

**ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM IN BRAZILIAN POSTGRADUATE: A BRIEF
OVERVIEW AND PERSPECTIVES**

***O RACISMO AMBIENTAL NA PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO BRASILEIRA: BREVE
PANORAMA E PERSPECTIVAS***

***EL RACISMO AMBIENTAL EN EL POSGRADO BRASILEÑO: BREVE PANORAMA Y
PERSPECTIVAS***



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How to reference this paper:

MIRANDA, Aline da Cunha; RODRIGUES, Iris Carmen Pinheiro. Environmental racism in Brazilian postgraduate: a brief overview and perspectives. **Rev. Cadernos de Campo**, Araraquara, v. 25, n. esp. 2, e025019, 2025. e-ISSN: 2359-2419. DOI: 10.47284/cdc.v25iesp2.20052



| **Submitted:** 13/06/2025
| **Revisions required:** 13/06/2025
| **Approved:** 10/10/2025
| **Published:** 28/12/2025

Editors: Prof. Dr. Maria Teresa Miceli Kerbauy
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ABSTRACT: The present study aimed to conduct a scoping review of how the concept of environmental racism has been addressed in Brazilian graduate programs. The results indicate that discussions on the topic have increased over the years. Higher education institutions in the Southeast region and the field of Applied Social Sciences stand out as those producing most of the research on the subject. Regarding the conflicts analyzed, a diverse range of cases was identified, involving communities, indigenous peoples, quilombola groups, neighborhoods, and parks. It is concluded that Brazil presents a significant number of environmental conflicts that can be investigated from the perspective of environmental racism and that require greater attention from public authorities and various academic fields in order to seek alternatives for mitigating their effects.

KEYWORDS: Environmental racism. Graduate studies. Scoping review.

RESUMO: *O presente estudo teve como objetivo realizar uma revisão de escopo acerca de como o conceito de racismo ambiental vem sendo abordado na pós-graduação brasileira. Os resultados indicam que a discussão sobre o tema vem aumentando ao longo dos anos. As instituições de ensino da região Sudeste e a área das Ciências Sociais Aplicadas aparecem como as que mais realizaram trabalhos com a temática. Com relação aos conflitos, verificou-se a presença de uma série diversa de casos envolvendo comunidades, populações indígenas, quilombos, bairros e parques. Conclui-se que o Brasil possui uma quantidade expressiva de conflitos ambientais que podem ser investigados sob a perspectiva do racismo ambiental e que necessitam de maior atenção do poder público, diferentes campos de estudo para buscar alternativas de mitigação dos seus efeitos.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Racismo ambiental. Pós-graduação. Revisão de escopo.*

RESUMEN: *El presente estudio tuvo como objetivo realizar una revisión de alcance sobre cómo se ha abordado el concepto de racismo ambiental en los programas de posgrado en Brasil. Los resultados indican que las discusiones sobre el tema han aumentado a lo largo de los años. Las instituciones de educación superior de la región Sudeste y el área de las Ciencias Sociales Aplicadas se destacan como las que más han producido investigaciones sobre la temática. En cuanto a los conflictos analizados, se identificó una diversidad de casos que involucran comunidades, pueblos indígenas, quilombolas, barrios y parques. Se concluye que Brasil presenta una cantidad significativa de conflictos ambientales que pueden ser investigados desde la perspectiva del racismo ambiental y que requieren una mayor atención por parte del poder público y de diversos campos del conocimiento para buscar alternativas que contribuyan a mitigar sus efectos.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Racismo ambiental. Posgrado. Revisión de alcance.*

Introduction

The North American environmental movement of the 1970s and 1980s brought visibility to a form of violence that intertwines racial, environmental, and social inequalities: environmental racism (Bullard, 1999). In this context, environmental racism came to be understood as the manifestation of environmental inequalities that disproportionately affect Black, Indigenous, and marginalized communities (Herculano, 2008). It is therefore closely related to structural racism, as it is not confined to isolated situations but rather results from a historical process that has neglected Black populations' access to public services, adequate housing conditions, and quality of life (Herculano; Pacheco 2008; Pacheco; Faustino, 2013; Jesus, 2020).

In the Brazilian context, environmental racism can thus be understood as a category within structural racism (Carolino; Ferreira; Teodósio, 2023). Currently, it is reflected in the disproportionate negative impacts of territorial and environmental crimes, climate emergencies, and state negligence, which weigh more heavily on historically marginalized populations. A recent example is the impact of the severe floods that struck the state of Rio Grande do Sul in 2024.

According to Augustin and Soares (2024), the areas most affected by the floods were predominantly inhabited by Black residents. This finding revives a discussion presented by Gonzalez and Hasenbalg (2022), who identified as early as 1980 what they termed the “place of the Black population” in Brazil—a phenomenon rooted in a historical process dating back to the colonial period, which confined Black Brazilians to peripheral territories, distant from public infrastructure and often located in high-risk areas.

Although the concept of environmental racism originated in the United States, it has been incorporated by Brazilian scholars engaged in the struggle against environmental injustice (Herculano; Pacheco, 2008; Jesus, 2020; Nascimento; Azevedo; Almeida, 2023). In Brazil, discussions on environmental racism date back to 2000, culminating in the International Colloquium on Environmental Justice, Labor, and Citizenship held at the Federal Fluminense University in 2001 (Herculano, 2008). The event was a milestone in national debates on the subject and included prominent figures, among them Professor Robert Bullard, who had participated in the environmental justice struggles of the 1970s in the United States (Herculano, 2008).

Given this historical background and recognizing the central role of graduate studies in knowledge production (Moita; Andrade, 2009), it becomes essential to examine researchers' interest in environmental racism within the Brazilian context. Accordingly, this study aims to conduct a scoping review of how the concept of environmental racism has been addressed in Brazilian theses and dissertations available in the CAPES Theses and Dissertations Catalog.

The paper is organized into five sections, including this introduction. The next section discusses the concept of environmental racism, addressing its socio-historical dimensions and its relationship to the Brazilian context. The methodology employed is then presented, followed by a section outlining the main findings of the review. The final section offers concluding remarks and suggestions for future research.

