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ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC POLICIES IN BAHIA AND THEIR EFFECTS ON TRADITIONAL PEOPLES AND COMMUNITIES

POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS DE MEIO AMBIENTE DA BAHIA E SEUS EFEITOS PARA OS POVOS E COMUNIDADES TRADICIONAIS

POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS AMBIENTALES DE BAHIA Y SUS EFECTOS PARA LOS PUEBLOS Y COMUNIDADES TRADICIONALES

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ABSTRACT: Environmental policies in Bahia represent an important field of research into environmental racism. In this article we explore two important aspects, linked to each other, of environmental racism in Bahia: the context of violence and environmental conflicts that traditional peoples and communities (TPC) experience; and the role those public policies on the environment, water resources and climate play in sustaining this situation. We carried out a bibliographical review of research in this field, which indicates that these policies are selective, undemocratic, and their implementation is related to a broad spectrum of conflicts. We systematized data on environmental conflicts, which reveal the worsening of the scenario in Bahia over the last 20 years; an increase in water-related conflicts within the total number of conflicts; the predominance of TPC among the social categories involved; and government entities and environmental policies as important instigators of conflicts.

KEYWORDS: Public policies. Environment. Traditional peoples and communities. Socio-environmental conflicts. Environmental racism.

***RESUMO**: As políticas ambientais baianas são um importante campo de investigação sobre racismo ambiental. Neste artigo, exploramos dois importantes aspectos, vinculados entre si, do racismo ambiental na Bahia: o quadro de violência e conflitos ambientais que os povos e comunidades tradicionais (PCT) vivenciam; e o papel que as políticas públicas de meio ambiente, recursos hídricos e clima exercem na sustentação desse quadro. Realizamos revisão bibliográfica das pesquisas neste campo, e o corpus analisado aponta que essas políticas são seletivas, pouco democráticas, e sua aplicação está relacionada a um amplo espectro de conflitos. Sistematizamos os dados de conflitos ambientais da Comissão Pastoral da Terra e da Fiocruz, que revelam o agravamento do cenário na Bahia nos últimos 20 anos; o aumento na participação dos conflitos por água no total dos conflitos; a predominância dos PCT entre as categorias sociais envolvidas; e as entidades governamentais e políticas ambientais como importantes geradoras dos conflitos.*

***PALAVRAS-CHAVE**: Políticas públicas. Meio ambiente. Povos e comunidades tradicionais. Conflitos socioambientais. Racismo ambiental.*

***RESUMEN**: Las políticas ambientales bahianas constituyen un importante campo de investigación sobre racismo ambiental. En este artículo exploramos dos aspectos importantes, vinculados entre sí, sobre racismo ambiental en Bahía: el contexto de violencia y conflictos ambientales que viven los pueblos y comunidades tradicionales (PCT); y el papel que juegan las políticas públicas en materia de medio ambiente, recursos hídricos y clima en el sostenimiento de esta situación. Realizamos una revisión bibliográfica de las investigaciones en este campo, que señala que estas políticas son selectivas, antidemocráticas y su aplicación está relacionada con un amplio espectro de conflictos. Sistematizamos datos sobre conflictos ambientales, que revelan el agravamiento del escenario en Bahía en los últimos 20 años; el aumento de la participación de los conflictos hídricos en el total de los conflictos; el predominio de los PCT entre las categorías sociales involucradas; y las entidades gubernamentales y las políticas ambientales como importantes generadoras de estos conflictos.*

***PALABRAS CLAVE**: Políticas públicas. Medio ambiente. Pueblos y comunidades tradicionales. Conflictos socio-ambientales. Racismo ambiental.*

Introduction

In Bahia—the Brazilian state with the largest quilombola population—environmental policies have failed to protect and ensure access by traditional peoples and communities (TPCs) to the natural resources they rely on for their physical, cultural, economic, and ancestral reproduction, diverging from policies aimed at the sustainability of these populations. According to data from the 2022 Census, Bahia is home to 400,000 quilombolas, corresponding to 2.8% of the state's population and 30% of Brazil's quilombola population (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics [IBGE], 2023). The Census also reveals an alarming figure: only 5.2% of quilombolas live in officially delimited territories, and just 0.1% reside in titled territories (IBGE, 2023). The lag in land tenure regularization of quilombola territories places these communities in disputes over access to environmental resources. The resulting landscape is one of widespread socio-environmental conflicts involving not only quilombola communities but TPCs in all their diversity. These groups have mobilized the concept of environmental racism to address this reality, leading the struggle for environmental justice in the state with national articulation and impact, and highlighting the responsibility of state environmental agencies—such as in the recent manifesto, "Situations of Violations of the Economic, Social, Cultural, and Environmental Human Rights of Quilombola and Fishing Communities in Bahia: Environmental Racism Is the Hallmark of Bahia's Licensing Authority," issued by the Artisanal Fishers' Movement (MPP) and the National Quilombola Coordination (ANQ) (2023).

The role of governmental environmental agencies and public environmental policies in producing environmental racism has been identified since the origin of the term, within the context of the U.S. Black civil rights movements of the 1980s. At that time, a study published by the Commission for Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ showed that the siting of hazardous waste facilities authorized by the federal environmental agency was statistically explained by race, and that Black and Latino communities were the most exposed to such waste (Commission for Racial Justice, 1987). Shortly thereafter, sociologist Bullard (1993) published *Confronting Environmental Racism*, warning that racism was embedded in the formulation and implementation of environmental protection policies, that environmental agencies failed to protect Black populations from pollution, and that Black people were excluded from governmental decision-making spaces. In the Brazilian context, Bahian scholars Rocha and Santana Filho (2008) have made important contributions to the concept of environmental racism, arguing that it must encompass the analysis of the social, cultural, and

environmental degradation to which entire communities have historically been subjected. They maintain that the socio-environmental problems faced by TPCs are revealing of environmental racism in Brazil.

This article examines environmental policies in Bahia, focusing on their role in the production of environmental racism through socio-environmental conflicts involving traditional communities. It presents partial findings from the ongoing doctoral research titled *Bahian Environmental Policy in the Voices of Quilombola Women: From Environmental Racism to Buen Vivir*, conducted by the first author—an environmental and sanitation engineer, researcher in gender, women's, and feminist studies, and public environmental servant—under the supervision of the second author—a sociologist and researcher of race, racism, and racial relations; both are capoeira practitioners and adherents of Candomblé. It is from this positionality that we conduct this research, drawing on the epistemic privilege afforded by the combination of lenses developed across these spaces of knowledge production: technical, bureaucratic, academic, and traditional.

Here, environmental policies are understood as the set of public policies concerning the environment and water resources, climate change, and environmental education, presented in Table 1. In the state of Bahia, all are coordinated and implemented by the same institutions: the Bahia State Secretariat for the Environment (SEMA) and the Bahia Institute for the Environment and Water Resources (INEMA). Table 1 also presents the national environmental policies and the state and national policies for TPCs.

