

**Fair Trade? Fragmented Responsibility in the  
Enforcement of Socioenvironmental Norms:  
A Critical Discourse Analysis of the 2026 EU–Mercosur Agreement  
and Brazil’s Indigenous Advocacy**



**Christos Ioannou Naoum**

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**Supervisor: Ian Manners**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores how welfare and sustainability are constructed, promoted, and contested within contemporary trade governance and specifically through looking at the EU–Mercosur Association Agreement and the 2026 report by Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil, representing the voice of the Indigenous people there, to explore how fair trade can be promoted in today's world of volatile global politicoeconomic affairs. By focusing the spotlight on Brazil as Mercosur's largest economy and a central actor in agricultural exports and environmental governance, the study explores how the three socioenvironmental normative values of sustainable development, labour rights and environmental protection are embedded in the EU-Mercosur trade agreement and how they are challenged and contested by Indigenous actors as not implemented practically in the internal political microclimate of Brazil. Motivated by the need to understand whether trade policy can meaningfully advance sustainable development in a turbulent global context marked by protectionism and institutional strain, this research compares EU institutional discourse with Indigenous advocacy narratives to assess the scope and limits of the EU's normative power as illustrated through antagonising discourses, unveiling a fragmented allocation of responsibility for the enforcement of socioenvrionmental norms under the Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) Chapter of the agreement. Through the use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the bridging of the fields of international relations, trade law, and welfare policy, this thesis contributes to debates on whether large-scale trade agreements can truly reach harmony between economic development and socioenvironmental justice, adding to the field of policy and legislative development for achieving fair trade.

**Keywords:** EU–Mercosur Agreement, fair trade, sustainable development.

## **List Of Abbreviations**

|          |                                           |
|----------|-------------------------------------------|
| APIB     | Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil |
| CDA      | Critical Discourse Analysis               |
| CNT      | Constructivist Norm Theory                |
| CT       | Critical Theory                           |
| EU       | European Union                            |
| GATT     | General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade    |
| ILO      | International Labour Organisation         |
| ILS      | International Labour Standards            |
| MERCOSUR | Mercado Común del Sur                     |
| NPE      | Normative Power Europe                    |
| TSD      | Trade and Sustainable Development         |
| UN       | United Nations                            |
| WTO      | World Trade Organisation                  |

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# 1. Motivation

To start off, the motivation behind the choice of topic for this thesis project, was the fact that my Bachelor was in International Relations and my first and previous Master was in European and International Trade Law, and I thus wanted to combine it with my current Management and Welfare Policies second master but also my passionate environmentalist and social rights idiosyncrasy to explore how trade can promote sustainable development policies within the current international relations system characterized by volatile global affairs, especially in today's turbulent world influenced by protectionism, dysfunction of the WTO and ongoing conflicts influencing and shaping interstate behaviour, making it interesting to explore how economic cooperation occurs in this atmosphere. The EU-Mercosur agreement was selected because of how contemporary and controversial it is, and the weight it holds as a large economic agreement amongst EU countries and the South American Mercosur bloc.

That being said, being a Hellene and an EU citizen myself, I wanted to delve deeper into this trade agreement to understand its dynamics. I will devote 3 days a week to work on this project, as due to simultaneously dealing with a personal health issue. Through emphasising Brazil and its indigenous people when looking at the EU-Mercosur trade agreement, this research is enabled to explore how normative claims and contestation work in an atmosphere that is economically and environmentally loaded, with the parallel recent hosting of COP30, providing deep insights into the challenges of EU normative power in the current turbulent dynamics of global trade. Ultimately, drawing inspiration from Aristotle's conception that political and economic arrangements should ultimately aim at the good of the community through the notion of eudaimonia in governance, this thesis evaluates whether contemporary

trade agreements function as instruments of collective welfare or if they remain crystallised as primarily vehicles of pure economic integration without solid enforcement mechanisms for their sustainable development values.

## 1.1 Introduction and Context

In today's volatile world of global affairs, the European Union positions itself as a normative power on the global stage that promotes social, labour, and environmental standards through foreign policy tactics and trade agreements with third states while also pragmatically balancing strategic economic interests (Lika and Riga, 2025). Its external trade policy is not merely a tool for economic development but simultaneously constitutes a means of exporting and promoting norms and values (Śliwiński, 2026), aiming to shape global governance according to EU normative ideals of environmental sustainability and welfare, such as labour protection. Nonetheless, the EU's normative ambitions and actorness are recently being increasingly criticised, as questions arise on whether these ideals are truly and honestly reflected in practice, particularly when it comes to EU trade relations with developing states, that are of promising economic dynamism, such as Brazil in the South American Common Market (Mercosur).

Recent events highlight the tensions between the EU's normative ambitions and the realities on the ground. In the European Union, farmer protests have erupted over concerns that trade agreements undermine local agricultural standards, revealing domestic friction around the EU's claims to uphold environmental and social norms abroad. Meanwhile, though, in Brazil, political and social upheavals, ranging from large debates over land rights for economic development purposes to controversial as well as contested environmental policies under the light of its hosting of the most recent COP30 summit, have further complicated the implementation of welfare and sustainability initiatives in the country. These dynamics paint

out the contested nature of EU normative influence in today's profit-driven and resource-exploitative world, raising critical questions about the interplay between external trade policy and the internal political and social responses of its major trade partners, such as Brazil. Thus, this thesis seeks to answer the following research question (RQ).