Environmental Racism as a Form of Historical Injustice

According to Acelrad (2004), the concept of environmental racism emerged in the United States during the 1980s within the broader struggle for environmental justice. It originated from the construction of hazardous chemical waste landfills in Warren County, North Carolina, an area predominantly inhabited by Black residents. Community members protested for weeks against the landfill and toxic waste facilities. Nevertheless, "even amid peaceful protests, more than 500 people were arrested, marking the first arrests in the United States related to socio-environmental struggles" (Louback *et al.*, 2022, p. 28, our translation). This movement, in dialogue with broader anti-racist struggles, catalyzed and intensified the environmental justice movement.

The emergence of environmental racism is therefore linked to social mobilization for environmental justice and encompasses issues related to housing, health, quality of life, and the right to a balanced environment (Rammê, 2012). These dimensions involve either the inclusion or exclusion of populations in the formulation of public policies and actions that may directly affect specific groups. To clarify this understanding, the following definition is illustrative:

Environmental racism is racial discrimination in environmental policymaking and enforcement. It is racial discrimination in the application of regulations, actions, and laws. It is racial discrimination in the deliberate targeting of communities of color for toxic waste disposal and the siting of polluting industries. It is racial discrimination in the official sanctioning of life-threatening poisons and pollutants in communities of color. It is racial discrimination in the historical exclusion of people of color from mainstream environmental groups, decision-making bodies, commissions, and regulatory agencies (Chavis Júnior, 1999, p. 3, our translation).

Although this concept originated in the United States, it is applicable to the Brazilian context, as its manifestations vary according to geographic area, phenomenon, and social conditions (McIntyre-Brewer, 2019). In Brazil, environmental racism is evident in racial, spatial, and geographic segregation rooted in structural racism, which defines the so-called “place of the Black population” (Almeida, 2019; Gonzalez; Hasenbalg, 2022). Racism is thus considered systemic and structural because it “articulates racial segregation and the spatial division of races into specific localities, neighborhoods, ghettos, peripheries, etc.” (Almeida, 2019, p. 24, our translation).

As early as the 1980s, Gonzalez and Hasenbalg (2022) discussed geographic stratification based on race within the context of Brazil’s economic growth. With the advent of wage labor, Black individuals were disadvantaged relative to White individuals, often compelled to accept precarious working and housing conditions. This dynamic relegated Black populations to peripheral neighborhoods characterized by inferior economic and housing conditions, as opposed to central areas with better infrastructure. Historical processes thus continue to shape the prevalence of environmental racism today, particularly in situations of state negligence and environmental disasters that disproportionately affect historically vulnerable groups.

As emphasized by Herculano (2008) and Nascimento, Azevedo, and Almeida (2024), environmental racism gained prominence in Brazil with the creation of the Brazilian Network for Environmental Justice (RBJA) in 2001. The organization functions as “a forum for discussion, denunciation, mobilization, and political articulation aimed at exposing and combating racism and environmental injustice” (RBJA, 2024). In Brazilian debates, environmental racism is closely linked to the concepts of environmental justice and injustice (Herculano, 2008; Nascimento; Azevedo; Almeida, 2024). Environmental justice refers to:

[...] a set of principles ensuring that no group of people—whether defined by ethnicity, race, or class—bears a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences of economic operations and federal, state, and local policies and programs, as well as those resulting from the absence or omission of such policies (Herculano, 2008, p. 2, our translation).

A literature review by Nascimento, Azevedo, and Almeida (2024) identified academic discussions dating back to 2008 that examined the socio-historical formation of Brazil and its relationship to environmental racism and injustice. In the Brazilian context, the negative impacts fall predominantly on communities such as riverine populations, fishers, Pantanal

dwellers, quilombolas, extractivists, *geraizeiros*, *caiçaras*, *vazanteiros*, Roma communities, Pomeranians, Afro-Brazilian religious communities, and others (Herculano, 2008, p. 16).

This historical overview frames the contemporary debate shaped by escalating climate crises. According to Human Rights Watch (2022), climate crises represent one of the greatest threats to human rights in our time, arising from climate change and unsustainable environmental exploitation. The impacts of these crises are unevenly distributed, reinforcing environmental racism as a constituent element of environmental injustice. Herculano (2008) defines environmental injustice as the mechanism through which unequal societies allocate the heaviest burden of environmental harm to historically discriminated and socially vulnerable groups.

Thus, in contexts of structural inequality and racial segregation such as Brazil, climate crises and environmental crimes tend to disproportionately affect certain groups (Herculano, 2008; Sanches; Belmont, 2023). The persistence of environmental racism and injustice deepens existing inequalities and demands sustained attention within scientific research.

Brazilian Graduate Studies in the Face of Environmental Racism

In Brazil, several environmental crimes and disasters have exposed the reality of environmental injustice and racism. In 2015, the collapse of the dam in Mariana and, in 2019, the dam failure in Brumadinho revealed that, in the first tragedy, “84.5% of the victims were Black, and in the second, 58.8% of the victims in *Córrego do Feijão* and 70.3% of the victims in *Parque da Cachoeira* self-identified as non-White” (Louback *et al.*, 2022, p. 43, our translation). According to the authors, these data demonstrate that the impacts of both environmental crimes disproportionately affected Black populations.

In 2024, the floods and inundations in Rio Grande do Sul further illustrated how housing conditions can intensify the vulnerability of marginalized communities (Augustin; Soares, 2024). The disaster did not affect all populations equally, as “the areas most severely impacted by the floods exhibited a significant concentration of Black residents” (Augustin; Soares, 2024, p. 68, our translation).

With this in mind, it becomes evident that the concept of environmental racism runs through the historical formation of Brazil and continues to perpetuate inequalities to this day (Sanches; Belmont, 2023). For this reason, although the concept gained prominence in the 1980s, it may be interpreted as a “colonial continuum” (Jesus, 2020), insofar as factors

established during the colonial period—such as exclusion from access to land and certain services based on ethnic-racial characteristics—continue to operate as mechanisms that exclude and deepen inequalities affecting historically vulnerable populations (Jesus, 2020).