Table 1 – National and Bahia State Public Policies on the Environment and on Traditional Peoples and Communities

Public Policies	National	State
For the environment, water resources, climate, and environmental education	National Environmental Policy (Law No. 6,938/1981)	State Environmental and Biodiversity Protection Policy (Laws No. 10,431/2006 and No. 12,377/2011)
	National Water Resources Policy (Law No. 9,433/1997)	State Water Resources Policy (Laws No. 11,612/2009 and No. 12,035/2010)
	National Policy on Climate Change (Law No. 12,187/2009)	State Policy on Climate Change (Law No. 12,050/2011)
	National Environmental Education Policy (Law No. 9,795/1999)	State Environmental Education Policy (Law No. 12,056/2011)
For traditional peoples and communities	National Policy for the Sustainable Development of Traditional Peoples and Communities (Decree No. 6,040/2007)	State Policy for the Sustainable Development of Traditional Peoples and Communities (PEDSPC), Decree No. 15,634/2014

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The State Policy for the Sustainable Development of Traditional Peoples and Communities recognizes the importance of environmental preservation for the (re)production of life among these groups: it explicitly addresses the fight against environmental racism, and the environmental dimension and protection of natural resources in traditional territories are embedded in its definitions, principles, objectives, and instruments. However, environmental policies make no mention of combating racism—not even environmental racism—nor do they refer to race as a category in their principles, objectives, or guidelines. Moreover, although—with the exception of the climate policy—they include some references to TPCs, none establishes instruments or actions aimed at ensuring the protection of traditional territories and/or the natural resources used by these populations.

This article is divided into two sections, in addition to this introduction and the final considerations. In the section *The Field of Bahian Environmental Policies: State of the Art*, we present a review of research on environmental policies in the state of Bahia and their instruments. The objectives are to contribute to consolidating Bahian environmental policies as a multidisciplinary field of study and to provide an overview of the state of the art in this field: which universities and graduate programs have engaged with it, the different themes and approaches explored, and a synthesis of the main findings of this body of research. Until now, this field of study has lacked a systematic review of the research conducted in Bahia.

The literature review was conducted using the Institutional Repositories of federal and state universities in Bahia, the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations[3] and the CAPES Journal Portal[4]. We employed different combinations of the following keywords: public policies; environment; environmental policy; environmental policies; Bahia. From the search results, we selected—based on titles, keywords, and abstracts—theses, dissertations, and articles dedicated to analyzing at least one of the state environmental policies or any of their instruments. We excluded studies that merely mentioned these policies without taking them as the object of investigation; those focused on federal or municipal policies; and those whose full texts were not available online, as our objective also included examining each study's findings. This procedure resulted in 41 theses and dissertations and four scientific articles addressing Bahian environmental public policies from different perspectives. From this corpus, we systematized the following information: university and graduate program (for theses and dissertations); year of publication; research topic; and principal findings.

[3] Electronic portal developed and coordinated by the Brazilian Institute of Science and Technology Information. Available at: https://bdtd.ibict.br/vufind/. Accessed on: Feb. 20, 2025.
[4] Search conducted via CAFe access to content subscribed to by UFBA.

The body of research points to a model of public management of environmental resources that is insufficiently democratic, marked by the exclusion of traditional communities from decisions that affect them, and to the existence of socio-environmental conflicts associated with such management. Two of the studies situate their findings within a broader context of racism and environmental injustice. We found no research investigating the interface between environmental policies and policies for women or for traditional communities—a gap within which the first author's doctoral research is situated.

Finally, we underscore the absence of feminist research in this field of environmental policy studies. Only one recent study within the corpus identifies gender as a relevant analytical category (Gomes, 2021), and even then, it does not place gender at the center of its analysis. There is a lack of intersectional and intersectoral research positioned at the interface between environmental policies and policies for women, racial equality, and traditional peoples and communities. There is also a lack of studies that listen to women—especially those from traditional communities—and engage them as analytical partners in examining public policies. Although this is not the central focus of the present article, it is within this gap that the broader research project to which it is connected is situated

In the section *Environmental Conflicts in Traditional Communities*, we present a systematization of data on conflicts involving environmental injustice and health produced by the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ) and the Federation of Social and Educational Assistance Organizations (FASE), as well as data on rural violence produced by the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT). The objective is to characterize the socio-environmental conflict scenario in the state of Bahia suggested by the body of research on environmental policies.

To understand the evolution of this conflict scenario over time, we consulted the Dom Tomás Balduino Documentation Center of the CPT, the institution with the longest continuous record of such conflicts in Brazil. The *Conflicts in the Countryside* reports have been produced and published for 40 years. Although these reports focus on rural areas, conflicts involving traditional peoples and communities in urban areas are also recorded and counted (Pastoral Land Commission [CPT], 2022).

t is important to clarify that this article does not address the full range of conflicts that the CPT classifies as land conflicts, defined as "acts of resistance and confrontation over the possession, use, and ownership of land and access to natural resources" (CPT, 2022, p. 12, our translation). Land retakings, occupations, and encampments were not included in this

analysis, as they constitute political strategies within the struggle for land[5], more closely related to land tenure policies than to environmental policies. Here, we limit our focus to conflicts related to struggles undertaken by those already on the land for access to natural resources. Therefore, within the broader category of land conflicts, we selected those the CPT classifies as occurrences. To these, we added water conflicts, defined as "generally collective acts of resistance aimed at ensuring the use and preservation of water; opposing the private appropriation of water resources; […] contesting charges for water use in rural areas; and […] resisting the construction of dams and reservoirs" (CPT, 2022, p. 13, our translation).

We refer to the grouping of conflicts related to disputes over water and land—excluding data on occupations, retakings, and encampments—as water and land conflicts. From the data presented in the reports, we selected only those concerning Bahia over the past 20 years. First, we constructed a timeline of the number of conflicts per year. We then examined the social categories involved in land conflicts from 2012 to 2021 and in water conflicts in 2019, as these reports provide such information for those years. Although limited in scope, we consider the snapshot of categories involved in water conflicts significant, as it refers to the year with a record number of such conflicts.

A brief clarification is warranted: these social categories are not mutually exclusive. Communities—and their members—may simultaneously identify as quilombola and as fishers, for example. However, in the reports, each conflict is assigned a single category. Therefore, the quantifications presented here are not absolute. It is possible, for instance, that fishers are involved in a greater number of conflicts than indicated, since in some occurrences they may have been recorded as quilombolas, or vice versa.

Another important source for understanding socio-environmental conflicts in Brazil is the *Map of Conflicts Involving Environmental Injustice and Health in Brazil*, produced by FIOCRUZ and FASE to support environmental justice movements and the actions of the Brazilian Environmental Justice Network (RBJA). The Map incorporates data from initiatives of the Network, such as the *Map of Conflicts Caused by Environmental Racism in Brazil*, developed within the framework of the RBJA Working Group on Combating Environmental Racism (Porto; Pacheco; Leroy, 2013).

The Map provides information on 652 conflicts, considered by its organizers to be "the tip of the iceberg of a much larger number of situations of environmental injustice that

[5] Guiomar Germani (2010) establishes a distinction between the struggle for land, undertaken mainly by movements of landless rural workers, and the struggle on land, undertaken mainly by PCTs in defense of their territories.

characterize Brazil and its development model" (Porto; Pacheco; Leroy, 2013, p. 13, our translation). The cases included in the Map were selected by the researchers because they reveal emblematic situations of territorial transformation resulting from a development model that disregards the lives of populations who inhabit, work in, and have their livelihoods intertwined with the resources and landscapes under dispute in their territories (Porto; Pacheco; Leroy, 2013).