*RQ: How do the EU–Mercosur Trade Agreement, signed in 2026, and the 2026 APIB report discursively construct and contest the European Union's role as a normative power in relation to Brazil's welfare and environmental governance?*

Therefore, the puzzle at the heart of this aforementioned RQ, truly is the attempt to understanding whether the EU's discursively expressed values translate into coercive practical influence through its trade agreement with Brazil, and how competing narratives in Brazil complicate the EU's role as a moral and regulatory actor in global governance. So, this paper will go on to emphatically argue that while the European Union seeks to assert and actually illustrate itself as a normative soft power through the EU–Mercosur Trade Agreement, its influence over Brazil's environmental and welfare governance is highly contested, revealing a complex interplay between European normative ambitions and Brazilian political, social, and economic realities. Thus, the thesis argument of this paper is that the EU's normative power projection is limited and contested by the 2026 APIB report due to the fragmented allocation of responsibility for the coercive enforcement of socioenvironmental norms through unclear and inexplicit legal language in the Trade and Sustainable Development section of the EU-Mercosur trade agreement.

On the one hand, we have the soft power tactic in contemporary international relations of the EU advancing policies within agreements that claim to be promoting sustainable development. On the other hand, we have the actual local realities in Brazil, shaped by

political upheaval, contested governance, and socioenvironmental challenges, which in fact often resist, reinterpret, or even undermine these normative claims as untrue or hypocritical. Through using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, the discourses surrounding the EU–Mercosur Trade Agreement signed in 2026, alongside the January 2026 APIB report, are analysed in this research to examine how Brazilian Indigenous actors contest, and ultimately seek to reconstruct and challenge the EU's normative authority in practice as promoted through its trade agreement with the Brazilian government.

## 1.2 Literature Review: Bringing Trade, Welfare and the Environment Together

With the ultimate goal in mind of better setting the atmosphere for this research paper and to elaborate on the state of the art in academic research of the chosen field, a specified literature review is conducted below, showcasing the intricate relationship between trade, social welfare and environmental sustainability. Firstly, past literature on trade and welfare in EU-Mercosur relations are examined more broadly, then the environmental aspects of these relations is explored, followed by the addressing of the economic development and fair trade tensions and finally, the exploration of the role that is played by the indigenous people of the Mercosur region in terms of trade with the EU more specifically.

### 1.2.1 Trade and Welfare in EU-Mercosur Relations

Past literature on the EU–Mercosur relationship highlights the intricate nature of the interaction between trade liberalisation, welfare outcomes, and the field of environmental governance. Academic scholars have been highlighting that the EU incorporates social and environmental provisions into its trade agreements, yet the effectiveness of these provisions



remains a very contested and controversial topic of dialogue. For example, Postnikov and Bastiaens (2014) argue the EU relies primarily on dialogue-based synergetic mechanisms instead of sanctions to promote labour standards in trade agreements, and even though such mechanisms may indeed encourage incremental change, their effectiveness depends heavily on domestic political conditions in the trade partner states. This insight is core to understanding how the EU tries to advance its normative influence without direct and practical market-driven coercive enforcement.

### 1.2.2 Environmental Aspects of EU-Mercosur Trade Relations

Furthermore, environmental impacts, in particular deforestation in the Amazon, are central to recent academic analyses of the EU–Mercosur agreement, with Arima et al.’s (2021) dynamic modelling, illustrating that tariff reductions could accelerate deforestation unless accompanied by robust and durable environmental safeguards. These findings align with concerns that increased agricultural competitiveness levels in Brazil could undermine honest forest conservation efforts. In a similar manner, Cesar de Oliveira et al. (2024) firmly argue that the agreement could promote sustainable land-use governance, but only if internal institutional mechanisms are actively used to align trade incentives with biodiversity protection monitoring activities. To add, trade-related welfare effects are also uneven as explored by Timini and Viani (2020) who find that while trade flows would increase, welfare gains vary significantly across different states and societal sectors, particularly when it comes to agriculture, a claim also reinforced by Veiga (2017) who explores sustainability as an emerging societal value in economic systems, such as trade agreements. This identified asymmetry reinforces concerns raised by NGOs about disproportionate and weak labour standards, as well as welfare systems more generally.

### 1.2.3 Balancing Economic Liberalisation and Fair Trade Between the EU and Mercosur

Adding on, within the broader academic debate on EU trade policy, scholars such as Jan Orbie (2008) contribute to understanding these dynamics by critically examining the EU's self-representation as a normative or ethical trade power. Research associated with Orbie (2011) is of the argument that EU trade agreements frequently include sustainability and human rights provisions such as labour rights, yet their implementation tends to remain largely dialogue-based and therefore limited and weak in its enforcement, with clear legal criteria lacking in the articles of legal texts. So, when applying this critical perspective to the EU–Mercosur agreement, we are able to observe the tension between normative commitments and economic interests within EU external trade policy become highlighted. Consequently, the literature increasingly emphasises that without stronger institutional safeguards and meaningful participation mechanisms, Indigenous peoples risk remaining politically marginalised actors in EU–Mercosur trade governance despite being among those most directly affected by its environmental and socio-economic consequences. Additionally, the significant argument made by Young and Peterson (2014), who analyse EU trade policy as a field of competing internal and external pressures, highlighted existing fragile tensions between liberalisation and regulation. What is more, in the context of this fragile and intricate balance between trade liberalisation and regulation, Raynolds (2012), defines fair trade as a trading partnership aimed at achieving greater equity in international trade by promoting better prices, decent working conditions, and sustainable livelihoods for marginalized producers of goods in the Global South, a perspective which further highlights the difficult challenge of reconciling processes of market liberalisation with socially and environmentally just trade relations for all actors involved.

Importantly, Meunier and Nicolaïdis (2006) interpreted trade agreements as legitimacy-building schemes, making the significant point that normative claims must always be socially accepted to be actually truly effective in practice. Finally, Harrison et al. (2019) make the solid argument that sustainability clauses often function symbolically rather than practically, offering discursive legitimacy but lacking vigorous binding mechanisms and so summing things up, even though the above reviewed literature indeed provides valuable insights into trade outcomes and governance mechanisms, it largely views norms as variables whose effectiveness is always measurable. This research instead fills the gap in the above reviewed literature of norms being examined as continuously discursively changing, and actually asks how norms are constructed, contested, and politicised dynamically through language, something remaining underdeveloped still in existing research.