Given the persistence of issues related to environmental racism, it is imperative that science—particularly in terms of knowledge production—revisit discussions that highlight this ongoing prevalence in order to develop alternatives capable of mitigating its impacts. In this context, Brazilian graduate education constitutes a relevant locus for the production of scientific knowledge, which is essential for addressing present and future challenges.

According to Nazareno and Herbetta (2019), the economic and ethnic-racial characteristics that shape the profile of graduate students in Brazil are directly related to the inequalities experienced by historically vulnerable populations. For this reason, the “elitist and unequal space of graduate education faces enormous difficulty in accommodating and incorporating the diversity present in the country” (Nazareno; Herbetta, 2019, p. 111, our translation).

This finding, for instance, influences the direction of research agendas and scientific investigations, potentially contributing to the reproduction of what Santos (2002) calls the sociology of absences. According to the author, this sociology assumes the production of non-existences that sustains hegemonic conceptions of knowledge. Therefore, by acknowledging the continued predominance of an elitist profile in graduate education—one that does not reflect the diversity of the Brazilian population—there is a risk of perpetuating hegemonic knowledge production.

Without recognizing this risk, themes related to environmental racism may not be regarded as relevant within graduate programs. This is because combating environmental racism is directly linked to the notion of environmental injustice, as previously noted. It is therefore necessary to understand how these discussions are being developed in Brazilian graduate education through questions such as: Are certain cases and issues investigated more frequently? What are the main research areas? Is it possible to identify reference institutions in this field?

Methodology

This study consists of a scoping review conducted through a search for theses and dissertations addressing environmental racism available in the CAPES Theses and Dissertations Catalog, the official online system of the Brazilian government for the submission of Brazilian theses and dissertations, linked to the Ministry of Education (MEC) (UNESP, 2013). A scoping review is one possible form of literature review and enables the mapping of key concepts discussed within a given research field. Its implementation may be justified on at least four grounds: examining the extent, scope, and nature of a given topic; assessing the feasibility of conducting a systematic literature review; summarizing and disseminating the main findings on a topic of interest; and identifying gaps in the existing literature. The latter two purposes result in a study in which the scoping review is conceived as a method in its own right (Arksey; O'Malley, 2005; Santini; Barros, 2022).

In this study, the scoping review was employed as a method in itself. The analytical framework proposed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) was adopted, structured into five stages: (1) identification of the research question; (2) identification of relevant studies; (3) selection of studies based on inclusion and exclusion criteria; (4) charting of the selected studies in relation to their objectives, methodologies, key findings, and other relevant aspects; and, finally, (5) synthesis and reporting of the main findings, identification of gaps, and proposal of a future research agenda. In addition to the framework proposed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), the discussions by Levac, Colquhoun, and O'Brien (2010) and by Daudt, Mossel, and Scott (2013) were also considered, as these authors refined and expanded the original scoping review methodology. Based on these references, the following stages were carried out:

Stage 1 – Identification of the research question: How has the concept of environmental racism been investigated in Brazilian theses and dissertations available in the CAPES Theses and Dissertations Catalog?

Stage 2 – Identification of relevant studies: At this stage, key search terms, the period of analysis, and the database used were defined. The key term adopted was "Environmental Racism." The search was conducted in the CAPES Catalog, as it is the mandatory repository for theses and dissertations developed at higher education institutions nationwide. No specific time frame was established. The search was conducted on November 18, 2024, resulting in a total of 76 studies.

Stage 3 – Selection of studies based on inclusion and exclusion criteria: In this stage, inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined to determine which texts would be included in the analysis:

- **Inclusion criteria:**

- a) Theses and/or dissertations published in the CAPES Theses and Dissertations Catalog;
- b) Theses and dissertations whose central theme concerns or relates to environmental racism; and
- c) All publication years were considered.

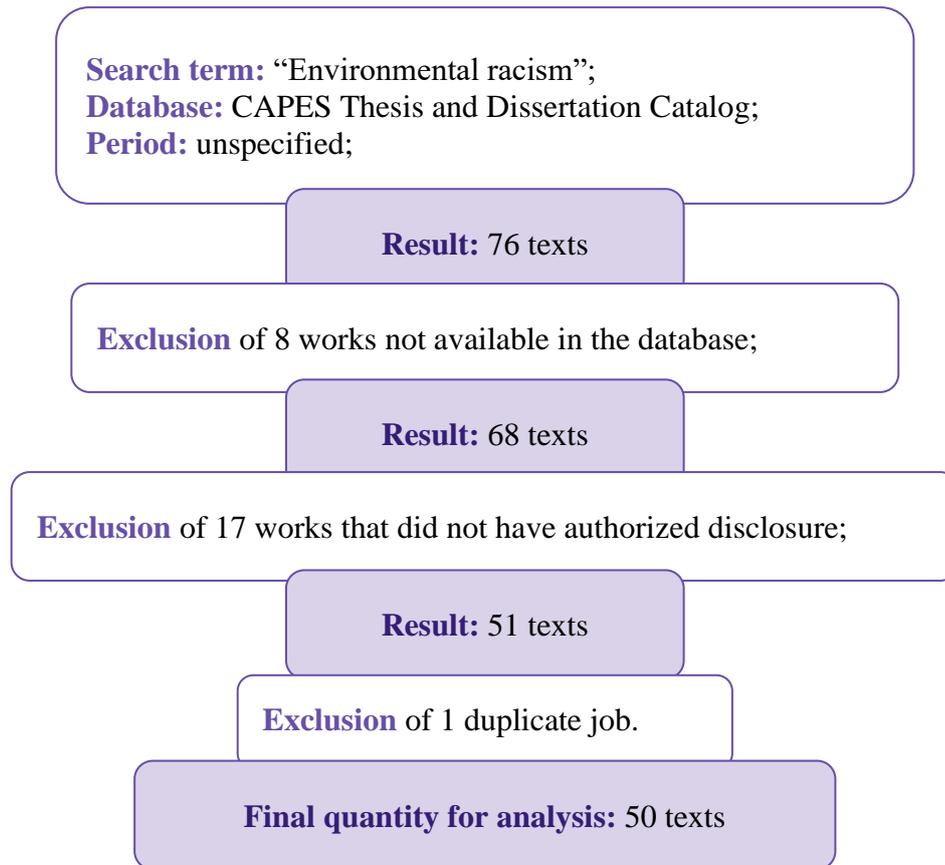
- **Exclusion criteria:**

- a) Texts not available in the Catalog;
- b) Texts without authorized public access; and
- c) Duplicate texts.

