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Mining and Territorial Dispossession in Brazil's Legal Amazon

Mineração e Pilhagem territorial na Amazônia Legal Brasileira

Minería y saqueo territorial en la Amazonia Legal brasileña

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RESUMO: O presente ensaio visa analisar o avanço da mineração na Amazônia Legal Brasileira entre 2011 e 2024, à luz da Geografia Agrária Crítica, evidenciando as contradições e perversidades que historicamente marcam nosso país. Nesse sentido, esse estudo é fundamentado em dados quantitativos do IBGE e do INPE, em sobreposição com demais dados cartográficos de instituições de regulamentação nacional, como a Agência Nacional de Mineração (ANM). Os resultados apontaram que a Amazônia Legal Brasileira é marcada como um território de disputa entre projetos que são antagônicos: o da mercantilização dos bens comuns e o da defesa da vida enraizada nos territórios. A partir das análises, foi possível enfatizar que a legalidade minerária atua como dispositivo de despossessão, convertendo a floresta em “ativo econômico”. Além disso, é importante ressaltar que o Estado brasileiro, em diferentes governos, tem atuado como facilitador da apropriação privada dos territórios, ora pela flexibilização das leis ambientais, facilitando a obtenção dos processos minerários, ora pela omissão diante das diferentes violações.

Palavras-chave: espoliação territorial; mineração; Amazônia Legal; territórios.

ABSTRACT: This essay undertakes a critical examination of the expansion of mining in Brazil’s Legal Amazon between 2011 and 2024, through the analytical lens of Critical Agrarian Geography. It seeks to expose the contradictions and structural injustices that have historically shaped the Brazilian territory. The study draws on quantitative data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) and the National Institute for Space Research (INPE), combined with cartographic information from national regulatory bodies such as the National Mining Agency (ANM). The findings reveal that the Legal Amazon has become a space of antagonistic projects — a region torn between the commodification of the commons and the defence of life deeply rooted in local territories. The analysis highlights that the legal framework governing mining operates as a mechanism of dispossession, transforming the forest into an “economic asset.” Moreover, the Brazilian State, across successive administrations, has acted as a



facilitator of private territorial appropriation — at times by deregulating environmental protections to ease access to mining concessions, and at others by remaining silent in the face of ongoing violations.

Keywords: territorial dispossession; mining; Legal Amazon.

RESUMEN: El presente ensayo busca analizar el avance de la minería en la Amazonía Legal Brasileña entre 2011 y 2024 a la luz de la geografía agraria crítica, evidenciando las contradicciones y perversidades que históricamente han marcado a nuestro país. En este sentido, el estudio se fundamenta en datos cuantitativos del IBGE y del INPE, superpuestos con otros datos cartográficos de instituciones nacionales de regulación como la Agencia Nacional de Minería (ANM). Los resultados señalaron que la Amazonía Legal Brasileña está marcada como un territorio en disputa entre proyectos sociales antagónicos: uno que favorece la mercantilización de los bienes comunes y otro que defiende la vida arraigada al territorio. A partir del análisis, fue posible observar que la legalidad minera actúa como un dispositivo de desposesión, convirtiendo la selva en un activo económico. Además, es importante destacar que el Estado brasileño, en diferentes gobiernos, ha actuado como facilitador de la apropiación privada del territorio mediante la flexibilización de leyes ambientales para facilitar la obtención de concesiones mineras o por omisión ante las violaciones a la propia legalidad que se producen en los territorios.

Palabras-clave: saqueo territorial; minería; Amazonía Legal.

INTRODUÇÃO

“On an unprecedented global scale of inequality, the asymmetrical consumption and use of natural resources is deteriorating the situation of humanity in an increasingly decaying world. This is a dysfunctional mode of production and consumption. Mega-mining increases inequalities through various mechanisms, while becoming a result of them by providing the basis for asymmetric global consumption” (Trocate; Coelho, 2020, p. 42; our translation).

The Brazilian Legal Amazon is not just a vast, legally delimited territory. It is, above all, a field of dispute over senses, practices, and projects within an internationalized capitalist society. The Amazon is a region marked by a historical intertwining of cycles of usurpation, authoritarian developmental policies, and territorialized resistance, where nature and its peoples are transformed into shifting frontiers of capital. Throughout the centuries, the Amazonian space has been successively appropriated by colonial, military, technocratic, liberal projects, which converged towards a constant subordination of the multiple local territorialities to the imperatives of accumulation and imperial geopolitics (Porto-Gonçalves, 2006.)

Beyond being an economic activity, mining is inscribed in the territory as a long-term political project, founded on the logic of plunder and commodification of common goods. We should emphasize that

[...] the natural resources, mainly minerals, of the Amazon are internationalized, the Brazilian economy is internationalized. The workers of this country will have to struggle against this alliance – which capital has consolidated (OLIVEIRA, 1991, p. 99; our translation.)