#### 1.2.4 The Role of Indigenous People in EU-Mercosur Trade Relations

Narrowing down closer to the specified research field of this thesis, recent academic literature has increasingly been highlighting that Indigenous communities in the Mercosur region may be disproportionately affected by the EU–Mercosur trade agreement, particularly through its indirect impacts on land use, resource extraction for example, when it comes to wood, soy and cattle, and wider agricultural expansion activities that are occurring. Here, it is also a good thing to mention that scholars that have been examining the environmental and social implications of the agreement point out that increased European demand for agricultural exports such as beef and soy could intensify deforestation and land-use change in areas overlapping with Indigenous territories, especially in the Amazon basin area. Moreover, the research conducted by Verdum (2021) cleverly suggests that such economic incentives may in fact contribute to growing pressures on Indigenous lands and could potentially exacerbate existing conflicts over territory and environmental governance, conflicts which

are at the heart of the schism in discursive framing and interpretation on all sides. In a similar tone, scholarship on environmental governance and human rights in international trade, including research by Morgera (2018), highlighting that sustainability provisions in trade agreements oftentimes fail to provide realistically effective safeguards for communities whose livelihoods depend directly on the harnessing of ecosystems, such as Brazil's Indigenous people in the Amazon region so in this sense, Indigenous peoples remain especially vulnerable when environmental protections are weakly enforced or yielded to purely economic profit priorities and resource extraction pragmatism by the state.

## 2. Key Theoretical Perspectives

Furthermore, the study of EU–Mercosur trade relations and their subsequent socio-environmental consequences is based on the foundation built by multiple theoretical frameworks ranging throughout the spectrum of the field of international political economy, development studies, and critical trade scholarship. Firstly, the one absolutely central lens is the groundbreaking Normative Power Europe (NPE) theory, introduced by Ian Manners (2002), which conceptualises the EU as a global actor seeking to export its norms such as human rights, sustainable development, and labour standards, through its trade agreements. Some notable scholars such as Orbie (2008) and Schimmelfennig (2001), have critiqued NPE, arguing that while the EU promotes normative claims in agreements such as the EU–Mercosur one, these often rely on dialogue-based mechanisms rather than coercive enforcement, revealing tensions between normative ambitions and structural power asymmetries inherent in global trade. What is absolutely vital to highlight here is how Orbie's work, in particular, emphasizes how these mechanisms can reproduce global exploitation hierarchies when implemented in the Global South and views eu normative power concepts

as too vaguely defined to effectively exert power. This research builds on a similar critical notion, problematising the degree of effectiveness of Normative Power Europe.

Adding on to the aforementioned key theories of the field being explored, classical and neoclassical trade theories have sought to conceptualise international trade as mutually beneficial and efficiency-enhancing. Building on Adam Smith's theory of absolute advantage and David Ricardo's theory of comparative advantage, classical trade theory argues that countries gain by specialising in goods they can produce relatively more efficiently, through free trade agreements and international bodies such as GATT and the WTO, which are the epitome of international trade synergy globally however they remain dysfunctional and problematic today due to political disagreements and stalemate in negotiations during the Doha rounds (Daemmrich, 2010). Moreover, mainstream neoclassical models, particularly the renowned Heckscher and Ohlin framework, extend this logic much further through suggesting that trade patterns reflect countries' relative factor endowments, thereby increasing overall welfare. Similarly, modernisation theory, which is associated with Rostow (1960), claims that development should be framed as a linear progression from "traditional" to "modern" societies, where integration into global markets and industrialisation are the key drivers of economic growth. However, critics argue that such approaches overlook structural inequalities in the global economy. Perspectives on neocolonialism, notably articulated by Kwame Nkrumah (1965), contend that trade relations can actually be used by states to reproduce colonial patterns of dependency, whereby formally independent states remain economically subordinate through unequal trade structures and commodity dependence, a theory which is also central and in alignment with the critical notion of the exploitation of Indigenous land for economic gain by others.

To add on, another major and well-respected theoretical perspective is that of post-development theory, which was formulated by Escobar (1995) and Esteva (1992), actually critiquing past conventional development paradigms as being too Eurocentric and in truth, outdated and marginalising of domestic knowledge systems, including Indigenous epistemologies, and their rich and deep cultural diversity. This point being made, within the context of EU–Mercosur trade, this framework draws attention to how normative and sustainability-centric clauses may fall short of fully accounting for true Indigenous agency and existing local socio-environmental priorities in the Amazon region, prioritising market-driven growth and export targeted development instead. Also, some other relevant perspectives that are really worth mentioning include critical political economy approaches informed by the academic works of Cox (1981) and Strange (1996), examining how trade agreements redistribute economic and political power across actors and regions, often privileging corporate and state interests over local communities. In addition, the important theoretical concept of coercive enforcement through disciplinary neoliberalism, as developed by Gill (1995), another Neo-Gramscian like Cox whose work has significantly influenced critical approaches to international political economy and EU studies, provides a useful lens for understanding how trade agreements have inside them market-oriented rules that promote liberalisation and constraining fully autonomous state policy in Brazil for example, that would perhaps follow another direction in terms of labour rights and environmental protection standards, thereby reinforcing market discipline tactics in the long term and potentially shaping to some extent the politico-economic space within which partner countries operate.

Finally comes environmental governance theory, which was created by scholars such as Young (2002) and Ostrom (1990), and evaluates the extent of effectiveness of sustainability clauses and regulatory mechanisms in mitigating ecological harm while simultaneously

protecting social equity, in order to achieve the avoidance of both a social and ecological catastrophe. Now, when all these theories are taken as a whole, they allow for a deep and nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between economic liberalisation, normative commitments, and the actual experiences of the already vulnerable Indigenous peoples in terms of underrepresentation and lack of vigorous political decision-making power affected by the EU–Mercosur trade agreement.

