansion of monoculture competes with a second analytical category of determination that refers to homogenisation. Souza and Cabero Diegues (2012) stated that the homogenisation of a landscape expresses the established power relations as form, content and method of production of space, breaking the separation between appearance and essence in the spatial dynamics. The central issue is to understand that the landscape always brings together an ontological property which is a materiality of the concrete projection of human action in a given historical time and geographic space that expresses the appropriation through historically constructed power relations – according to Souza (2009), the territories – which effectively break with fragmented, univocal and dichotomous readings and that has been raised many times in the very abandonment of the use of this category in detriment to others – such as space, place and even region (Fulino & Souza, 2016).

In this sense, the landscape in capitalist logics denotes processes of geographical differentiation and equalisation, while in peripheral economies, its most evident determination is an equalisation of the processes of production of value linked to homogenisation, consolidating what Wolford (2021) calls plantationocene. Souza and Cabero Diegues (2012) analysed the processes of homogenisation of the landscape in Spain which was faced with the expansion of biofuel production and the economic crisis of 2008 and used Theil’s model to denote its impacts on the agricultural productive diversity of the country. The analysis of this territorial determination in the far west of Bahia denotes a process of hegemonic cultural entropy. In this case, soybean acts as a hole that absorbs the other agricultural activities, competing with the reduction of productive diversity and, above all, of food crops. Thus, the closer to 0, the more homogeneous is the analysed area. Map 3 shows the pattern of entropy of the landscape in the region of analysis and the increase in the homogenisation pattern. The indices below 1.1(H) are linked to almost all of the municipalities in the area of analyses and sharply contrast with levels of 2.6(H) or 3.2(H) present in the Spanish Autonomous Communities. It is worth noting that if all production linked to the logic of international markets (corn, for example) were added, we would have an even more accentuated pattern of homogenisation. An important example of the seriousness of this picture relates to the production of cassava, the main regional food element, which was reduced from a production area of 21,600ha in 2002 to 2,656ha in 2019, denoting the trajectory of food insecurity and the increase in prices of basic foodstuffs. Overall, this process, points to a trajectory of dependence on the external market, a markedly regressive specialisation due to the simultaneous amplification of the weight of sectors intensive in common goods and the deindustrialisation of the economy (Carneiro, 2017).

This dynamic of use, occupation, control of land and homogenisation of the landscape has established an increase in demand for land as investment and speculation. These speculative movements are reflected in the price trajectory. Map 4 shows the price performance in the period from 2002 to 2016 based on data from FNP Consultoria e Negócios (2002).
Map 3

Map 4
Agricultural land prices in the extreme West Baiano – Brazil/2002–2009–2016 (US $/ha)
We observe the increase in prices and how these dynamics do not only bring together a quantitative aspect of area and market but also denote a qualitative change in the relationship between production and social reproduction, since production is not food production and breaks with cultural food processes and productive knowledge. Land becomes an object of consumption and exchange value, which is clearly configured as a rupture in ways of life and in the relationship with nature.

The trajectory of land prices and its financialisation logic alter social relations of production. The consequences of these positive inflections in prices are associated with the expansion of the market and leasing practices as well as the types of use and the abandonment of regional food activities, thereby establishing conflicts among peasant populations over communal uses (common pastures). These consequences also reverberate towards a change of vision from labour land to business land, altering elements of the peasant ethos and of other landowners and further altering their sense of social reproduction, whether through wage earning or through the rent-seeking position that a few start to assume in the logic of commodity production.

Map 5 highlights the evolution of prices in the period of analysis and the appreciation in prices in increasing percentages in the same direction as the territorial expansion of crops, reaching average levels of 200% in price variation. This relationship between use, occupation and control is associated with the behaviour of agricultural activities and, above all, the boom in commodity prices (Svampa, 2013, 2019). In addition, power relations materialise with land-grabbing systems and socio-spatial conflicts that represent in breadth and depth the acute class contradiction in the region (Oliveira, 2020).

Land appropriation by agribusiness to meet the international demand for products increases worldwide the pressure on the use of common goods, particularly water (The Oakland Institute, 2011). According to data from the Conjuncture Report on Water Resources in Brazil (BRASIL/ANA,
about 66.1% of the water consumed in the country in 2019 was used for irrigation, followed by animal supply with 11.6%, an activity also associated with agribusiness.