Mining expansion in the Legal Amazon should be interpreted as an update of accumulation by usurpation, operating through the expropriation of resources, environmental destruction, and the forced displacement of populations (Harvey, 2004). This form of territorialization, although often packaged in discourses of ‘sustainable development,’ is anchored in a colonial rationality that persists and reinvents itself in contemporary times¹. The Amazonian space, in this case, is transformed into a ‘resource-territory’ deprived of its social and symbolic context and adjusted according to the logistical, legal, and technological needs of the global mining chain (Santos, 1996).

¹ This spatial organization is inseparable from the disorder and tensions between territorialities in the country and in the Amazon, according to the investigations of Oliveira (1990) and Ferreira (2018).

The advancement of mining processes, as demonstrated by the databases of the Brazilian Mining Agency (ANM) between 2011 and 2024, is not an isolated or random phenomenon. On the contrary, it reveals the existence of a structured territorial project that functions within the political economy of extractivism. This project manifests materially in mining permits, research requisitions, concessions overlapping indigenous lands and preservation units, as well as in the logistical corridors that connect the forest to export ports (Fernandes, 2021.) Statistics show that the appropriation of Amazonian subsoil resources has intensified, in a selective and concentrated manner, reinforcing regional inequalities and establishing domains of spatial control under corporate hegemony.

In this context, critical agrarian geography understands territory as a living totality, constituted by the power relations that shape the use and meaning of land and territories. Therefore, analyzing mining in the Amazon requires breaking with technical neutrality and embracing the conflictual dimension, a dialectic of concreteness. The territory is the concrete expression of the struggle between different societal projects, marked by contradictions. On the one hand, there is the project of capital, which sees the territory as a technical support for circulation and extraction, among other ancillary processes. On the other hand, there are the counter-hegemonic projects of the forest peoples – indigenous peoples, peasants, riparian populations, quilombola communities, etc.

Regarding this scenario, Porto-Gonçalves (2017, p. 75; our translation) highlights the problem of conflict in the Amazon stemming from the apparatus of large mining projects, whereby "[...] access to the subsoil is only possible through the land where indigenous ethnicities/peoples/nationalities, quilombola communities and various peasant communities of the Amazon are generally located."

Regarding mining processes, the legal structure that organizes their exploration in Brazil is centered on four main regimes for the exploitation of mineral resources: (I) research authorization, (II) mining concession, (III) licensing regime and (IV) artisanal mining permit. Each of these instruments establishes not only a way to access the subsoil, but also a type of legal and territorial resource that directly interferes with the configuration of space. These systems, although formally distinct, converge on the same functional goal: to guarantee the continuous expansion of the extractive frontier.

These normative processes allow the State to operate as a technical manager of the territorialization of capital, promoting the legal order necessary for mineral exploration,

especially in areas of greater environmental sensitivity, such as the Legal Amazon (Fernandes, 2021). The advancement of these processes, even before the physical installation of the mines, generates pressure on peasant, indigenous, traditional, etc. territories², destabilizing their forms of use, management, and sense of belonging. The configuration of mineral exploitation regimes, especially the exploration permit system, operates as a ‘symbolic entry’ into the territory, becoming the initial mechanism for expropriation and deterritorialization.

This process produces concrete effects, such as the fragmentation of communities, the destruction of ecosystems, the replacement of traditional land uses with allegedly productive enclaves, and, above all, the denial of territory as a common good. The appropriation of subsoil resources through concessions represents the visible face of a process that renders invisible ancestral ways of life and knowledge.

In this sense, a critical territorial analysis of mining requires overcoming the dichotomy between lawfulness and unlawfulness. The Amazon is undergoing a legalized usurpation, in which the state's legal apparatus acts as a facilitating agent.

Therefore, it is necessary to recognize and value the ‘territories of resistance’ that emerge in response to the offensives of extractive capital. These insurgent territorialities are not merely forms of symbolic or cultural resistance – they constitute concrete practices of reterritorialization, which articulate agroecology, self-management, traditional knowledge, and political alliances in defense of life. These are territories that produce viable alternatives to the mineral exploitation model and that point to another possible geography, rooted in reciprocity, solidarity and territorial justice (Oliveira; Costa, 2022).

Thus, this essay begins by questioning how the legal regimes of mineral exploration and the territorial strategies of capital have reconfigured the Legal Amazon as a space functionalized to the logic of capital. It is important to emphasize that this issue arises not only from empirical and/or quantitative observation of mining expansion, but also from the deepening contradictions between legal norms and the reality of Amazonian territories.