## 2.1 Selected Theoretical Framework

After exploring the state of the art theoretically, this project is chosen to be theoretically grounded in Normative Power Europe (NPE), Critical Theory (CT) and in combination, Constructivist Norm Theory (CNT). Manners's (2002) concept of NPE conceptualises the EU not merely as a material power but as an actor that seeks to shape international norms through persuasion in its external relations with other states, promoting institutionalised practices. However, critics do argue that NPE risks becoming symbolic if normative claims are not realised practically and are still vaguely defined in the EU's trade policies and external agreements. Therefore, the utilisation of Constructivist Norm Theory (CNT), particularly the norm life-cycle model developed by Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) and extended by Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink (1999), provides a useful analytical framework in this situation. Based on their influential work, norms are understood as dynamically emerging through actions of norm entrepreneurs, diffusing through institutional and social mechanisms, and as a final result becoming internalised, or contested, by other actors such as states, NGOs or political representation unions and political advocacy networks such as the Articulation of the Indigenous people of Brazil.

Importantly, when following the CNT theoretical foundation, norms are not static entities but they are rather dynamic and continuously renegotiated and reinterpreted amongst changing and antagonising actors, a phenomenon occurring also at both the interstate and intrastate levels. To be more precise, when also following the Critical IPE theoretical tradition inspired by the Neo-Gramscian work of Gill (1995), this research sees international trade arrangements as non-neutral mechanisms and as structures shaped by power relations aimed at neoliberal global economic governance, acting as instruments for economic discipline. Thus, based on this foundational viewpoint, CNT is then used to critically analyse how actors such as the Indigenous peoples of Brazil negotiate, contest, and experience emerging norms with dynamism, while NPE is used to emphasise how the EU seeks to promote these norms through its EU-Mercosur trade policy.

To further elaborate, CNT is particularly appropriate for this study because it focuses on how international norms are created, internalised, contested, and institutionalised, rather than assuming that norms automatically produce fully predictable outcomes. In the context of EU–Mercosur trade, CNT allows us to analyse how sustainability, labour, and human rights values present in the Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) chapter of the EU-Mercosur Agreement, are interpreted, implemented and experienced differently by EU policymakers, Mercosur states, and Indigenous stakeholders. This perspective is crucial because existing literature often treats norms as static variables, measuring their effectiveness quantitatively (Harrison et al., 2019), rather than exploring the dynamic processes through which norms acquire meaning and legitimacy.

To add, the application of CNT highlights the discursive and social processes by which norms gain traction or fail in the interstate and intrastate interconnected dimensions, including political negotiation, the degree of existence of trade-integrated legal requirements



and enforcement mechanisms, contestation, and local interpretation. For instance, research by Orbie (2021) goes on to critically demonstrate that while the EU promotes normative principles in trade agreements, their influence is often shaped by domestic political conditions in its partner countries, the relative institutional capacities, and the influence and mobilisation of civil society actors in each context, such as Indigenous people in Brazil for this research case. Through using CNT, this thesis is enabled to effectively explore how norms related to Indigenous rights, environmental protection, and fair trade are constructed, resisted, or reshaped in practice, providing a more in-depth and nuanced understanding than approaches that simply evaluate compliance, as it gives a richer insight into the agency-norm interplay.

Finally, this theoretical approach is also very well-suited to complement the broader field of post-development academic critiques and environmental governance theory, offering a framework to problematize not only the formal codification of norms but also their social and political practical application and extent of realisation in contexts marked by historical asymmetries and existing structural power imbalances. This, therefore, makes it particularly relevant for analysing the EU–Mercosur trade agreement, where normative commitments to sustainability and Indigenous rights interact with economic, social, and on-the-ground political realities.

### 3. Research Design

Moving forward, after elaborating the selected theoretical framework above, this section outlines the research design strategy employed by this thesis in order to answer the research question, starting from elaborating its ontological and epistemological basis, methodological technique, and data selection for the purposes of the analysis. All these are outlined and mapped out step by step, and the thinking and logic behind their selection is elaborated clearly, to add a solid layer of internal validity and reliability to the study, making it as methodologically sound and solid as possible. The sections below aim to carefully guide the reader to and through the analysis phase smoothly, which is the chapter that follows right afterwards.

#### 3.1 Ontological and Epistemological Basis

Moving forward, this research aims to adopt a critical realist ontology, which believes that social structures, such as trade regimes, norms, and power relations, exist independently of discourse, yet are only accessible through socially mediated representations (Bhaskar, 1978). From this point of view, normative power is thus understood best as a real yet contingent phenomenon which actually operates and takes shape through exercising discursive practices. Next, this being said, epistemologically, the proposed research is inspired by interpretivist and critical discourse analytical traditions, recognising that knowledge about norms and governance is constructed through the utilisation of language (Fairclough, 1995).

In detail, the Critical Discourse Analysis will be conducted through a systematic, multi-phase process, aligned with Fairclough's three-dimensional model. It is chosen as the method best suitable to answer my research question due to the fact that it allows for a multilayered yet harmoniously interconnected analysis of how language, social setting and different types of political power are all simultaneously shaping and reshaping discourse. It provides an

organised and systemic analytical framework that can be used to symmetrically explore how the three EU-promoted normative values of labour rights, sustainable development and environmental protection are embedded in both the TSD Chapter of the EU-Mercodur agreement and in the APIB 2026 Indigenous peoples' report, which are antagonising and therefore can be effectively compared.

## 3.2 Outline

### *Textual Dimension*

First, the analysis begins with a phase of careful textual reading for exploration of the socioenvironmental values of labour rights, sustainable development and environmental protection throughout all relevant Articles of the Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) chapter of the 2025 version of the EU-Mercosur Agreement and through the language of the APIB 2026 report, amplifying the political stance of the Indigenous people of Brazil on the ground. At this phase of the research, the focus shifts on actually identifying the three socioenvironmental norms of sustainable development, labour rights and environmental protection in relation to indigenous peoples through looking at key discursive linguistic features, including modality such as “obligations” versus “commitments”, grammar and syntax, lexical choices such as “cooperation” and “sustainability” nominalisation of processes, and attributed agency within language as well as any linguistic omissions, representations or transitivity of action and passivisation of responsibility. It is vital to note that utmost attention will be paid to how social and environmental obligations are framed as mandatory or suggestive, and thereafter, how potential harms or protections are linguistically constructed or obscured.