Of the total conflicts presented in the Map, 53 are located in Bahia; among these, 36 involve one or more segments of traditional peoples and communities (TPCs) among the affected populations: quilombolas (24); artisanal fishers (15); Indigenous peoples (10); shellfish gatherers (9); riverine communities (7); fundo and fecho de pasto communities (5); extractivists (4); geraizeiros (3); and crab harvesters (1) (Oswaldo Cruz Foundation [FIOCRUZ]; Federation of Social and Educational Assistance Organizations [FASE], 2025). In this article, we systematize the conflict-generating activities and the environmental impacts associated with the 24 conflicts involving quilombola communities in Bahia—the segment with the highest number of recorded conflicts in the Map among TPCs.

The Field of Bahian Environmental Policies: State of the Art

Public policies dedicated to the management of environmental resources and to the preservation and conservation of nature have become the subject of study by researchers and research groups across diverse fields of knowledge, constituting a multidisciplinary field of inquiry. The body of research on Bahian environmental policies exemplifies the richness of this field, which in Bahia has been developing at least since 2003, with notable intensification from 2015 onward.

The theses and dissertations were produced in a range of academic and professional graduate programs at federal and state universities in Bahia, Sergipe, and the Federal District (Table 2). These studies are distributed across disciplinary programs in different areas of concentration, as well as interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary programs, both professional and academic, underscoring the multidisciplinary nature of this field of study.

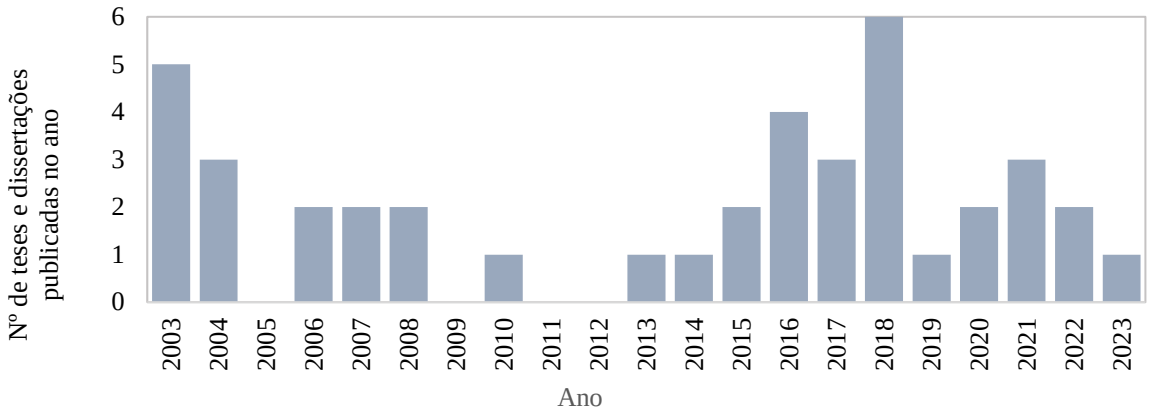
Table 2 – Universities and Graduate Programs with Theses and Dissertations on Environmental Public Policies in Bahia

University	Graduate Program	Theses and Dissertations
Universidade Federal da Bahia (UFBA)	Master's in Environment, Water, and Sanitation	3
	Professional Master's in Applied Ecology to Environmental Management	3
	Graduate Program in Law	3
	Professional Master's in Water Resources Management and Regulation	1
	Graduate Program in Administration	1
	Graduate Program in Social Sciences	1
	Graduate Program in Ecology	1
	Graduate Program in Urban Environmental Engineering	1
	Graduate Program in Geography	1
	Multidisciplinary Graduate Program in Culture and Society	1
Universidade de Brasília (UnB)	Graduate Program in Sustainable Development	11
Universidade Estadual de Santa Cruz (Uesc)	Graduate Program in Development and Environment	4
Universidade Estadual de Feira de Santana (UEFS)	Graduate Program in Civil and Environmental Engineering	2
Universidade Federal do Recôncavo Baiano (UFRB)	Graduate Program in Public Policy Management and Social Security	2
Universidade Federal do Sul da Bahia (UFSB) e Instituto Federal da Bahia (IFBA)	Graduate Program in Environmental Sciences and Technologies	2
Universidade do Estado da Bahia (UNEB)	Graduate Program in Territorial Studies	1
Universidade Federal de Sergipe (UFS)	Graduate Program in Geography	1
Universidade Federal do Sul da Bahia (UFSB)	Graduate Program in State and Society	1
Universidade Federal do Vale do São Francisco (UNIVASF)	Graduate Program in Agroecology and Territorial Development	1

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The research cycle in this field begins with marked intensity in 2003 and 2004 (Figure 1). The theses and dissertations produced during this period largely resulted from an agreement between the Center for Environmental Resources—Bahia's former environmental agency—and the Center for Sustainable Development at the University of Brasília, which explains the high number of studies originating from that program. From 2005 onward, the field experienced a decline, followed by renewed momentum beginning in 2013 and a significant concentration of research between 2015 and 2022, suggesting that the field is currently in full development (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Temporal Evolution of the Number of Published Theses and Dissertations on Environmental Policies in Bahia



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Among the articles identified, one was authored by a researcher from the State University of Santa Cruz (Bahia) in co-authorship with scholars from the University of São Paulo (USP) and the University of Northern Paraná (Schiavetti; Magro; Santos, 2012); the remaining articles were authored by researchers affiliated with universities in Brazil's South and Southeast regions and with the University of Brasília. There is, therefore, a notable interest among researchers and institutions from other regions of Brazil in Bahia's socio-environmental context and environmental policies, as well as an underrepresentation of articles by scholars from Bahian universities in journals affiliated with UFBA and available through the CAPES Portal.

Most of the studies focus on specific instruments of Bahia's environmental policies (Table 3). Within the framework of the State Environmental and Biodiversity Protection Policy, environmental licensing is the most extensively studied instrument, followed by Conservation Units and their Management Councils, the State Forest Registry of Rural Properties, environmental enforcement, and Payment for Environmental Services. Within the scope of the State Water Resources Policy, the research addresses the classification of water bodies; River Basin Committees; and conflicts related to water resource management or water governance. The State Environmental Education Policy has also been the subject of research; however, we found no studies addressing the State Policy on Climate Change.