The rationale for this investigation lies in the urgent need to understand the impacts of mining not only in its environmental dimension, but especially in its territorial dimension. The methodology adopted combines document analysis, secondary data collection, and cartographic interpretation under the guidance of Critical Agrarian Geography. We analyzed public databases from the National Mining Agency (ANM), the National Institute for Space

² Conservation Unit, maritime/coastal areas, etc.

Research (INPE), and the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), including information on applications, authorizations, and concessions for mineral mining between 2011 and 2024.

Data was cross-referenced with strategic territorial divisions, as well as information on the spatial distribution of mining, which allowed for a geographical portrait of legalized usurpation in the region. We also examined legal and institutional frameworks that structure mineral exploitation regimes, based on decrees, laws, bills, and resolutions from the Brazilian Environment Council (CONAMA).

Therefore, this work aims to analyze the expansion of mining processes in the Legal Amazon, revealing the territorial, legal, and political mechanisms that underpin the contemporary usurpation of common goods. Furthermore, it proposes to identify the most affected territories, highlighting the role of large companies and cooperatives in the concentration of subsoil land ownership, and to reflect on the role of the State – not as a neutral mediator, but as a manager of the territorial order of exploitation. This essay, therefore, contributes to a deeper critical reading of land uses and to an understanding of contemporary forms of usurpation, now disguised as sophisticated legal and institutional tools.

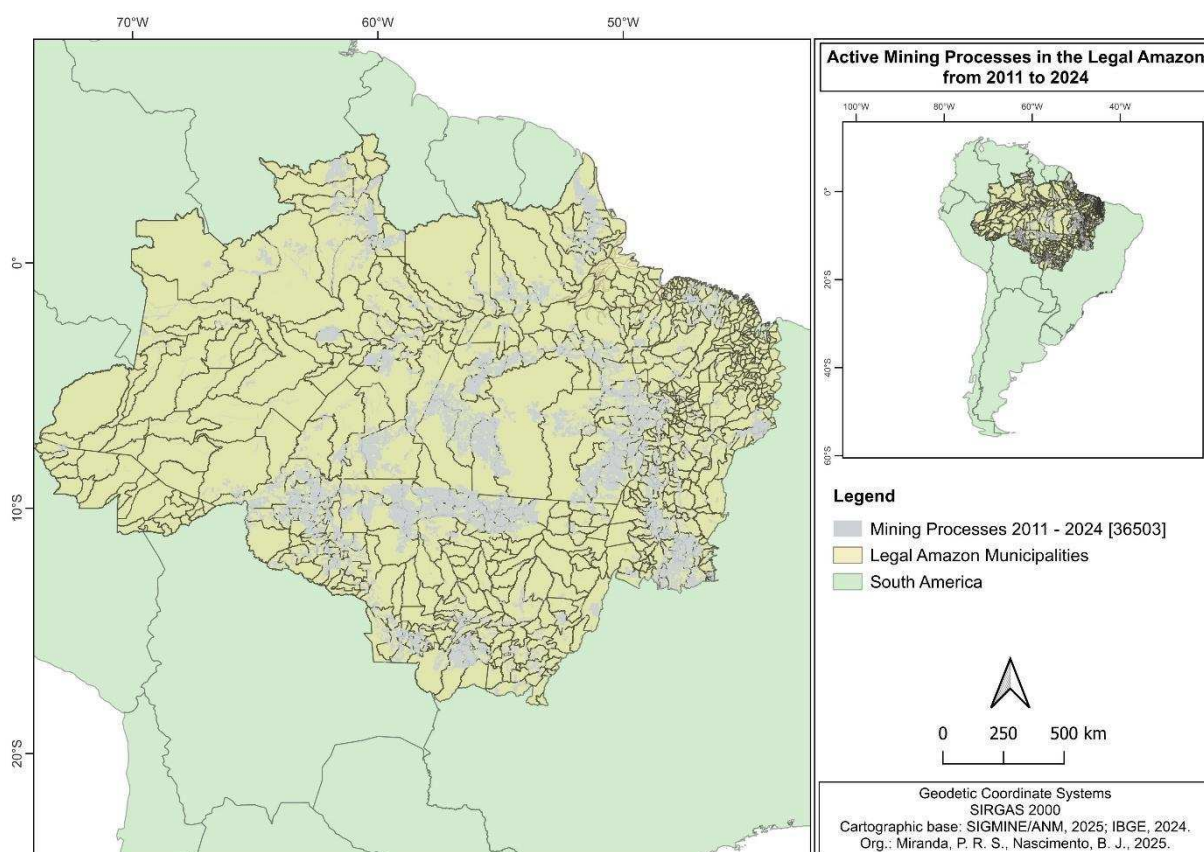
Mining Processes in the Legal Amazon: Geography of Usurpation under a Territorial Perspective

The appropriation of the Legal Amazon by mineral capital, intensified since the 2000s, constitutes a sophisticated and violent form of territorial reconfiguration. In this process, territory is not merely the physical space from which minerals are extracted, but also the material and political basis upon which imposes relations of command, control, and usurpation are imposed. Territory is, first and foremost, an instance of power, and mining, in this context, represents a form of territorial imposition guided by capitalist rationality, with institutional backing and geopolitical projection (Haesbaert, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2007a).