In more detail, at this descriptive level of analysis, both texts will be examined for linguistic features framing the three values in terms of labour rights, environmental protection and sustainable development in the vocabulary, grammar, agency, nominalisation, modality, presuppositions, omissions, representation of actors, metaphors and symbolisms, tone, as well as the intensifiers of the texts.

### *Discursive Practice Dimension*

Thereafter, the study moves to a specialised coding phase during which the identified recurring discursive patterns are systematically categorised in a table. This process of coding will be conducted iteratively, combining deductive and inductive approaches to achieve the most fruitful outcomes. When it comes to deductive codes, these derive from the theoretical framework, taxonomised in categories such as norm promotion and enforcement versus voluntary implementation, as well as norm contestation. In terms of the inductive codes, these are expected to emerge from the texts themselves, allowing for the identification of unexpected frames or rhetorical strategies, particularly within the space of Indigenous political network critiques. This coding strategy enables structured comparison across the EU legal text and the APIB 2026 report while remaining sensitive to contextual nuance.

Then, during this same phase, the analysis aims to examine discursive practice through situating the texts within their conditions of production, distribution, and reception and in this moment, the concept of intertextuality plays a central role. The APIB report explicitly references EU policy language, international labour and environmental conventions, and corporate supply-chain practices, often recontextualising official EU discourse to expose contradictions between stated commitments and observed outcomes. For example, the critiques within the APIB report may actually juxtapose the EU's language of sustainability through evidence of deforestation or labour abuses in Brazil, thereby starkly challenging the

coherence and credibility of EU normative claims. To be specific, at this second interpretive level of analysis, both texts will be examined in terms of production, audience, consumption, distribution, intertextuality and interdiscursivity (which are concepts referring to traces to references in other types of texts and discourses), to see how the three values of labour rights, environmental protection and sustainable development are framed in the phrasing of both texts.

### *Social Practice Dimension*

Finally, the analysis situates these discourses within broader social practices as the final phase, including global trade governance, Brazilian environmental politics, and EU normative policy. This includes consideration of how recent EU farmer protests against the Mercosur agreement form part of a wider discursive struggle over sustainability, welfare protection, and fairness in trade. Adding on, reflexivity is an integral to the formulated research design, and as the researcher, it is worth acknowledging that my interpretive position is informed by idiosyncratic commitments to social and environmental protection. Also, in order to mitigate any potential arising bias, the analysis applies consistent analytical categories across all texts and remains attentive to alternative interpretations from other researchers. Moreover, reflexivity ensures the research does not unfairly treat the APIB report's critiques as inherently more truthful than interstate discourse, but rather examines how a plethora of different actors strategically construct and contest meanings. At this third explanatory level of analysis, ideology, overarching power relations, institutional and social context, hegemony, order of discourse, and consequences are all key themes that will be taken into account used to explore how the three values of labour rights, environmental protection and sustainable development are framed in both texts.

### 3.3 Methodology

As for the specifics of the methodological approach used in this research is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), foundationally based on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model (Appendix C), which is a technique for analysis in political science aimed at exploring how language mirrors as well as shapes power relations through its phrasing and usage (Halperin et al, 2017). More specifically, the reason why CDA is particularly applicable to this project is due to its duality as both a method and theory and the fact it explicitly links linguistic features to broader socially constructed structures and overarching power relations (Jørgensen, et al, 2002), allowing for us to grasp the degree of the chasm between the TSD Chapter of Mercosur and the APIB 2026 report when it comes to the interpretation, experience and framing of the values of labour rights, environmental protection and sustainable development. The analysis consists of the following three interconnected analytical dimensions:

First off, the textual analysis. This level examines the pure linguistic features of the texts, including modality, lexical choices, agency suppression or attribution, and framing. In the Articles of the TSD chapter and of its analogous Annex 18A, attention will be paid to how obligations are expressed, such as the use of "shall" or "must", and how concepts such as sustainability, cooperation, and development are expressed. When examining the 2026 APIB report, the analysis will focus on finding critical language and the usage of evidence to construct the framing of failure.

Secondly, the discursive practice analytical part comes in. This particular dimension focuses on analysing how the chosen texts are produced, distributed, and perceived, meaning that the EU-Mercosur trade agreement is examined as an institutional document shaped up by a multidimensional influence of legal and political limitations, while the 2026 APIB report is analyzed as an advocacy campaign aimed at shaping public opinion and influencing policy

alterations at a national level as well as raising awareness internationally through publication in the English language. Invaluable here is the concept of intertextuality, as NGO (Human Rights Watch, 2025; Greenpeace Brazil & Greenpeace EU, 2024) and Indigenous union reports in Brazil tend to reference EU policy language, international conventions, and corporate practices when critiquing them, thereby recontextualising official discourse, challenging its legitimacy when it comes to its actual practical application.

Thirdly comes the social practice analytical dimension. At this level, the analysis situates the texts within broader social and political contexts, as for example with the identification of the meaning behind omissions in order to suppress agents, and taking into account the hierarchical dynamics global trade governance and their interconnected economic structuralities, as well as Brazilian environmental politics, EU agricultural policy, the COP30 summit, and transnational activism elements. The recent EU farmers' protests against the Mercosur deal are incorporated as part of this social practice, illustrating how normative contestation extends beyond elite policy circles into domestic political arenas (Euronews, 2025). So, the red thread is that NPE and Constructivist norm theory identify processes of norm promotion and contestation while the use of CDA practically reveals how these take shape through language used in the EU-Mercosur agreement and the APIB 2026 report text.