Table 3 – Instruments and Aspects Investigated in Bahian Environmental Policies

Research Themes	Authors
Environmental and Biodiversity Protection Policy	
Environmental Licensing	
Social participation in licensing	Assunção (2006)
Decentralization of environmental licensing to municipalities	Souza (2003); Santos e Mendez (2016); Machado (2018)
Precautionary principle in environmental licensing	Meira (2003)
Water and energy efficiency in environmental licensing	Souza (2015); Fonseca (2017)
Licensing of dams	Avelar (2016)
Licensing of projects of social interest	Silva (2017)
Environmental licensing of shrimp farming	Lima (2004); Dias, Soares e Neffa (2012); Ferraz (2018)
Licensing of wind energy complexes	Barrero (2022)
Vegetation Suppression Authorizations	Silva (2016)
Conservation Units	
Management and Management Councils of Environmental Protection Areas (APAs)	Carvalho (2004); Torres (2007)
Use of information technologies in the management of APAs	Gonçalves (2003); Maia (2003)
Evaluation of participatory management and social oversight	Macêdo (2008); Lima (2014)
Conflicts with traditional communities arising from the creation of Conservation Units	Guanaes (2018); Palma (2007); Souza (2017); Silva *et al*. (2019)
Territorial planning of Conservation Units	Jesus (2021)
Evaluation of the implementation of Conservation Units	Schiavetti, Magro e Santos (2012)
Other instruments	
Environmental enforcement	Silva (2004); Felizola (2010)
State Forest Registry of Rural Properties (CEFIR)	Corrêa (2019); Batista (2023)
Payment for Environmental Services	Sousa (2021)
Water Resources Policy	
Classification of water resources	Lacerda (2003)
River Basin Committees	Gomes, T. M. (2021); Souza (2022); Melo, Panhoca e Silva (2024)
Conflicts related to water management	Rossi (2015); Khoury (2018)
Environmental Education Policy	
Social participation in the State Environmental Education Council	Azevedo (2008)
Environmental education in environmental licensing	Cerqueira (2013)
Environmental education in combating forest fires	Oliveira (2017)

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Most of the studies adopt evaluative approaches to public policies or to specific instruments, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and in some cases offering recommendations for improvement or redirection. The overall picture that emerges is one of environmental public policies in the state of Bahia that are insufficiently democratic, providing limited space for societal participation in decision-making processes, and that are,

to some extent, responsible for a scenario of significant socio-environmental conflicts affecting not only—but especially—traditional peoples and communities (TPCs), thereby constraining or threatening their existence. The body of research indicates that the changes implemented between 2011 and 2012 did not promote the democratization of state environmental management; on the contrary, they moved in the opposite direction.

Martins (2016) analyzed democratic principles within national and state environmental policies and found that the state policy does not regulate direct participation by citizens and organized civil society. As a result, political activity remains concentrated within government bodies, in contradiction to the foundations of the contemporary democratic rule-of-law state. At least seven studies have identified the absence or insufficiency of public participation in environmental licensing in the state of Bahia, noting that such participation is sporadic and limited to large-scale projects. These studies advocate expanding participation in order to strengthen the instrument (Souza, 2003; Assunção, 2006; Santos; Mendez, 2016; Silva, 2017; Ferraz, 2018; Machado, 2018; Barrero, 2022). The research conducted by Santos and Mendez (2016), Silva (2017), Carla Ferraz (2018), Machado (2018), and Barrero (2022) indicates that current problems in environmental licensing stem from regulatory flexibilization. Contrary to the need—already highlighted two decades ago by Assunção (2006)—to expand and strengthen mechanisms for social participation, these changes have significantly reduced both the spaces available for public engagement and their capacity to influence environmental licensing decisions. Regarding environmental licensing, Ferraz (2018) further observes that the social impacts of projects are neglected by both companies and the environmental agency. In the cases she analyzed, "social conflicts are described by the license applicant itself, and there is usually no verification of consistency with the opinion of the local community" (Ferraz, 2018, p. 131, our translation).

Environmental licensing is not the only instrument marked by democratic deficits. The literature also indicates that water resources management and the creation and management of conservation units have not been sufficiently democratic or participatory, thereby generating or exacerbating inequalities and conflicts, particularly—though not exclusively—with traditional communities (Palma, 2007; Macêdo, 2008; Lima, 2014; Souza, 2017; Guanaes, 2018; Khoury, 2018; Gomes, 2021; Souza, 2022). In the field of water governance, studies point out that River Basin Committees—formal arenas for public participation—are merely consultative, and decision-making processes do not necessarily reflect their recommendations. Moreover, these committees require greater institutional support and strengthening by the

State to function adequately, and they face representational limitations, including the presence of members who do not live the local reality, the limited participation of women, and the insufficient inclusion of traditional communities (Khoury, 2018; Gomes, 2021; Souza, 2022).

Palma (2007), Souza (2017), Guanaes (2018), and Jesus (2021) found that the establishment of Conservation Units (CUs) without the participation of local populations generates fear, anxiety, and insecurity among residents. They also identified the omission of studies regarding existing traditional communities in the area, land tenure conflicts, forced deterritorialization, the imposition of changes to traditional ways of life due to restrictions on the use of territory and natural resources and the prohibition of traditional techniques, financial losses, and the disruption of communities' relationships with their environment and cultural practices. Guanaes (2018) argues that "no" defines the lives of those affected by the creation of conservation units—both those who were displaced from their lands and those who remain, resisting and struggling for improved living conditions and the preservation of their identity" (Guanaes, 2018, p. 102, our translation).

The studies also point to the selectivity of environmental policies in producing inequalities. Silva *et al*. (2019) demonstrate that while the flexibilization of environmental regulations in Bahia has facilitated the expansion of the agricultural frontier, the appropriation of natural resources—land and water—and land grabbing in western Bahia, traditional communities have been progressively confined to areas later designated as Conservation Units, where they are subject to stricter environmental regulations. Although local peasants employ production systems characterized by greater agrobiodiversity and significant relevance to food security (Souza, 2017), they have been adversely affected by the lack of governmental recognition of environmental conservation within their territories, by restrictions on the use of natural resources and traditional production techniques—such as the controlled use of fire—and by the environmental impacts of agribusiness.

Palma (2007) identified significant inequalities arising from the creation of the Pedra do Cavalo Dam Environmental Protection Area (APA). While the dam and the protection of its water sources through the APA benefit the population of Salvador by ensuring water supply, riverside communities and fishers in ten municipalities of the Recôncavo Baiano affected by the dam face a lack of public policies. Palma (2007) reported the existence of resettled riverside families living without piped water just a few meters from the reservoir that supplies the state capital, located 150 kilometers away—an example that starkly exposes this inequality.

Khoury (2018) argues that water resources management in the Bahia portion of the São Francisco River basin is characterized by environmental injustice. She describes a context of degradation and crisis in the region, marked by the disappearance of springs and streams, water contamination, species extinction, water scarcity, and increasing conflicts over water. These conditions result from the combined effects of the failure to implement water management instruments and a development model that is "concentrative of land and water, extractive, short-term oriented, and minimally committed to its traditional communities" (Khoury, 2018, p. 89, our translation). Traditional peoples and communities (PCTs)—who are not responsible for the crisis—are among those most significantly affected by changes in water quantity and quality, and their situation is further aggravated by rights violations and the destruction of cultural heritage (Khoury, 2018). The researcher also observed insufficient participation of these communities in River Basin Committees, which serve as decision-making arenas for water governance (Khoury, 2018).