Of the 76 studies identified in the search, 8 were not found (i.e., not available in the Catalog), 17 did not have authorized public access, and 1 was a duplicate. Thus, the final sample comprised 50 theses and dissertations.

Figure 1 illustrates Stages 2 and 3 described above, highlighting the search term used and the filters applied based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Figure 1 – Description of the search and selection stages of the theses and dissertations



Source: Prepared by the authors (2026).

Stage 4 – Charting of the selected studies: Proceeding to the fourth stage, the model proposed by Arksey and O’Malley (2005) recommends the charting of data. Accordingly, the studies were charted and synthesized in a table made available as supplementary material. The categories selected for charting were: thesis or dissertation; institution where the research was conducted; whether it was carried out at a public or private institution; year of publication; federative unit; region; graduate program; field of study; objective; methodology; and nature of the research.

Stage 5 – Synthesis and reporting of the main findings, identification of gaps, and proposal of a future research agenda: The fifth stage consists of presenting an overview of the topic based on the data charted in the fourth stage. In this sense, it involves the presentation and discussion of the information considered relevant to the analysis (Arksey; O’Malley, 2005). Accordingly, the following section presents and discusses the results, corresponding to the fifth stage of the model proposed by Arksey and O’Malley (2005).

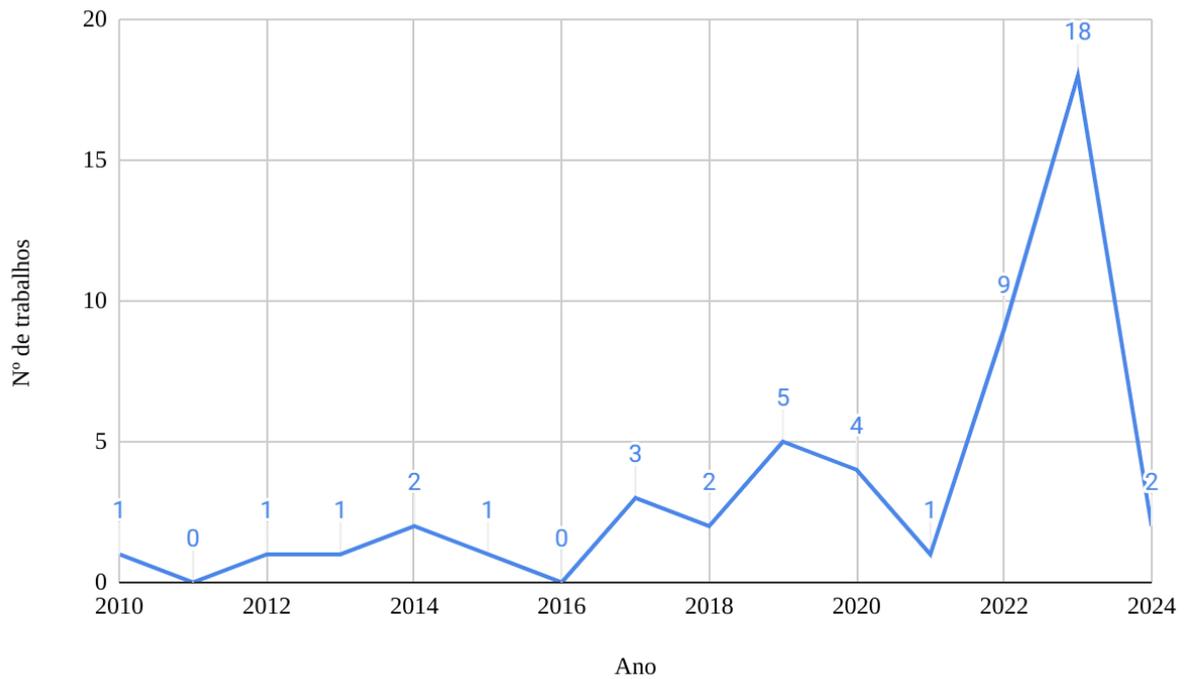
Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the main findings identified through the charting process and the scoping analysis. In this regard, the first three subsections examine the evolution of research output on the topic over time, the regions and higher education institutions where the studies were conducted, and the fields of knowledge in which works addressing environmental racism are situated. Finally, the fourth subsection presents the main concepts discussed in the identified theses and dissertations, as well as the conflicts analyzed in the sampled studies.

Environmental Racism: Evolution of Scientific Production on the Topic in Brazilian Graduate Education

In order to examine how interest in the topic of environmental racism has evolved, the fifty texts comprising the sample were organized into periods to track publication dynamics over the years. Based on Graph 1, it is evident that the first dissertation in the sample addressing environmental racism was published in 2010 and corresponds to the work of Formentini (2010), which discussed environmental racism from a theoretical and conceptual perspective as a form of environmental injustice, emphasizing the need to improve judicial instruments for the protection of environmental rights in alignment with the notion of development. Thus, the initial discussion of the topic within the sampled studies is characterized by a predominantly conceptual and theoretical approach.

Graph 1 – Evolution of publications over time



Source: Prepared by the authors. Adapted from the CAPES Theses and Dissertations Catalog (2024).