To specify further, the analysis will be focusing on the degree of legitimacy of claims regarding sustainability and welfare norms, looking at how these are justified and promoted as well as contested and challenged in the language of the texts. Ultimately, through the use of this methodology, the research question will be answered, and differences in power and agency and discursive priorities such as profit-driven trade vs indigenous peoples' rights in terms of the three socioenvironmental values of labour rights, environmental protection and sustainable development will be unveiled.

### 3.4 Definitions and Operationalisation of Values

Furthermore, the exact definitions for the three values explored in this essay's CDA, which are labour rights, environmental protection and sustainable development, are derived from and operationalised based fully on the European Commission's Directorate-General for Trade "*Development and Sustainability*" policy framework (European Commission, Directorate-General for Trade, 2026). So, with this as the foundational basis, more specifically, the definition used for the labour rights protection value is the claim that "*EU trade agreements require partners to respect and implement the ILO fundamental conventions*". Based on this, the exact definition of the labour rights protection value is therefore understood through the ILS framework for the purposes of this thesis as "*fundamental rights at work, such as freedom of association, the abolition of forced and child labour, and non-discrimination*", which are all applicable to ensuring the rights to work, fair labour practices, socio-economic participation and work-related autonomy of Indigenous peoples, as expressed in Article 20 for example (International Labour Organization, 1998). Next, with the same logic of reference is the operational definition for the sustainable development value, which is defined as "*meeting the needs of the present whilst ensuring future generations can meet their own needs*". Finally, for the Environmental protection value, the definition is that "*EU trade agreements promote the effective implementation of multilateral environmental agreements and the maintenance of high levels of environmental protection*".



### 3.5 Data Selection and Justification

The empirical material consists of the following two core texts. Firstly, Article X of the Trade and Sustainable Development chapter of the EU–Mercosur Agreement. Secondly, the APIB 2026 report, bringing in and amplifying an indigenous and non-western or colonial influenced viewpoint that criticizes the aforementioned agreement, putting the voices of the Indigenous people at the center of the spotlight and not focusing on western-born NGOs such as Greenpeace or Human Rights Watch which although have also been somewhat critical to the EU-Mercosur agreement, lack vigorous ethical sovereignty in comparison to the actual Brazil Indigenous people’s association (APIB), who have historically inhabited the area and are the ones directly affected by the land use and environmentally harmful practices for economic development promoted in the agreement itself.

To end, the reason why Brazil is selected as the focus case, is because of its well-known central economic role within Mercosur, as it constitutes the largest economy and agricultural exporter in the South American geopolitical bloc, making a prime beneficiary of tariff liberalisation policies under the atmosphere of the EU–Mercosur agreement. Through focusing on Brazil, this research is well-positioned and enabled to explore how normative claims and contestation work in a context that is simultaneously economically and environmentally pivotal, with the parallel recent hosting of COP30, as well as deeply politically controversial, providing deep insights into the challenges and limits of the nature of EU normative power in the current turbulent dynamics of global trade.

## 4. Analysis

Moving forward into the analytical phase of this thesis paper, first Norman Faircloughs three dimensional CDA will be applied on the TSD chapter of the EU-Mercosur agreement exploring the textual, discursive and social practice dimensions of the framing of the three values of sustainable development, labour rights and environmental protection, followed by the application of the same technique on the critical Brazilian Indigenous Peoples 2026 report, in order to reach an understanding on how these values are promoted and contested in this competing discourse and to answer the research question. This structure of analysis will be applied symmetrically to both the TSD Chapter of the EU-Mercosur and the APIB 2026 report texts, to effectively describe, interpret and explain how they embed and contest these values using Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA, utilising the techniques outlined in the research design.

### 4.1 CDA on the EU-Mercosur Agreement's TSD Chapter and its Annex

Kicking off the analysis phase, first, Chapter 18 of the EU-Mercosur Agreement that was officially signed in 17th January 2026 and is therefore currently in provisional effect, titled Trade and Sustainable Development as well as its equivalent Annex 18A (EU-Mercosur Agreement, 2026), are analysed for the framing and promotion of the values of labour rights, environmental protection and sustainable development across the three different levels of Fairclough's CDA, starting with the text level, moving to the discursive practice level and finally at the social practice level for best interpretation. These will be referred to in terms of Articles, paragraphs and subparagraphs for the purpose of a more efficient analysis that is understandable to the reader. This reveals the linguistic way in which these three normative

socioenvironmental values are advanced as a core pillar of the EU's trade policy strategy, indicating a combination of soft and economic power.

#### 4.1.1 Text Dimension of CDA

In the text level of analysis real of the TSD Chapter of the EU-Mercosur Agreement, and its analogous Annex 18 A, create a very normative discourse through lexical repetition and intertextualisation. The term "*sustainable development*" used throughout the majority of the TSD Chapter's Articles and the Annex's points, serves as a type of organising signifier that recurs throughout the texts, bringing together different elements, economic, social, and environmental, into one single combined semantic domain. Through repetition, cohesion and discursivity, sustaining the notion of sustainable development as a grand principle is achieved, while at the same time concealing the contradictions within the practical application of the concept itself through abstract, non-explicit and unclear wording. The annexes further reinforce the cohesion of the different aspects by highlighting their integration and indivisibility as an interdependent and reinforcing system.