This can be best observed in Map 1, which shows the spatial distribution of subsurface appropriation through mining processes in the Legal Amazon. This observation demonstrates that no territorialization process is neutral (Haesbaert, 2005). These relationships are not without purpose; on the contrary, they are permeated with intentionality. Therefore, spatial

configurations behave according to the social groups that dominate them (Fernandes, 2005; Fischer, 2010).

Map 1 - Appropriation of the subsoil of the Legal Amazon through mining processes



Source: Sigmene (2025). **Org:** The authors (2025).

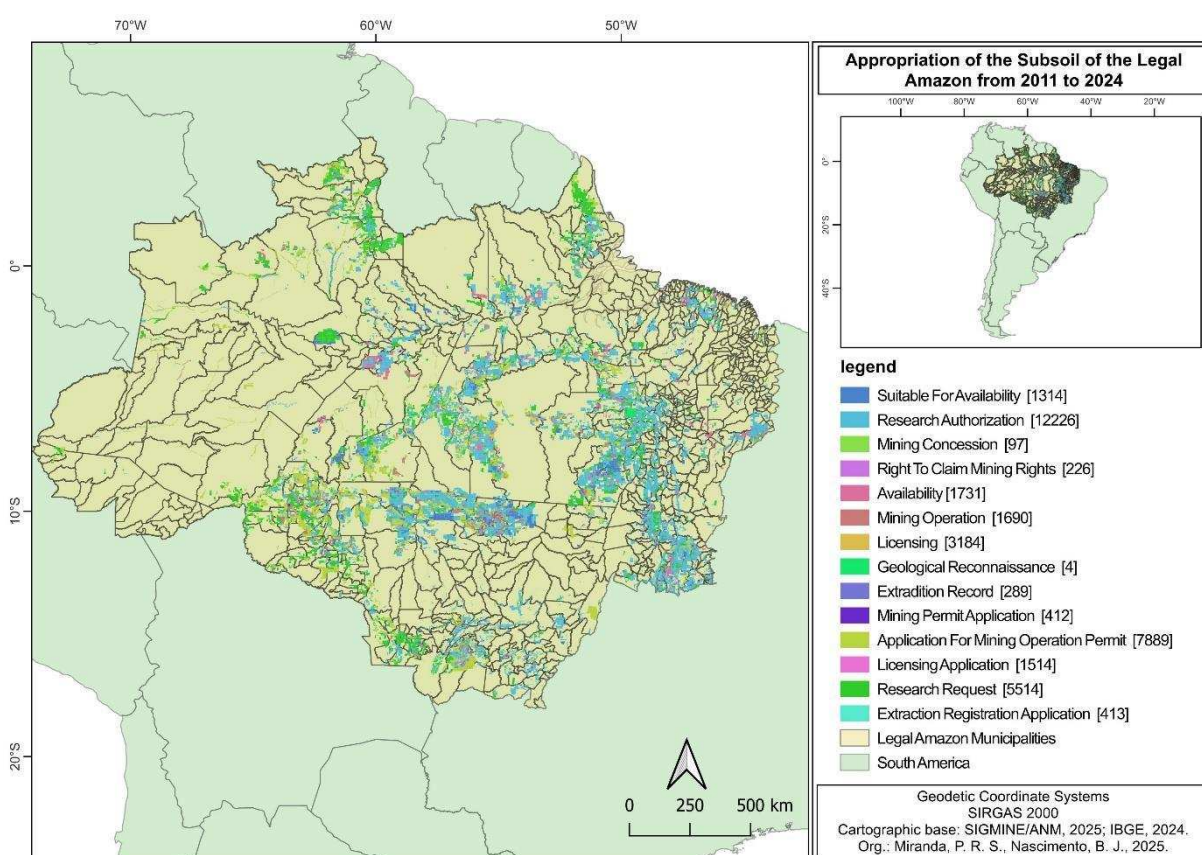
The mapping (Map 2) of mining and mineral research applications between 2011 and 2024 highlights the consolidation of a territorial project focused on mineral exploration, with emphasis on the state of Pará, which concentrates more than 186,000 registrations. This dynamic is driven by permissive public policies, legal instruments such as the Mining Code, and a technical infrastructure that connects extraction areas to global markets.