Despite the mandatory submission and publication of theses and dissertations to CAPES, Nascimento, Azevedo, and Almeida (2024) demonstrate that environmental racism has appeared in Brazilian scientific publications since 2008. Therefore, although the topic had been introduced into public debates well before 2008—with records dating back to 2001 following the creation of the RBJA—there is evidence of graduate-level research on the subject since 2010, which is consistent with the scenario presented by Nascimento, Azevedo, and Almeida (2024). However, a period of stagnation is observed between 2010 and 2016, as the number of published works did not exceed two during this interval.

This stagnation may represent a phase of maturation in the field of study on the concept of environmental racism, given that in 2001, at the time of the establishment of the RBJA, the topic was still addressed incipiently in Brazil and was largely discussed in conjunction with the concepts of environmental justice and injustice (Herculano, 2008). In addition, CAPES began to make the Theses and Dissertations Catalog available in 2003, and only in 2013 did a new version of the Catalog become publicly accessible, facilitating searches. This information is relevant, as it may have influenced the visibility and publication of studies.

Moreover, a decline in the number of studies is observed, reaching zero in 2021, which may reflect the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, given that most institutions and public

services were suspended and the resumption of administrative and research activities was slow. Conversely, it is noteworthy that between 2017 and 2020, 14 studies addressing the topic were published, indicating growth compared to the period from 2010 to 2016. It is possible that interest in environmental racism intensified and stimulated further research as a result of the environmental disasters that occurred in 2015 in the city of Mariana and in 2019 in Brumadinho, both in the state of Minas Gerais, areas characterized by intensive mining activities. According to Wanderley (2015), for example, there was a predominance of Black populations (Black and Brown), accounting for approximately 84%, among those most affected by the disaster in Mariana, Minas Gerais.

For instance, Miranda (2020) examined both environmental crimes from the perspective of environmental racism, highlighting how such crime-disasters disproportionately affect historically vulnerable communities through mining activities. The period between 2022 and 2023 records the highest number of published works, totaling 27. Once again, the pandemic and other contextual factors may have exerted influence, alongside the gradual evolution and maturation of discussions surrounding the concept.

Within this broader context, in 2022 a landslide occurred in the peripheral region of Petrópolis, in the state of Rio de Janeiro, resulting in more than 240 deaths. In Pires (2022), this disaster was analyzed in relation to environmental racism and discussed within the field of human rights. This suggests a possible correlation between the development of the concept and the occurrence of environmental catastrophes or crimes that can be interpreted through the lens of environmental racism.

In this regard, an evolution in the discussion can be observed. In 2010—as briefly noted earlier—Miranda (2020) developed a more conceptual study articulating environmental racism with policies and legislation related to justice and rights. By contrast, in 2024, the debate advances toward empirical analyses of the concept: Silva (2024) draws on participants' narratives to understand processes of resistance to environmental racism, while Rossato (2024) examines how the debate on environmental racism is articulated in contexts involving the overlap of Indigenous territories with Conservation Units. It is therefore evident that research addressing the concept has evolved over time and that these discussions are closely linked to situations embedded in Brazilian social reality, which in turn influence their development.

The following section examines the relationship between these works and the higher education institutions and regions where they were produced, as well as how they may reveal

catastrophes and situations that are not always immediately evident but can nonetheless be analyzed through the lens of environmental racism.

Research Spaces on Environmental Racism in Graduate Education: Regions and Higher Education Institutions

According to Pulido (2000), discussions on environmental racism should not focus solely on specific and sporadic cases; rather, they must extend beyond predefined boundaries to generate interpretations that are not always readily apparent. In other words, such discussions should not be restricted to a single context or isolated case. They must consider local, regional, and global dimensions and their interconnections, taking into account the political, social, and structural conjunctures that shape these relationships.

With this in mind, based on the sample, Table 1 was prepared to present the number of studies by region and institution. This analysis makes it possible to understand how discussions on the topic are distributed across Brazil and among higher education institutions. At first glance, the Southeast region accounts for the highest number of graduate-level studies addressing the topic, with 21 works. It is followed by the Northeast region, with 17 studies, and subsequently by the South, Midwest, and North regions.

Table 1 – Distribution of studies by region and institution

Southeast		Northeast		South		Midwest		North	
Institution	Number of works	Institution	Number of works	Institution	Number of works	Institution	Number of works	Institution	Number of works
Públicas									
UFF	4	UFPB	3	UFPR	1	IFMT	2	UFPA	2
UNIRIO	3	UFPI	2	UDESC	1	UFMT	1	-	-
UERJ	2	UFSE	2	-	-	UNB	1	-	-
UFRJ	1	UFS	2	-	-	UFG	1	-	-
UFRRJ	1	UFBA	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
UFJF	1	UNEB	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
UFOP	1	UEFS	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
UNESP	1	UFRB	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
UFSCAR	1	UFMA	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
UFES	1	UEMA	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
-	-	UFCE	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Individuals									
ESDHC	2	UCSAL	1	UNIJUI	1	-	-	-	-
FDV	1	-	-	UNIVALI	1	-	-	-	-
UCP	1	-	-	PUC-PR	1	-	-	-	-
UNISANTOS	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	21	Total	17	Total	5	Total	5	Total	2

Source: Prepared by the authors. Data source: CAPES Theses and Dissertations Catalog (2024).

Among the possible explanations for why the Southeast region has the highest number of studies on environmental racism, it is important to note that this region also has the largest number of graduate students enrolled in Brazil, according to data released in 2024 in the study *Brazil: Masters and Doctorates* by the Center for Management and Strategic Studies (CGEE) of the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation (MCTI). However, this characteristic alone does not fully explain the higher concentration of studies. When revisiting the emergence of discussions on environmental racism in Brazil in 2001, with the creation of the Brazilian Network for Environmental Justice (RBJA), it is noteworthy that the International Colloquium on Environmental Justice, Labor, and Citizenship was held in Niterói, Rio de Janeiro. Furthermore, as previously highlighted, the Southeast region experienced environmental crimes and disasters that can be analyzed through the lens of environmental racism, which may have influenced the development of research on the topic.