As far as the transitivity patterns in both the texts of the TSD Chapter and its Annex are concerned, a tendency towards a preponderance of the state-oriented agency can be identified, where "*the Parties*" emerge as the grammatical subject of various processes. Such structures as "*the Parties shall promote*" in Article 18.1 paragraph 4, "*each Party shall strive to improve its relevant laws, regulations and policies so as to ensure high and effective levels of environmental and labour protection*" in Article 18.2 paragraph 2 of the TSD Chapter, and especially the phrase:

*"the Parties recognise the right of each Party to determine its sustainable development policies and priorities, to establish the levels of domestic environmental*

*and labour protection it deems appropriate and to adopt or modify its laws, regulations and policies”,*

claimed in Article 18.2 paragraph 1, suggest that states obscurely become agents of practical norm realisation, which is performed by them, although it is left vague on which exact bodies or organs of governance such as Brazilian ministries for example, will carry out this implementation in practice. Also, such agency is intentionally neutralised by using abstract nouns as an object (*“promotion,” “implementation,”* and *“cooperation”*) in Articles 18.13 and 18.14 regarding the formulation of a vague and precarious Subcommittee on trade and sustainable development. On the contrary, *“labour rights,” “the environment,”* or *“biodiversity”* mostly appear as abstract grammatical objects in vague sentences, thereby highlighting their passive position in the discourse.

The role of modality becomes significant as far as the power of obligation goes because many high-level modals used throughout all of the TSD Chapter like *“shall”* indicate that the documents create formally binding obligations. However, there is also systematic weakening of commitment by using modal verbs like *“strive to”*, in Article 18.2 of the TSD Chapter but also even more passive and unassertive verbs throughout Articles 18.11, 18.12, 18.8, 18.3 and 18.2, such as *“should,” “encourage,”* as well as *“promote,”* such as emblematically in Article 18.11 on trade and the responsible management of supply chains by involved actors, and specifically paragraph 2 subparagraph (b) where it is stated that each party shall *“promote the voluntary uptake by enterprises of corporate social responsibility or responsible business practices.”* Thus, through these linguistic patterns, the phenomenon that can be described and expressed as normative ambiguity emerges, especially with regard to issues related to labour rights and the environment. For example, while Parties shall respect, promote and effectively implement labour standards, they should *“not weaken”* them, according to paragraph 3 of Article 18.2.

Nominalisation is yet another important characteristic that plays an integral role in the abstraction of responsibility. The use of abstract processes such as “*the implementation of sustainability measures*,” in paragraph 55 of Article B.3 of Annex 18A, “*the promotion of sustainable development*,” in paragraph 47 subparagraph (b) of Article B.2 of Annex 18A, or “*measures aimed at protecting the environment and labour conditions that may affect trade or investment*” in Article 18.3 subparagraph (a) of the TSD chapter, instead of straightforward sentences that would include both subjects and verbs obfuscates accountability and makes it harder to determine who would be responsible in case of the failure to guarantee the protection of labourers and the environment. Abstract nouns such as “*commitment*”, “*cooperation*”, “*framework*”, and “*mechanisms*”, used throughout numerous of the paragraphs of the Annex such as 20, 25, 26, 28, 46, 50 and 51 contribute to the abstraction of responsibility as well and add to the atmosphere of vagueness set out from the main body of text of the TSD chapter itself, with the reference to an abstract potential TSD Subcommittee overseeing the implementation of the values of the TSD Chapter of the EU-Mercosur agreement in paragraph 11 of the Annex, with its main powers being the facilitation of intergovernmental dialogue to enhance cooperation and help enforce the socioenvironmental norms but at its current proposed form does not have the power to impose sanctions to compel involved actors such as governments and private companies to comply. This makes it have a soft institutional design in reality, that puts it at high risk of being ineffective if created in its currently agreed-upon designed form.

Adding on, the use of passive constructions in conjunction with abstract verbs and nouns serves to further depersonalise responsibility by excluding the subject performing an action. Examples of passive constructions linguistically are sentences like “*measures are based*” in

paragraph of Article 18.10 of the TSD Chapter, and “*exchange information*” in Article 18.5 paragraph 4 of the TSD Chapter regarding the progress in terms of implementing Multilateral Environmental Agreements. These passive constructions linguistically are especially prominent in procedural articles addressing the settlement of disputes and cooperation between the signatory parties to the Agreement.

Furthermore, intratextuality emerges as a crucial textual strategy whereby there are numerous allusions to international treaties and organisations in both the Chapter and Annex. The existing references to global instruments like UN declarations, international environmental agreements, and labour conventions serve as legitimacy claims, situating the document within a larger global discourse. By employing such intertextual references, the agreement can be said to be constructed as being in accordance with global standards while also delegating its authority to external systems through deference to their standard-setting and compliance mechanisms.

Moreover, the lexical strategy deployed throughout both the TSD Chapter and Annex 18A further reinforce a discourse of cooperation instead of coercion in the text. Lexes such as “*promote*”, “*encourage*”, “*support*”, and “*cooperate*” dominate the language of the document, especially in areas dealing with sustainable development and environmental protection. These items have a positive ring to them, but are not as coercive as terms such as “*enforce*” and “*must*” as used in Article 18.2 paragraph 5 of the TSD chapter and point 36 of Annex 18A for example, and which could have been used more frequently, supplemented by the omitted even more coercive verbs that could have been used hypothetically such as “*compel*” or “*sanction*”. As such, norm implementation in this text emerges as a

voluntary-cooperative, fluid, disorganised, and overall fragmented process in terms of responsibility for enforcement in practice.

The use of hedging and qualification is widespread in the Annex, especially in terms such as “*as appropriate*”, “*in conformity with domestic law*”, “*having regard to national conditions*”, and “*where applicable*”. These identified linguistic devices importantly provide flexibility and considerable leeway in interpretation, adding to an overarching systematic strategy of vagueness in phrasing terms. Under a CDA framework, such forms of hedging can be seen as strategies that maintain state sovereignty while at the same time undermining the universality of labour and environmental obligations. The Annex further consolidates this trend by repeatedly highlighting “*differences in their levels of development*” and “*national realities*”, which become justification devices for applying differential responsibility and employing a common goal but differing capacities narrative. Additionally, text cohesion between the articles and between Chapter 18 and the Annex is established not only through repetition but also through inter-textual referencing of provisions within Chapter 18. Hence, the technique of intertextual referencing occurs frequently in the Annex, thus producing an intricate web of textual connections that ties both texts together as a coherent discourse.