Based on data collected by the Irrigation Atlas prepared by the National Water Agency (BRASIL/ANA, 2020), it is possible to observe the intensification of water consumption given the expansion of agro-hydrobusiness (Cunha, 2017; Thomaz Júnior, 2010). The main soybean producing municipalities in Bahia total about 1,564 pivot centres, irrigating about 187,979 hectares. Among those municipalities, we highlight São Desidério and Barreiras, which have 431 and 385 pivot centres, respectively, and in these municipalities, the average flow is 7,500m³/h in 28 irrigation days per month, as opposed to the average flow of the São Francisco River Basin, which reached 49,260m³/h. This means that the ANA’s reduced action only shows the impossibility of controlling and domesticating capital in its eagerness to appropriate and control water and expand the production of value in relation to the number of permits, tube wells, and pivots installed in the region, as can be seen in map 6. The expansion of water extraction is not restricted to a control process, as presupposed by institutionalists, but expresses the managerial role of the state in ratifying the mechanisms of spoliation from its regimes of authorisations as well as indicating the trajectory that will be established in the expansion zones of MATOPIBA in other areas with rainfall and fluvial regimes much more vulnerable to this area of analysis.

These processes indicate the reduced supervisory structure and state control action. They also indicate that the regulatory agencies formalise the capitalist exploitation and use of common goods to the detriment of the distribution to and access from communities. This debate breaks with any idealist institutionalist perspective, considering that the state is a direct agent in the processes of commodity expansion and that it acts from the institutionalisation of social, political and legal practices as a mechanism to guarantee the realisation of the value form (Souza, 2021).
All these factors are confronted with the deep imprint of land grabbing and territorial control by the large capital operating in the region. Companies such as SLC Agrícola, Sollus Capital, Radar, Tiba Agro, Ceagro Agrícola and Cantagalo General Grains (Frederico, 2018; Jesus, 2020) promote spoliation and conflict in the countryside. The historical land conflicts are associated with water conflicts; these two dimensions are sides of the same coin with one result: the production of value, and it is worth noting that water conflicts unfold in the aspects of quality and availability (quantity) and access to water faced by local communities (CPT, 2020).

Maps 7 and 8 show the number of families involved in land and water conflicts in the municipalities of the far west of Bahia, showing not only the expansion of control and territorial construct but also the problems of land grabbing and dispute over land and water that affect about 78,000 families. Water conflicts are concentrated in the south of the area of analysis, and it is important to note that they develop from the process of expropriation of agricultural land, considering that the advance of capital over land in a second moment reverberates on water given the intensification of production in the region.

Map 7
This is the last territorial determination to be addressed and the most violent because it compromises peasant social reproduction, their ways of life and their relations with the environment. It is materialised in the number of murders of peasant leaders who fight for their rights as they confront the exploitation and concentration of land and income.

**Conclusion**

This analytical framework has allowed us to infer that the logic of dependency is expressed internally in a dynamic of spatial production by its territorial determinations and deepens in the forms of constitution of the power of agribusiness. It is considered that green crimes are territorial determinations of dependency that express internalisation, that is, the internalisation of the internationalisation of production, finance and, therefore, of power which makes these spatialities become territories of accumulation and territories of sacrifice by exposing these communities to various forms of violence.

The imposing forces of agribusiness are amplified by the state’s main action in institutional arrangements, in the regularisation of land occupation processes and in the offer of credit and investment policies to economic groups. These policies accelerate the appropriation of space, consolidating these regions as expressions of the class struggle which distances them from any sphere of understanding of what development would be since they exclude social subjects from the results of their work and deprive them of the totality of human life, fragmenting it and fixing it as merchandise. They also reveal the face of violence; the green crimes are only inaugural processes to exterminate ways of life and the very lives of those who resist their destructive logics. Dependency thus presents its relational dimension between centre–periphery, with the pernicious evidence that situations of violence and environmental and social destruction materialise with the internationalisation of the...
internal structure of the periphery, since production and product materialise into extraordinary profit which is realised in the centre of capitalism. This process concludes capitalism’s logic of geographical expansion, the result of its laws of centralisation and concentration. Green crimes are the harmful effects of dependency, the very phantasmagoria of the ideology of development.

**Bibliography**


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