It is also relevant that the Federal Fluminense University (UFF) is the institution with the highest number of studies addressing environmental racism, both nationally and within the Southeast region, totaling four works. It is worth recalling that the 2001 Colloquium was held at the same institution. Thus, there is a concentration of studies at UFF, which is consistent with its role as the site of the initial academic debate on the subject.

Nevertheless, discussions on environmental racism are present across all five Brazilian regions. The North region appears in two studies—one thesis and one dissertation—both conducted at the Federal University of Pará (UFPA), making it the region with the lowest number of works in the sample. Notably, both studies (Rebelo, 2017; Araújo, 2023) examined the contexts of quilombola communities and how environmental racism influenced the violation of their rights. Therefore, although the sample includes few studies addressing environmental racism in the region, this does not imply that the phenomenon is absent from its territory.

The works by Rebelo (2017) and Araújo (2023) address issues grounded in empirical data. Each author, within the scope of her respective object of analysis, discusses the challenges faced by quilombola communities regarding land tenure and territorial legality in light of environmental justice and legal frameworks. These discussions align, for example, with data presented in the report *Conflicts in the Countryside – Brazil 2023*, published in 2024 by the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), which indicates that the North region accounted for the majority of land tenure conflicts in Brazil, totaling 810 occurrences in 2024 alone (CPT

Nacional, 2024). The state of Pará recorded the highest number of conflicts involving Indigenous lands and violence against Indigenous populations.

The same report revealed that the primary victims of these conflicts were small landowners (26.4% of recorded cases), Indigenous peoples (24.7%), landless rural workers (18%), squatters (14%), and rubber tappers (5%) (CPT Nacional, 2024). In addition, the 2022 Census conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) showed that the North region has the highest proportion of Indigenous people in Brazil (4.3%), with the states of Roraima (15.4%) and Amazonas (12.5%) standing out. The convergence of these data indicates the presence of environmental racism embedded in land tenure conflicts, rendering traditional and Indigenous populations vulnerable and subject to ongoing violence.

At the same time, it is essential to emphasize the importance of the Amazon for Brazil and for the global community—not only because of its vast forests and biodiversity but also because it is the region where most Indigenous populations are concentrated. According to the Amazon Environmental Research Institute (IPAM, 2010), the Legal Amazon encompasses the majority of Indigenous lands—424 areas totaling 115,344,445 hectares—whose populations depend on the forest to sustain their ways of life and cultures, which are grounded in environmental preservation. Consequently, Indigenous modes of relating to nature and territory should be recognized as key allies in efforts to combat climate change.

In this context, it is relevant to highlight that the 30th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 30) will be held in Brazil in 2025, in the city of Belém, Pará, located in the North region. Therefore, discussions on environmental racism, land conflicts, the populations most affected, and the importance of preserving the Amazon should be central to these debates, particularly in light of the local context and the interrelationship between climate change impacts and environmental injustices, as these issues are closely intertwined. In this regard, the studies conducted with quilombola communities by Rebelo (2017) and Araújo (2023) could inform such discussions and foster the development of new research, especially considering the characteristics of the conflicts identified in the North region.

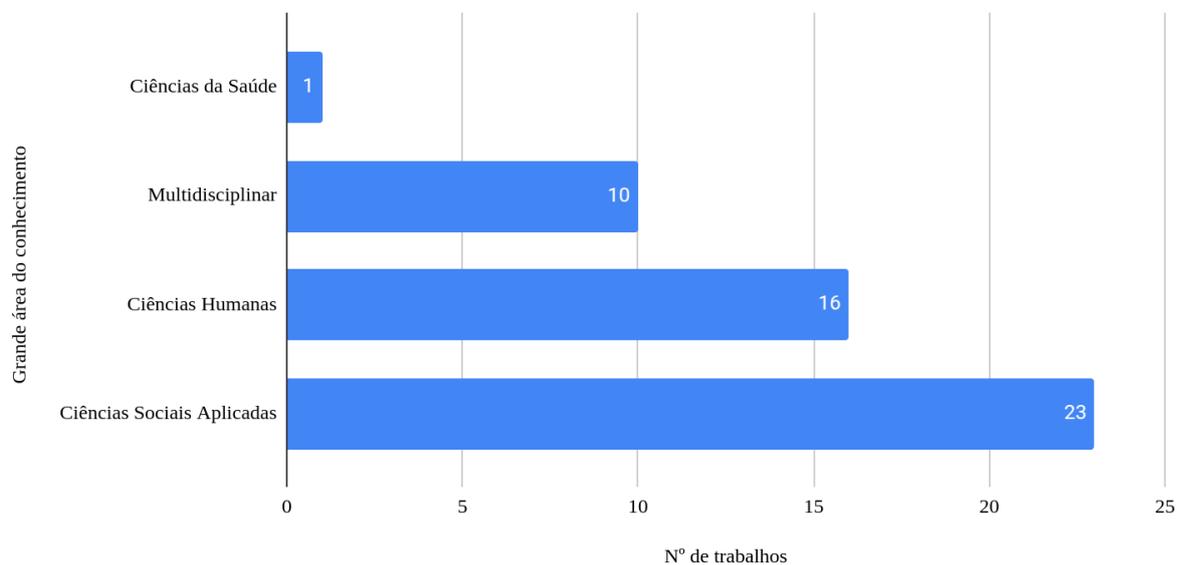
Finally, it is noteworthy that private universities have also contributed to the dissemination of the topic in graduate education, as exemplified by Formentini's (2010) study conducted at the Regional University of the Northwest of the State of Rio Grande do Sul (UNIJUÍ). Nevertheless, the majority of studies originate from federal public institutions. In this sense, the debate initiated in 2001 at a public higher education institution (UFF), combined with other initiatives such as the creation of the RBJA, stimulated the expansion and deepening of research on environmental racism across different institutions—both public and private—

throughout Brazil's regions. It is therefore pertinent to identify the fields of knowledge that have been engaging with the concept and to outline future possibilities arising from the advancement of these discussions, as addressed in the following section.