The studies that examined points of tension between environmental policies and Traditional Peoples and Communities (PCTs) identify conflicts related to land use and natural resources, land tenure disputes, impacts on production systems, social disorganization, health problems, violence, among others, as systematized in Table 4. The research indicates that environmental instruments and policies have not been sufficient to prevent or resolve existing conflicts and, in certain cases, have acted as causes or aggravating factors.

Notably, six of the seven studies addressing conflicts point to the absence or insufficiency of traditional communities' participation in decisions affecting them as a factor contributing to the emergence or intensification of conflicts—whether in environmental licensing, water resources management, or the creation and management of conservation units (Palma, 2007; Lima, 2014; Guanaes, 2018; Khoury, 2018; Nascimento, 2018; Barrero, 2022). Although this issue was identified more than fifteen years ago by Palma (2007), more recent research, such as Barrero (2022), suggests no meaningful shift toward expanding these communities' participation in decisions made by environmental authorities, including those directly affecting them. This trend runs counter to the provisions established in public policies directed at PCTs.

Conversely, the studies also report the strengthening of collective identities and support networks, as well as the creation or consolidation of cooperatives and community associations, driven by the need to confront disputes with the State. Guanaes (2018) observes that, in the face of persistent denial of rights, communities have turned to their collective

identities as a means of asserting their claims and strengthening themselves in a dispute in which "they neither set the rules nor control the resources" (Guanaes, 2018, p. 141, our translation).

Table 4 – Main environmental conflicts involving traditional communities related to environmental policies or their instruments

Types of Conflict	Studies
Land tenure conflicts	
Overlap between protected areas and the territories of traditional communities or resettled plots	Palma (2007); Nascimento (2018); Souza (2017)
Compulsory expropriations and/or forced deterritorialization	Palma (2007); Souza (2017); Guanaes (2018); Barrero (2022)
Green grabbing	Souza (2017)
Disorganization of traditional territories	Barrero (2022)
Lack of land tenure regularization of traditional territories	Palma (2007); Nascimento (2018); Souza (2017)
Fear of expulsion from territories	Souza (2017)
Neglect in the relocation of families from traditional communities	Palma (2007)
Conflicts related to land and natural resource use	
Exposure to negative impacts of development projects with limited participation in their benefits	Palma (2007)
Impacts on water quantity or quality, primarily affecting Traditional Peoples and Communities (PCTs)	Khoury (2018)
Coexistence with conflicts over resource use	Guanaes (2018)
Ambiguity and ambivalence in environmental regulations	Nascimento (2018)
Selectivity of environmental policies: permissive toward the agribusiness production model and restrictive toward traditional production techniques	Souza (2017)
Impacts on production systems	
Deprivation or abandonment of traditional and/or subsistence production techniques	Guanaes (2018); Souza (2017)
Disqualification of traditional agricultural systems by environmental regulations	Souza (2017)
Pressure on common-use areas, rendering traditional ways of life unviable	Barrero (2022)
participation	
In the creation of Conservation Units: absence of participation by local traditional communities in decision-making	Palma (2007); Guanaes (2018)
In the management of Conservation Units: limited, ineffective, unequal participation by traditional communities, weakened by a lack of material resources and information	Lima (2014); Nascimento (2018)
In environmental licensing: participation of traditional communities restricted to public hearings and lacking decision-making power	Lima (2014)
In environmental licensing: absence of public hearings and other participatory spaces for traditional communities	Barrero (2022)
In water resources management: insufficient participation of traditional communities in decision-making arenas	Khoury (2018)
Social disorganization, health problems, violence, among others	
Disruption of riverside families	Palma (2007)

Social, economic, cultural, political, and psychological disturbances affecting riverside populations	Palma (2007)
Financial losses and disruption of communities' relationships with the environment and their cultural practices	Guanaes (2018)
Coercion and harassment of community leaders	Barrero (2022)
Health problems resulting from noise and air pollution caused by wind energy complexes	Barrero (2022)
Internal conflicts arising from differentiation resulting from land leases and resettlements	Palma (2007); Barrero (2022)

Source: Prepared by the authors.

In sum, the body of research on environmental policies in Bahia contains substantial criticism regarding deficiencies in participatory spaces within the state's environmental governance framework. A significant portion of the studies indicates that decisions are generally made without adequately consulting the populations affected and without necessarily reflecting the positions of collegial bodies in which organized civil society is represented—such as River Basin Committees and Conservation Unit Management Councils. This modus operandi results both in shortcomings within the policies and their instruments and in numerous environmental conflicts, particularly involving PCTs, who are excluded even from decisions that directly affect the territories they occupy and/or the natural resources upon which they depend.

Although the situations and conditions documented by the studies clearly fall within what is understood as environmental racism, only two researchers explicitly mobilized the concept of environmental racism—together with environmental injustice—as an analytical framework (Khoury, 2018; Conceição, 2020).

The body of research presented contributes to understanding the mechanisms through which environmental racism is (re)produced by environmental policies in the state of Bahia, as well as to comprehending its effects on those living in sacrifice zones, particularly Traditional Peoples and Communities (PCTs), and their role within the broader landscape of socio-environmental conflicts established in the state.

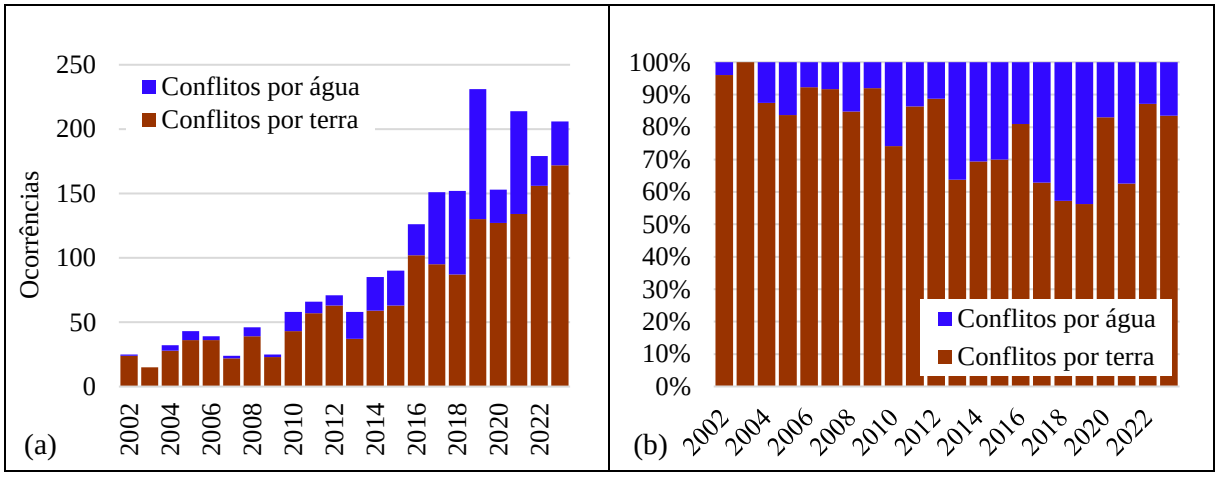
Environmental Conflicts in Traditional Communities

Borrowing Khoury's (2018) words and extending her observation regarding the São Francisco River Basin to the state of Bahia as a whole:

> In this Bahia[6] [originally "basin"], conflicts over land, territory, and water are increasing. The beauty and wealth of this Bahia—ranging from its cultural heritage and traditional peoples to its biomes—stand in stark contrast to a scenario marked by inequality, exclusion, and environmental injustices (Khoury, 2018, p. 9, our translation).