In this process, territory assumes a functional role for capital, subordinated to the logics of appropriation, domination, and productive use. This results in the emptying of their social and ecological functions, under the control of companies, logistics consortia and the

State (Haesbaert, 2004, 2005). This phenomenon is particularly noticeable in the Amazon, where the map of subsoil appropriation reveals extensive occupation: more than 36.9 million hectares are under research authorization, 16.8 million under research requests, and 15.1 million under artisanal mining requests.

The sum of the phases indicates a significant advance in mineral occupation, reflecting a territorial model driven by extractive logic and the commodification of natural resources.

Map 2 - Appropriation of the subsoil of the Legal Amazon from 2011 to 2024



Source: Sigmene, 2025. **Org:** The authors, 2025.

This logic is realized in the conversion of complex territories, marked by ecological diversity and traditional land uses, into source territories, that is, spaces instrumentalized for the continuous supply of natural resources.

Therefore, nature was reevaluated under two distinct logics. The first perspective is of a cultural or civilizational nature, characterized by a genuine care for nature based on the valuing of life – the foundation of environmental movements. The second view is linked to

the logic of accumulation, which interprets nature as a limited resource and as a strategic asset for generating capital in the future, especially in the context of biodiversity exploitation (Becker, 2005).

Mining is not limited to the physical occupation of the soil/subsoil; it profoundly transforms the role of the territory. What was previously a collective space geared towards subsistence and cultural and ecological reproduction transformed into a territory functionalized by the logic of exploitation and exchange value.

Table 1 shows an empirical observation of the territorial reconfiguration. Between 2016 and 2020, there was a reduction in the mined area, signaling possible regulatory restrictions or economic fluctuations that affected the pace of extractive activities. However, this trend did not continue: the years 2021 and 2022 registered significant increases, indicating an intensification of mining practices, possibly driven by the relaxation of environmental regulations and the valuation of mineral commodities.

In this scenario, territorial appropriation – or ‘used territory,’ according to the terminology proposed by (Santos, 1996) – emerges as a result of the dialectical relationships between socioeconomic dynamics, spatial structures, and material and symbolic elements that underpin human actions in the present. This intertwining delineates analytical categories of territory-as-shelter and territory-as-resource, with the function of each territory being determined by the hegemony that structures it. In the Amazon, this hegemony takes on a predominantly extractive character, subordinating the space to economic interests that disregard its multiple social and environmental dimensions.

Table 1 - Mining processes per area (ha) in the Legal Amazon between 2011 and 2024

Year	Area/ Million (ha)
2011	7.72
2012	4.74
2013	4.16
2014	3.40
2015	2.89
2016	4.73
2017	6.44
2018	5.88
2019	5.11
2020	5.95
2021	9.26
2022	8.19
2023	5.20
2024	7.32

Source: Sigmire (2025). **Org:** The authors (2025).

The expansion of mining in the Amazon highlights the formation of territorial enclaves in which capital territorializes itself through mining concessions, logistical infrastructure – such as ports (Vila do Conde and Juruti), railways (Estrada de Ferro Carajás) – and operational urban centers subordinated to the extractive logic. These enclaves are not merely production points; they are complex systems of usurpation sustained by territorial dispossession and the silencing of local populations (Bringel et al., 2024).

Analysis of mineral appropriation data reinforces this configuration: gold ore leads in subsurface occupation, with more than 29.6 million hectares, followed by copper (12.4 Mha) and cassiterite (10.8 Mha). Substances such as iron, manganese, phosphate, and bauxite also make up significant areas, totaling tens of millions of hectares committed to the logic of

exploitation. This massive appropriation of territory materializes environmental sacrifice zones, in which the social and ecological functions of the land are dismantled to serve the accumulation of capital.

In this context, there is a systematic dismantling of traditional territoriality, understood as the set of social, political, and symbolic practices that link human groups to the land, in favor of a mercantile and homogenizing model. The Amazonian conflict, therefore, reveals itself as a conflict of territorialities. On one side, the project of capital, which simplifies the territory to its productive and profitable dimension; on the other, the forest peoples, who fight for the right to signify and appropriate the land according to their own cosmologies and forms of existence (Porto-Gonçalves, 2006).

Table 2 - Substances extracted in the Legal Amazon between 2011 and 2024

Substance	Area/Million (ha)
Gold ore	29.60
Copper ore	12.43
Cassiterite	10.86
Iron ore	5.33
Manganese ore	3.65
Phosphate	3.12
Bauxite	2.19
Diamond	1.84
Tin ore	1.82
Gold	1.82
Data not registered	0.86
Lead ore	0.78
Tantalum ore	0.76
Sand	0.51

Source: Sigmire (2025). **Org:** The authors (2025).