The Discussion of Environmental Racism Across Different Fields of Knowledge

For the present analysis, the classification of the broad fields of knowledge associated with the works included in the sample was used. Accordingly, the following areas were identified: (1) Applied Social Sciences; (2) Human Sciences; (3) Multidisciplinary; and (4) Health Sciences. Based on Graph 2, it is possible to observe the diversity of fields represented in the theses and dissertations addressing environmental racism in graduate education. Considering that environmental racism, as a dimension of structural racism, constitutes a form of environmental injustice embedded in Brazilian society, its manifestations are varied and present across multiple social phenomena, which explains the presence of these four major fields of knowledge.

Graph 2 – Main fields represented in the studies



Source: Prepared by the authors. Adapted from the CAPES Theses and Dissertations Catalog (2024).

However, the field of Applied Social Sciences accounts for the largest number of studies, with 23 works, followed by Human Sciences with 16, Multidisciplinary with 10, and Health Sciences with only one study. The National Council for Scientific and Technological

Development (CNPq) classifies research areas into eight major groups: (1) Agricultural Sciences; (2) Biological Sciences; (3) Health Sciences; (4) Exact and Earth Sciences; (5) Engineering; (6) Human Sciences; (7) Applied Social Sciences; and (8) Linguistics, Literature, and Arts.

From this classification, only four areas are represented among the works in the sample. This indicates that, although the topic is discussed across different fields, it is still necessary to expand the debate into other areas in order to contribute more effectively to the mitigation of environmental injustices. The presence of the multidisciplinary field is particularly noteworthy. According to the National Graduate Plan (PNPG) released in 2023, the multidisciplinary area carried out the highest number of extension projects in 2022 compared to other areas and, in the present analysis, ranks third among the fields investigating environmental racism in Brazil. This is especially significant given that CAPES highlights that the creation and formal registration of this area within Graduate Programs occurred only in 2008 (Brazil, 2019), unlike other areas that have a long-established history of institutional consolidation.

In light of this analysis, it is important to emphasize the need for interdisciplinarity in research addressing environmental racism. This concern is also reflected in international documents and debates held in Brazil. Moreover, among the guidelines set forth in the PNPG (2024–2028) is the need to “value interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary, recognizing that complex problems require the integration of multiple competencies” (Brazil, 2023, p. 112, our translation).

Environmental racism can thus be understood as a complex problem requiring articulation among different fields of knowledge. Nevertheless, it is essential that other areas—particularly those not yet engaged in the debate—incorporate the concept into their research agendas and analytical frameworks. The following section presents, based on the analyzed sample, the main concepts and/or empirical cases discussed in the studies.

Environmental Racism Between Theory and Practice: Some Reflections

In order to demonstrate how the concept of environmental racism is addressed in graduate-level research, a survey was conducted of the main concepts discussed in the studies (theoretical dimension) and the principal conflicts and cases examined (empirical dimension). The analyses were synthesized in Table 2, in which the first column lists the most recurrent concepts identified in the sample, and the second column presents the conflicts and cases analyzed. This brief overview makes it possible to understand the contexts, conflicts, and

conceptual frameworks through which environmental racism has been examined, especially considering, as previously noted, the diversity of fields involved.

Table 2 – Main concepts, conflicts, and cases addressed in the studies

Theoretical nature - Main concepts discussed	Empirical nature - Main conflicts and/or cases discussed
Environmental racism (50)	Guarani Mbya (2)
Environmental justice (21)	Women fishers from Mangue do Cumbe (1)
Territory (15)	Santa Maria neighborhood (Aracajú-SE) (1)
Environmental injustice (12)	Castanheira Hydroelectric Plant (Juara-MT) (1)
Quilombos (10)	Manguinhos Complex (1)
Vulnerability (10)	Picos-PI (1)
Socio-environmental crimes and conflicts (10)	Quilombola Community (Ilha de Maré-BA) (1)
Socio-environmental inequalities (8)	Quati Community (1)
Environmental education (8)	Colônia Getúlio Vargas Community (Bayeux-PB) (1)
Necropolitics (4)	Canto da Várzea and Louzinho Monteiro (1)
Social and socio-environmental movements (4)	Morro do Bumba (Niterói-RJ) (1)
Decoloniality (4)	São Benedito Community (1)
Structural racism (3)	
Traditional communities (3)	Santa Cruz Community (1)
Climate change (2)	Communities of the Iguape Bay Marine Reserve (1)
Sustainability (2)	Environmental crimes related to the collapse of mining dams (1)
Environmental racism in Michael Foucault (1)	Gameleira Community (1)
Forced migration (1)	Minas-Rio Project - Anglo American Company (1)
Actor-Network Theory (1)	Rio de Janeiro state parks (1)

Source: CAPES Theses and Dissertations Catalog (2024).

To identify the main concepts addressed in the studies, each work was examined with particular attention to its theoretical framework and keywords in order to determine the most frequently discussed concepts. The survey of cases and conflicts was conducted through a review of the abstracts and introductions, which enabled the extraction and systematization of relevant information in the aforementioned table.

Regarding the column on the principal concepts discussed, environmental racism appears in all the studies, as the selection criteria required explicit engagement with this topic. In parallel, environmental justice emerges as the second most recurrent concept. This finding aligns with the historical development of the notion of environmental racism, which arose from environmental movements in the United States in response to demands for environmental justice (Herculano, 2008; Silva, 2012).

Environmental racism is understood as a form of environmental injustice, which explains why environmental injustice appears as the fourth most frequent concept in the sample. As noted by Herculano (2008), there were attempts in Brazil to broaden debates on environmental racism through the lens of environmental injustice, given that, etymologically, the latter encompasses a wider range of factors. Nevertheless, several authors continue to adopt the term environmental racism. This distinction is particularly relevant in the Brazilian context, where structural racism constituted the foundation for the consolidation of slavery and the systematic denial of fundamental rights to Black populations (Almeida, 2019).