In order to understand the conflict landscape in the state of Bahia, we systematized data on land and water conflicts produced and published by the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT). The data indicate that such conflicts have grown almost uninterruptedly in Bahia over the past two decades (Figure 2a), with a growing share of water-related disputes within the total number of conflicts (Figure 2b).

Figure 2 – Land and Water Conflicts in Bahia, 2002–2023



Source: Prepared by the authors. Data from CEDOC Dom Tomás Balduino – CPT (2003; 2004; 2005; 2006; 2007; 2008; 2009; 2010; 2011; 2012; 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022; 2023; 2024).
Note: (a) number of occurrences; (b) percentage of total occurrences.

To identify the individuals, groups, and/or projects involved in these conflicts, we examined land conflict data from the past decade (2012–2021) (Figure 3) and water conflict data from 2019 (Figure 4). Figure 3 shows that 73% of land conflicts in Bahia over the past ten years involved Traditional Peoples and Communities (PCTs). *Fundo* and *fecho de pasto* peasants constitute the category most frequently involved in conflicts, followed by quilombola communities. *Fundos* and *fechos de pasto* are traditional peasant communities located, respectively, in the Caatinga of the semi-arid region of Bahia and in the Cerrado of the state's western region (Alcântara; Souza; Germani, [2021?]). *Fundos de pasto* communities are heavily impacted by wind energy and mining projects (Chaves; Siqueira,

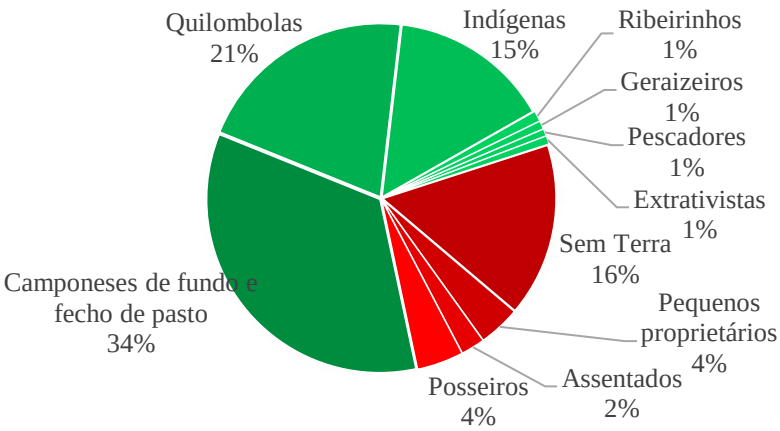
[6] In the original text, the author does not refer to Bahia, but rather to the [São Francisco River Basin].

2021), while *fechos de pasto* are affected by the Matopiba agribusiness project (Aguiar; Bonfim; Correia, 2021). Quilombola communities are present throughout the state and are therefore subject to disputes involving a broad range of economic development projects.

When examining water conflicts in 2019 (Figure 4), the profile of the most involved groups shifts, yet the predominance of PCTs remains, accounting for 83.2% of conflicts. Fishers represent the most affected category (42% of occurrences), followed by *geraizeiros* (22%), riverside communities (10%), *fundo* and *fecho de pasto* peasants (4%), quilombolas (3%), Indigenous peoples (1%), and extractivists (1%). The significant involvement of *geraizeiros*—a segment of PCTs also located in the western region of the state—suggests that the Matopiba agribusiness project has also generated water-related conflicts. This project is characterized by the formation of large-scale farming condominiums—explaining land conflicts—and by monoculture plantations that consume substantial volumes of water and agrochemicals—explaining water conflicts.

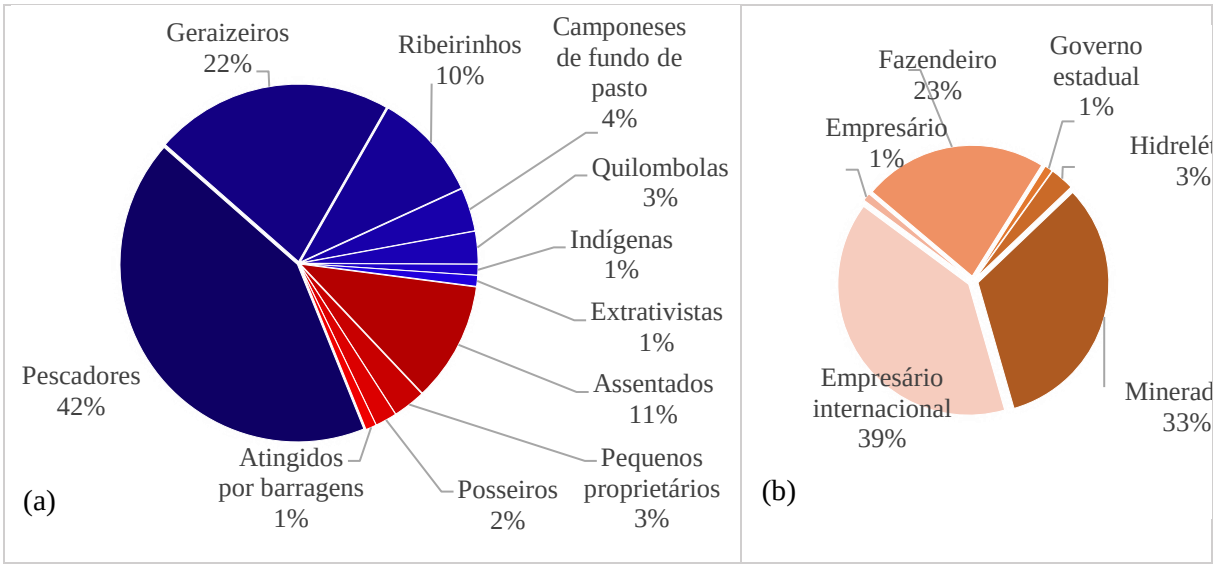
On the other side of these disputes, among the actors responsible for water conflicts in that year, international companies, mining corporations, and large landowners predominate. The presence of international companies may be linked to agribusiness—associated with landowners—and to mining—alongside mining firms—but may also indicate the involvement of wind energy enterprises. In Bahia, this sector is controlled by companies with foreign participation (Pereira, 2024) and is concentrated in the semi-arid region, an area marked by water scarcity.

Figure 3 – Distribution of Land Conflicts in Bahia, 2012–2021, by Social Categories Involved; PCTs in green; other categories in red



Source: Prepared by the authors. Data from CEDOC Dom Tomás Balduino – CPT (2012; 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022).

Figure 4 – Distribution of Water Conflicts in Bahia, 2019



Source: Prepared by the authors. Data from CEDOC Dom Tomás Balduino – CPT (2020).
Note: (a) by category involved; PCTs in blue; other categories in red; (b) by category responsible for causing the conflict.