The construction of mining territory in the Amazon presupposes a true engineering of exclusion. The forest converts into a productive asset, the rivers into logistical corridors, and traditional ways of life into administrative obstacles. This is a planned and selective territorial reorganization that favors states such as Pará, Mato Grosso, Amazonas, and Rondônia – which together concentrate more than 62 million hectares under some form of mineral appropriation, revealing the leading role of these federative units in the territorialization of capital.

This territorialization is not merely economic – it is also political, social, and ecological. The deliberate actions of companies and state agents transform the territory into a space functional to the ‘neo-extractive logic’³, subordinating local dynamics to the global market. In rural areas, this reconfiguration promotes demographic depopulation, displacing workers to urban centers and converting the land into a support for monocultures and wage labor relations, processes that intensify capitalist penetration in these areas (Oliveira, 2012).

Table 3 - Area of mining process requests by states in the Legal Amazon

State	Area/Million (ha)
PA	25.85
MT	18.81
AM	10.15
RO	8.09
TO	7.47
RR	4.54
AP	2.85
MA	2.35
Data not registered	0.68
AC	0.16
MS	0.003

Source: Sigmene (2025). **Org:** The authors (2025).

What is happening in the Amazon is not just the expansion of mining activity, but the consolidation of a new exclusionary territorial regime, structured by the centralization of decisions, the exclusive use of land, and the displacement of groups traditionally rooted in the forest. This is a geography of usurpation, sustained by command mechanisms, strategies of spatial capture, and developmental narratives that mask the devastation of the material and symbolic foundations of life and territories.

Analysis of areas controlled by mining companies and cooperatives reveals territorial concentration in private hands. Nexa Recursos Minerais S.A. controls more than 2.7 million

³ There is nothing new here, hence the use of quotation marks and hyphens. The contradictions and conflicts of the mineral model are timeless and devastating. Such finding allows us to infer about the contribution and construction of a broad understanding regarding the perverse territorialization of agribusiness, hydroelectricity, mining, and business in Brazil and Latin America.

hectares, while the Cooperativa dos Mineradores do Vale do Guaporé operates over 2.3 million hectares. Anglo American Níquel Brasil, mining cooperatives, and even natural persons also control areas exceeding 1 million hectares. This pattern indicates a profound process of privatization and appropriation of territory, which marginalizes traditional knowledge and reshapes it according to the speculative logics of capital.

The territorialization promoted by these agents imposes a functionalist and homogenizing logic, replacing the diversity of lifestyles with regimes of extensive exploitation. In this context, the forest ceases to be a habitat and becomes a resource, and the people who depend on it are displaced in the name of productivity and territorial efficiency.

Table 4 - Organizations with mining processes in the Legal Amazon between 2011 and 2024

Name	Area/Million (ha)
Nexa Recursos Minerais S.A.	2.76
Cooperativa dos Mineradores do Vale do Guaporé	2.34
Anglo American Niquel Brasil Ltda	1.90
Cooperativa dos Garimpeiros e Mineradores do Brasil	1.63
MFCM – legal person	1.31
Cooperativa Mista dos Garimpeiros de Peixoto de Azevedo	1.31
Cooperativa dos Garimpeiros de Apiacas - Coogap	1.15
Cooperativa de Pequenos Mineradores de Ouro e Pedras Preciosas de Alta Floresta	0.92
3D Minerals Ltda	0.91
Cooperativa Mineradora dos Garimpeiros de Ariquemes - Coomiga	0.88

Source: Sigmine (2025). **Org:** The authors (2025).

Geography of Usurpation and Mineral Governance: Political and Legal Dynamics in the Legal Amazon (2011–2024)

‘[...] the amount of foreign currency transferred to municipalities, states and the Federal Government, to compensate them for possible losses caused by mineral production, may decrease, increase or remain stable according to fluctuations in the international market’ (Trocate; Coelho, 2020, p. 66; our translation.)

The intensification of mining in the Legal Amazon between 2011 and 2024 highlights a continuous process of territorialization driven by extractive capital, whose legal and institutional origins date back to the Federal Constitution of 1988. Brazilian legislation, based on the Mining Code (1967), the Environmental Crimes Law (1998), ILO Convention 169 (2004), and more recent regulations such as Decree No. 9.406 (2018), provides the formal instruments for granting, exploring, and monitoring mining activities.

However, the materiality of usurpation emerges in the relationship between laws and the political use of territory, expressed in maps, numbers, and deterritorialized bodies.

Trocate and Coelho (2020) highlight the international scenario and the full conditioning of compensations and payments – foreign currency –, in other words, we continue to specialize in losing. The chart below summarizes some regulations inherent to mining in Brazil and the Amazon.