In this regard, the concept of structural racism itself is among the most recurrent in the studies, suggesting a correlation between historical processes and discussions of environmental racism in Brazil. At the same time, territory plays a central role and appears as the third most frequent concept. This notion relates both to the understanding of environmental racism within environmental justice struggles in the United States and to its application in Brazil. First, analyses of environmental racism must consider the specific contexts of each locality. Second, it is within territories that relations of power, neglect, and inequality become most visible (Carolino; Ferreira; Teodósio, 2023).

The concept of territory is also closely associated with other recurring terms, such as quilombos, traditional communities, crimes, and socio-environmental conflicts. Socio-environmental conflicts and crimes disproportionately affect populations embedded in specific territories, understood not merely as geographic or spatial units but as spaces constituted by meanings, interpretations, and social relations. In this sense, the quilombo is defined as a “territory for the preservation of the customs, beliefs, and culture of peoples” (Oliveira, 2023, p. 19, our translation). This connection reinforces the relationship between territory and environmental racism, as conflicts—often related to land ownership disputes, denial of rights, and violence against Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities—frequently arise within these territories (Oliveira, 2023).

In the second column, which addresses the most recurrent conflicts and cases, the term communities also appears frequently, as it commonly refers to quilombola, Indigenous, and

other traditional territories. The definition of traditional peoples and communities is established in Decree No. 6,040, enacted in February 2007, which instituted the National Policy for the Sustainable Development of Traditional Peoples and Communities.

The decree defines traditional peoples and communities as populations that possess distinct forms of social organization and occupy and use territories and natural resources as a condition for their cultural, social, religious, ancestral, and economic reproduction, employing knowledge, innovations, and practices generated and transmitted through tradition (Brazil, 2007, our translation). According to the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change, traditional communities are represented by 28 segments that constitute a significant portion of the population and occupy a substantial share of the national territory (Brazil, 2025).

The term quilombola community is often adopted to emphasize the collective dimension and shared sense of belonging among group members. It is important to note, however, that not all the studies address conflicts within these territories. Some focus on historical reconstruction (Oliveira, 2023) or on educational practices aimed at awareness-raising and resistance concerning environmental racism (Gonzaga, 2017; Sales, 2020; Santos, 2022).

It is also noteworthy that several of the conflicts identified in the analyzed studies are included in the Map of Environmental Injustice and Health Conflicts in Brazil, developed by the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation in partnership with other organizations, including the Brazilian Environmental Justice Network. The map seeks to identify territories where environmental risks and impacts affect diverse populations and to amplify the voices of communities that struggle for environmental justice and are frequently discriminated against or rendered invisible by institutions and the media (Oswaldo Cruz Foundation, 2010). The initiative documents conflicts across all regions of Brazil in connection with environmental injustices and serves as a foundation for further in-depth investigation. Importantly, the cases analyzed in the sample are not typically those highlighted by national media coverage but are instead closely linked to the local contexts in which the respective research institutions operate.

The analyses indicate that graduate education can contribute to identifying issues related to climate and environmental injustices and to mitigating their effects, thereby strengthening the alignment between research and practice with a focus on social impact. This perspective is consistent with the challenges of measuring research impacts, as outlined in the National Graduate Education Plan (PNPG) (2024–2028). It also converges with the debates held at the

United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 30), which took place from November 10 to 21, 2025, in Belém, Pará, Brazil.

Final Considerations

The selected studies demonstrate that discussions on environmental racism have intensified over the years, with 2023 recording the highest number of theses and dissertations on the topic, totaling 18 publications. Among the higher education institutions where the studies were conducted, the Southeast region stands out. Regarding fields of knowledge, the scoping review indicates that most of the research (23 studies) falls within the Social Sciences.

With respect to the conflicts and cases analyzed, a wide range of situations was identified, involving communities, Indigenous peoples, quilombos, neighborhoods, and parks. This diversity underscores the substantial number of socio-environmental conflicts in Brazil that may be examined through the lens of environmental racism. Accordingly, these issues require more systematic attention in graduate programs, as well as from public authorities and other research domains, to ensure that such situations receive adequate consideration and that their effects are effectively mitigated.

The debate on environmental racism is closely linked to environmental conflicts and historically vulnerable populations, reflecting structural racism and the persistent inequalities inherited from the colonial period, including patterns of territorial conception and occupation that frequently expose these populations to risk or neglect. Moreover, the discussion assumes a pedagogical and educational dimension, seeking to raise awareness among affected communities about the imminence of environmental racism. This approach is fostered by both education and law, reinforcing the relevance of an interdisciplinary perspective.

As a limitation of the study, it was not possible to conduct an in-depth discussion of the most recurrent concepts, correlating them with specific theoretical frameworks and identifying the principal authors associated with them. An additional limitation concerns the database selected, which was chosen to meet the objective of analyzing graduate-level research. Future studies are encouraged to undertake reviews in other databases and information sources, including the collection and systematization of primary data. Furthermore, given the hosting of COP 30 in Brazil, it is essential to advance investigations—within graduate education and beyond—that examine the outcomes of the strategies negotiated at the event alongside practical actions aimed at mitigating climate and environmental injustices in the national context.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: The authors acknowledge the Research Support Foundation of the State of Minas Gerais (FAPEMIG) and the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES) for the graduate scholarships that supported the development of this research.

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CRediT Author Statement

- **Acknowledgements:** The authors thank the journal reviewers and the proponents of the dossier for their valuable comments and suggestions.
 - **Funding:** The authors acknowledge the graduate scholarships provided by the research funding agencies CAPES and FAPEMIG.
 - **Conflicts of interest:** The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to this work.
 - **Ethical approval:** Not applicable.
 - **Data and material availability:** The table and the data collected in the survey can be made available upon request.
 - **Authors' contributions:** Aline: Theoretical development, data analysis, and contextualization. Iris: Development of analytical methods and data collection procedures, methodological design, and execution of the survey and mapping of the analyzed works. Both authors contributed to the review and overall structuring of the manuscript, as well as to the development and refinement of each section.
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Processing and editing: Editora Ibero-Americana de Educação
Proofreading, formatting, standardization and translation