The CPT Reports also reveal another dimension of land and water conflicts: violence against women in multiple forms—femicide, physical assault, death threats, rape, bodily injury, humiliation, intimidation, and imprisonment—concentrated primarily in the North and Northeast regions (Gomes, T. E., 2021). Gender-based violence associated with environmental conflicts is not examined in depth in this study; however, its presence underscores the need for feminist research addressing the impacts of environmental policies on women's lives, considering intersections with race, class, region, and other analytical categories.

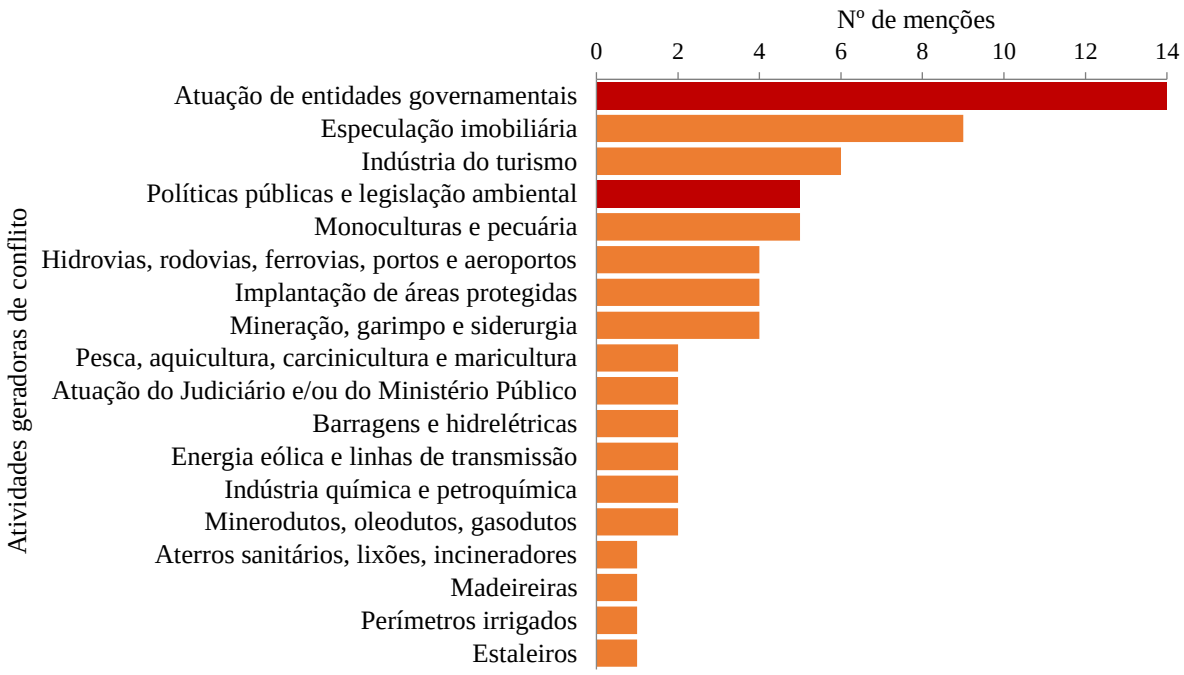
To add further analytical layers, we examined data from the *Map of Conflicts Involving Environmental Injustice and Health in Brazil*, produced by FIOCRUZ and FASE. From this database, we selected the 23 conflicts involving quilombola communities in Bahia and extracted, for each case, the conflict-generating activities and the identified socio-environmental impacts (Figures 5 and 6).

Among the activities responsible for generating conflicts, the actions of governmental entities stand out, having been mentioned in 14 of the 23 cases analyzed. It is equally noteworthy that in 5 of the 23 cases, public policies and environmental legislation are cited among the drivers of conflict, while in 10 of the 23 cases, deficiencies or irregularities in environmental licensing appear among the socio-environmental impacts. These findings strongly suggest that state agencies, in implementing environmental policies—and

particularly in conducting environmental licensing—play a significant role in generating conflicts affecting quilombola communities throughout the state. This conclusion corroborates the findings of the literature review. Other activities responsible for a substantial share of conflicts include the tourism industry, real estate speculation, monoculture plantations, and cattle ranching, reinforcing the patterns identified in the CPT data.

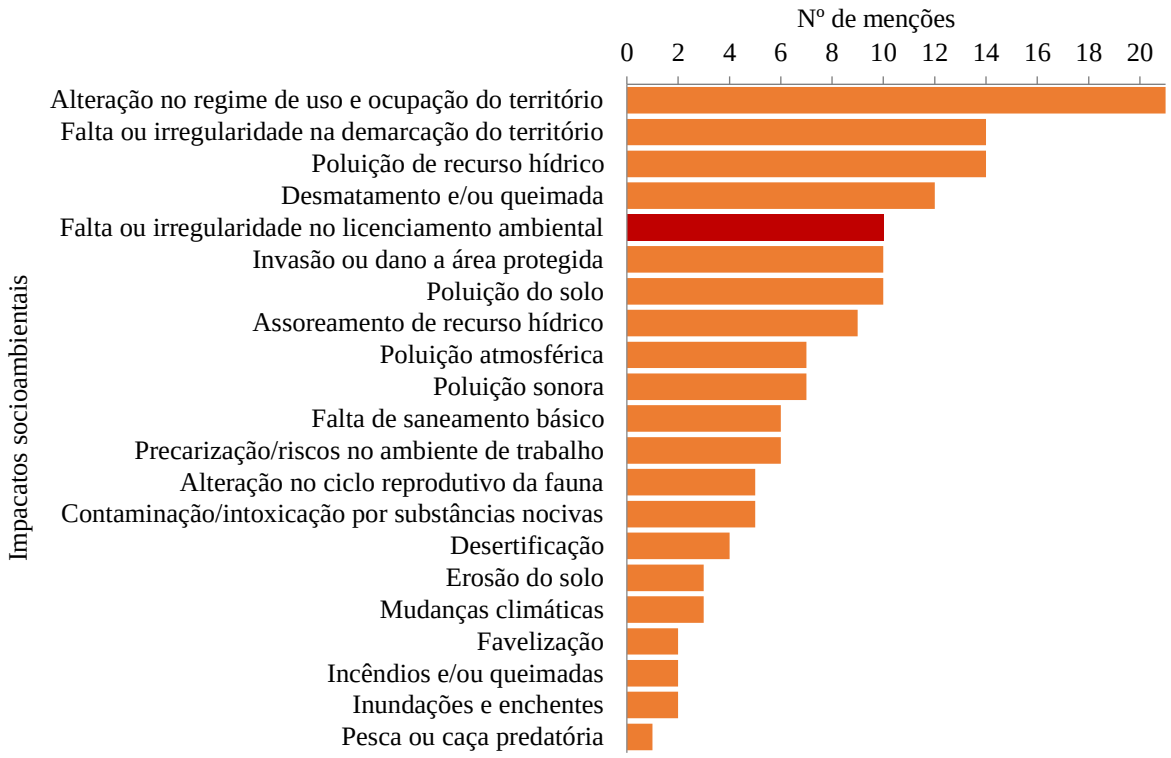
It is also noteworthy that all cases mention changes in the traditional regime of land use and occupation. This finding, combined with the results of the studies on environmental policies presented in Table 4 of the previous section, suggests that problems arising from land-use changes and interference in traditional production systems—such as the disqualification, deprivation, or abandonment of traditional agricultural systems and production techniques, pressure on common-use areas, and the undermining of traditional ways of life—affect the majority of quilombola communities involved in environmental conflicts.