Chart 1 - Laws and regulations on mining in Brazil and the Amazon

Standard/Law	Year	Description	Scope/Application
Mining Code (Decree-Law no. 227)	1967	Provides for the research and extraction of mineral resources in Brazil.	National
Statute of the Indigenous (Law no. 6.001)	1973	Provides for indigenous rights, including prohibiting mining on indigenous lands without authorization.	National, relevant for the Amazon
Brazilian Constitution (Art. 20, 176, and 225)	1988	Establishes that mineral resources belong to the Federal Government and that their exploitation must respect the environment.	National (includes areas in the Amazon)
CONAMA Resolution no. 237	1997	Provides for environmental licensing, which is required for mining activities.	National
Law no. 9.605 – Environmental Crimes Law	1998	Provides for criminal and administrative sanctions for conduct that harms the environment.	National
ILO Convention 169 (Decree No. 5.051)	2004	It requires prior consultation with indigenous and tribal peoples in the case of projects that affect their territories.	International (ratified by Brazil – relevant for the Amazon)
Law No. 12.334 – Brazilian Dam Safety Policy	2010	Provides for the safety of dams for the purpose of storing water, tailings, and industrial waste.	National, with relevant impact in mining areas
Law No. 12.651 – Forest Code	2012	Provides for the protection of native vegetation and permanent preservation areas.	National, with strong impact in the Amazon
Decree No. 9.406 – Regulates the Mining Code	2018	Modernizes mining management and defines criteria for granting and supervision.	National

Bill No. 191/2020 (under consideration)	—	Provides for the regulation of mining activities in indigenous lands.	National, with focus on the Amazon
ANM Normative Instructions	Miscellaneous	Regulate mining technical and operational aspects.	National

Source: IBGE, Brazil, ANM, Senate and Chamber of Deputies (2024-5).

During Dilma Rousseff's administrations (2011–2016), a tension was observed between environmental policies and the advancement of mineral extraction. Although laws such as the new Forest Code (Law No. 12.651/2012) have been defended as instruments of preservation, their flexibility has, in practice, allowed for an opening to land and mineral capital, especially in the Amazon. This coincides with the reduction in mined area between 2011 and 2015, as shown in Table 1, demonstrating a period of greater resistance from the State to the expansion of the extractive frontier. The implementation of the Brazilian Dam Safety Policy (Law No. 12.334/2010), while relevant, was not sufficient to contain the pressure exerted by large companies and cooperatives on peasant, riparian, and indigenous territories.

On the other hand, starting with the Temer administration (2016–2018), in the aftermath of the political-parliamentary-legal and media coup, a clear inflection point can be observed. The political and institutional crisis served as a pretext for deepening liberal policies of territorial liberalization. The approval of Decree No. 9.406/2018, which regulates the Mining Code, marks a moment in which, under the guise of ‘modernization,’ a legal and institutional framework favorable to accelerating extraction is being established.

The growth of the mined area in 2017 and 2018 (see Table 1), the resumption of concession processes, and the territorial concentration by large companies (Table 4) reveal the advancement of a logic that subordinates the territory to the commodification of common goods. This logic is consistent with the concept of transition from rural territories to enterprise territories, therefore, a reconfiguration of land use centered on financialization and the productive enclave (Fernandes, 2005).

During the Bolsonaro administration (2019–2022), the territorialization of mineral resources reached a new level. Under the rhetoric of ‘development’ and ‘sovereignty over the Amazon,’ a systematic dismantling of environmental and territorial protection institutions is being promoted.

The explosion in mined area in 2021 (9.25 million hectares) and 2022 (8.18 million), as shown in Table 1, was a direct result of a permissive political environment, in which even projects like Bill No. 191/2020, which proposes to regulate mining on Indigenous Lands, gained prominence.

During this period, the Amazonian territory was partially stripped of its social function, being reconfigured as a logistical and business asset due to the advance of global capital – in other words, the ‘droving’. In this sense, we observe conflicts and resistances.

Map 2 summarizes this systematic appropriation, demonstrating a characteristic territorial pattern of usurpation, with a massive occupation of the subsoil, highlighting the states of Pará, Mato Grosso and Amazonas (Table 3).

This process is not merely legal or technical, but essentially political. The territories that host mining are the same ones historically inhabited by traditional communities, landholders, farmers, peasants, indigenous people, extractive populations, etc. The logic of mineral concessions, under the discourse of ‘progress,’ operates as an instrument of dispossession, promoting ‘accumulation by usurpation’ (Harvey, 2013.)

Territorial logic transforms the forest into a resource, the river into a drainage route, and the people into obstacles, establishing a slow death in which life is managed under precarious conditions and violence becomes naturalized as an instrument of power, which refers to the concept of necropolitics (Mbembe, 2003).

Said processes is timeless in Brazil due to several factors.

The extraction of ore from the subsoil and its separation from sterile material and tailings leads to the exhaustion of landscapes. This promotes the conversion of territorial resources into commodities and brings to mind the question posed by Eduardo Galeano (1979, p. 14): ‘Do we export goods or export soils and subsoils?’ (*apud* Gonçalves, 2024, p. 123).

In this context, it is reiterated that, during Lula's fourth term (2023–2024), a reversal of this trajectory was expected. However, despite increasing environmental and social rhetoric, and renewed commitments to the Paris Agreement, practice reveals intense contradictions.

The year 2024 still showed 7.31 million hectares under mining processes, a number similar to that of 2011, at the beginning of the historical series (Table 1). The reconfiguration of the legal framework has, so far, not been sufficient to reverse the extractive logic, given the

maintenance of ongoing mining projects and the continuation of concessions, including in sensitive areas.

Therefore, although legal frameworks are designed to regulate, they end up legitimizing and deepening usurpation when linked to state projects aimed at accumulation. During this period, the Legal Amazon became a showcase for the financialization of nature, where land ceases to be a common good and becomes a financial asset, functionalized for capital and defunctionalized for communities and territories.

Final Considerations

“The history of modern mining throughout the world, but particularly in Our America, is a history of massacres, territories, workers, and peoples sacrificed on the altar of progress. The progress of mining was the progress of the ‘arts of war’; it was also the progress of colonialism; its expansion and globalization” (ARÁOZ, 2020, p. 256; our translation.)

The appropriation of subsoil in the Legal Amazon is not a recent or isolated phenomenon. It is a continuous and contested historical process in which the territory has been systematically captured by external interests and logics of accumulation. Over time, this process has become more sophisticated, incorporating new technological, legal, and political instruments that have broadened its scope and contributed to normalizing its impacts.

Based on the analyses carried out in this study on mineral appropriation between 2011 and 2024, it became clear that, more than numbers or areas claimed, what is at stake is the very condition of existence of thousands of communities, ways of life, biodiversity, and landscapes.

The analysis of mineral appropriation in the period from 2011 to 2024 shows that the conflict is not limited to numbers or the extent of the areas claimed. What is truly at stake is the continued existence of thousands of communities, their ways of life and their territories, as well as the integrity of ecosystems and landscapes.

These scenarios need to be understood in light of what Fernandes (2019, p. 18) characterizes as the ‘mineral commodities boom (2003-2011)’, a period in which exploration, extractive rhythms and exports were intensified, while internally, territorial fractures, socio-environmental vulnerabilities and worker illnesses deepened. In other words, this is not just a cycle of economic expansion, but the consolidation of a regime of territorial usurpation

articulated with different international networks and interests that impact Amazonian territories and reiterate historical patterns of usurpation and inequality.

Thus, this essay reveals the consolidation of a logic of land use that leverages legality to promote usurpation. Behind each request lies an unseen story – a threatened river, a strained community, and a forest converted into a commodity – intensifying and creating new tensions between the numerous Amazonian and Brazilian territories.

Thus, this essay highlights the consolidation of a logic of land use that relies on formal legality to legitimize usurpation. Behind every mineral claim lies a tapestry of silenced stories: a river under threat, a community under tension, and a forest transformed into an economic asset. This is a movement that intensifies pre-existing conflicts and produces new fractures between the multiple Amazonian and Brazilian territories, updating, under a legal guise, old mechanisms of capture and destruction of the common good.

The technical and legal apparatus of the mining system becomes a tool to operate in favor of a broader project. Territorial analysis has shown that the Brazilian State, under different governments, has acted as a facilitator of the private appropriation of territory, either by relaxing regulatory frameworks or by remaining silent in the face of violations.

This essay does not intend to conclude the discussion, but to contribute to broadening the debates on the centrality of territory in contemporary struggles. Mining is neither neutral nor inevitable: it is the result of political and geopolitical decisions, social choices, and future projects that violate the present – and, consequently, the future of many peasant and traditional communities, and of the entire Amazonian and Brazilian population.

This essay does not intend to end the debate, but to strengthen the understanding of the centrality of territory in contemporary struggles. Mining is neither neutral nor inevitable. It stems from political and geopolitical decisions, social choices, and future projects that, in order to materialize, violate the present and, consequently, compromise the future of peasant communities, traditional peoples, and the Amazonian and Brazilian population as a whole.

The critical geography must expose these choices, challenge them and, above all, give voice to those who continue to be silenced by the glitter of gold and the weight of the ore as its polluting waste claims lives, land, and territory.

In this context, Aróz (2020) reiterates the relevance of this model today, which is based on a material and symbolic foundation that produces and generates a permanent

colonialism, under the aegis of a geography of territorial plunder, a constantly evolving crossroads.

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