Figure 5 – Conflict-Generating Activities in Cases of Environmental Injustice and Health Involving Quilombola Communities in Bahia



Source: Prepared by the authors. Data from FIOCRUZ and FASE (2025).

Figure 6 – Socio-Environmental Impacts in Conflicts Involving Environmental Injustice and Health in Quilombola Communities in Bahia



Source: Prepared by the authors. Data from FIOCRUZ and FASE (2025).

The (non-)demarcation of quilombola territories also stands out, further corroborating the findings presented in Table 4, which highlight land tenure-related problems such as compulsory expropriations and/or forced deterritorialization, green grabbing, disorganization of traditional territories, and fear of expulsion, among others. Additionally, water pollution, deforestation, and wildfires are impacts present in more than half of the cases examined.

Therefore, in an effort to synthesize the data presented in this section, it becomes evident that Bahia is currently experiencing a dispute over environmental resources between two antagonistic projects operating within an extremely unequal balance of power. On one side are large-scale ventures led by landowners, mining companies, and foreign capital enterprises—expropriatory and extractive in nature. These projects depend directly on natural resources and on the labor of peasants—including Traditional Peoples and Communities (PCTs)—yet they expropriate and overexploit: they privatize land, degrade, consume, and contaminate vast areas of land and water; exploit and subject workers to conditions analogous to slavery[7] and generate violence, including violence against women.

[7]This is another dimension brought up by the CPT Notebooks, which I have not explored in this text.

On the other side are diverse non-capitalist projects of production and social reproduction, led by Indigenous peoples, traditional communities, and rural workers. These groups also depend directly on nature, but do not relate to it through a logic of expropriation and exploitation. They collectively use land and its resources, respect ecological regeneration cycles, and generate wealth through their own labor. These projects are incompatible. The latter have their modes of production and reproduction of life severely threatened by the former—whether through contamination or reduced availability of natural resources, restricted access to such resources, or expulsion from their lands and territories. Conversely, the capitalist project is challenged by the articulation, organization, and strengthening of rural workers and PCTs, who, as they advance in defending their territories and while they retain sufficient land and water, continue producing wealth, thereby reducing the supply of land, water, and labor available to capital. When mapped, the struggles of peasants and PCTs form what Guiomar Germani calls "luminous points of hope."[8]

Finally, given that environmental conflicts in Bahia disproportionately affect traditional communities—often rendering their traditional ways of life unviable—and subject women to additional forms of violence associated with these conflicts—and considering that many of these conflicts stem from the design or implementation of environmental policies insufficiently committed to the rights of PCTs—it is reasonable to assert that the implementation of Free, Prior, and Informed Consultation (FPIC) for PCTs, as established by International Labour Organization Convention No. 169, has the potential to mitigate the environmental conflicts to which these communities are subjected, as well as the violence against women associated with them. By ensuring these groups' right to self-determination in environmental licensing processes and other decisions by environmental authorities, FPIC constitutes a powerful feminist and anti-racist instrument.

Final Considerations

This article examined two interrelated dimensions of environmental racism in Bahia: the severe landscape of violence and environmental conflicts experienced by Traditional Peoples and Communities (PCTs), and the role played by environmental public policies in sustaining this context. Understanding these dimensions contributes to elucidating the

[8]Class notes from the course "State, Territory, and Social Movements," Graduate Program in Geography, Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), November 30, 2022.

mechanisms through which environmental racism operates in Bahia. Environmental policies in the state thus constitute a significant field of inquiry for studies on environmental racism in Brazil.

The first section presented the state of the art through a literature review of theses, dissertations, and articles addressing environmental policies in Bahia. The corpus analyzed indicates that these policies are selective, insufficiently democratic, and marked by limited or nonexistent participation of PCTs in decision-making processes, including those directly affecting them. Regarding policy implementation by public agents, the studies highlight negligence in environmental licensing, particularly in assessing social impacts; institutional incapacity to address conflicts; the emergence of sacrifice zones; imbalances between those who benefit from decisions and those who bear their burdens; and a broad spectrum of conflicts, especially involving PCTs.

Thus, whether in their design or implementation, these policies not only fail to protect the rights of these populations and their access to traditionally used natural resources, but also actively produce inequalities and injustices, aggravating the socio-environmental conflict scenario in the state. It can be asserted that Bahia's public policies on the environment, water resources, and climate are not committed to combating environmental racism, reducing inequalities, or promoting environmental justice. This policy silence regarding racism constitutes one expression of what Cida Bento terms the "narcissistic pact of whiteness"—that is, the unspoken complicity among white policymakers who remain uncommitted to anti-racist social transformation (Bento, 2022). The effects of this pact are profound and harmful. The situation described herein aligns with what Bruna Zagatto, in her study of Ilha de Maré (Bahia), conceptualizes as environmental necropolitics (Zagatto, 2020).

Despite the growing public debate in Bahia on environmental racism—largely driven by organized PCT movements—and within academia, as exemplified by the recent thematic volume *Environmental Racism and the Re-Existence of Black Territories Worldwide*, published by the Brazilian Association of Black Researchers (ABPN) (2022)—racial analysis remains largely absent from research on environmental policies in the state. Within the corpus examined, only two of forty-one studies addressed the issue, and even then marginally. A further gap concerns feminist research: only one recent study incorporated gender as an analytical category, and none addressed the intersection of gender and race. There is, therefore, a clear need for feminist scholarship in the field of environmental policy in Bahia that centers the intersections of gender, race, class, and other relevant analytical categories.

After examining environmental policies in Bahia, the subsequent section addressed their consequences: the landscape of socio-environmental conflicts in the state. The systematization of data on violence and land and water conflicts from the CPT, as well as data on socio-environmental conflicts involving environmental justice and health from FIOCRUZ, provides a comprehensive overview. The findings indicate a steady increase in land and water conflicts in Bahia over the past two decades, surpassing 200 recorded incidents in 2023. The growing proportion of water-related conflicts is also noteworthy. Another significant feature is the predominance of PCTs among the social categories involved in conflicts: 73% of land conflicts (2012–2021) and 83% of water conflicts (2019). The data further indicate that governmental action, environmental policies, and particularly the instrument of environmental licensing play a significant role in generating conflicts and environmental injustices affecting the health of quilombola communities.

In light of this scenario, the authors join those persistently urging Bahia's public environmental institutions to assume responsibility for combating environmental racism and to implement Free, Prior, and Informed Consultation for Traditional Peoples and Communities, as established by International Labour Organization Convention No. 169 and incorporated into Brazilian legislation in 2004. This would represent a decisive step toward reorienting public environmental governance in the direction of democratization and environmental justice.

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