Labour rights discourse can be identified through strong statements of intent coupled with weak and vague language about operational execution mechanisms. The actual implementation of core labour standards is couched in terms like promotion, dialogue, and cooperation, leading to tension in that there is a discrepancy between the explicit statement of rights on the one hand, and the lack of any clear enforcement mechanism on the other. Such tension is even evident in transitivity, where violations of labour rights tend to occur without any responsible agents, but simply as a phenomenon. In addition to being a discursive

construction, the normative value of environmental protection exhibits characteristics of urgency along with flexibility in the texts of the TSD Chapter and its Annex 18A. This duality in the construction of environmental protection is especially evident through the use of words in the Annex, which emphasise its necessity and urgency, in terms of the need for urgent action, that is critical and imperative. At the same time, however, modal and hedging words allow for discretionary actions in implementing the agreement on environmental protection.

Ending off, it is the sum total of all of the features employed in Chapter 18 and Annex 18A that generates the notion of managed commitment, which is promoted in the text, through a systematic legitimising but minimal operationalisation of the concepts of labour rights, sustainable development, and environmental protection. The combination of these textual elements, namely modality, transitivity, nominalisation, and intertextuality, creates the impression of effective normative engagement despite the inherent ambiguity in the linguistic structure of the phrasing of the text itself. This conflict is also highlighted in Annex Section A.3 paragraph 21, in which the Parties note that sustainable development:

*“must deliver, among others, tangible economic benefits for producers of goods and providers of services that incorporate sustainability in their activities, in particular the most vulnerable, including women, smallholder farmers, indigenous peoples and local communities”.*

Although the vocabulary utilised in this above extract reflects an understanding of the issue of socio-economic injustice, the wording here is quite vague and nebulous in nature.

The broad categorisation of the collectives under discussion and the lack of any more precise, enforceable terms here prevent these collectives from being sufficiently empowered through



language. In terms of CDA, indigenous peoples are recognised by the language used here, but they are neither constructed as actors with rights nor as negatively affected vulnerable subjects to be protected linguistically through explicit mentioning of criteria and measures that must be taken internally by the Brazilian government to protect them effectively. Moreover, this is also demonstrated by point 47 of the Annex, where the signatories stress the significance of regional cooperation and cooperation among regions as well as the fulfilment of commitments taken at the multilateral level on climate change, biodiversity and environmental issues, and ILO labour standards, and support the role of indigenous people and local communities in the achievement of sustainable development. However, point 47 is still very general and vague in content, and it will definitely need further clarification as regards what specific actions have to be performed. Among others, provisions (b), (c) , (d) and (e) of point 47 of Annex 18 A, cover the contribution that indigenous peoples and local communities can make to sustainable development, as well as improving traceability in value chains, but there is a lot of room for improvement in both aspects since more support needs to be provided to ensure the implementation of both issues effectively. Adding on, the inclusion of provisions to ensure that this trade Agreement benefits producers of sustainable products is further considered in paragraph 27 of Annex 18A, where the central importance of the indigenous population residing in areas far from cities, such as forests, natural grasslands, wetlands, and other ecosystems in realising sustainable development is acknowledged. In this context, the Parties are committed to cooperating in creating greater opportunities for market access for sustainably and legally sourced products by small farmers, cooperatives, indigenous peoples, and local communities, as well as in devising methods that will assist these populations in accessing sustainable livelihoods without violating their land rights as per national and international obligations. Nonetheless, even though the text of this article is much more detailed compared to other articles, it can still be improved in terms of specific

obligations that should be fulfilled to achieve the protection of indigenous people as well as use language and wording that actively and explicitly attributes responsibility to specific stakeholders within the Brazilian government to carry out the enforcement of these.

#### 4.1.2 Discursive Practice Dimension of CDA

From the perspective of discursive practices, the EU-Mercosur TSD Chapter, together with its Annex 18A, should be viewed as the result of a very institutionalised and inter-discursive process of negotiation that involves trade diplomacy, environmental governance, and international labour regulations. The discursive structure rests on three socio-environmental pillars, namely labour rights, environmental protection, and sustainable development as an integrative framework through which these principles are being implemented. In fact, there are several discourses incorporated into the formulated trade agreement, such as those of trade-friendly language in line with the principles of the WTO for free trade with fair competition, while respecting the United Nations frameworks for sustainable development, and labour norms set out by the ILO.

Truly, the composition of the text represents a delicate compromise made between the EU and Mercosur state parties, which is characteristic of treaty-based discourse that relies heavily on consensus language that aims to serve as a bridge working towards multilateral, mutually beneficial economic growth. The use of strategically vague wording follows from this, as different institutions need to come to a consensus about formulations that would be appropriate given differing political and economic interests regarding issues like labour protection, environmental governance, and sustainability. As a result, practices of discourses give precedence to diplomacy, thereby preferring the use of flexible language in terms of vocabulary, including “*promote*” in Article 18.4 of the TSD Chapter, “*enhance*”, in Article

18.5 of the TSD Chapter, and “*cooperate*”, in Article 18.8 of the TSD Chapter, which are all verbs that carry positive connotations aiming to inspire and advocate for synergy used systematically throughout both the TSD Chapter and Annex 18A, but are actually very broad and fluid in nature and leave too much room for interpretation, without a clear roadmap to the enforcement of the socioenvironmental norms. The reason for this lies in the common trade diplomatic practice tradition of using less restrictive formulations for achieving a form of an agreement that satisfies all sides. As for consumption, the text should be considered as intended to be addressing the institutional audience, comprising state governments, regulatory bodies, and international organisations, rather than being addressed directly to people affected by the text, in particular, workers, indigenous peoples, and other communities. In light of this, the discourse is shaped towards legality and policy framing on a more macro scale. Hence, the indigenous population does not play the active role of co-interpreters or co-authors of the text but rather benefits from it discursively speaking, to the extent that it discursively speaks to them specifically.

Thirdly, the circulation of the text within global governance networks adds to its legitimacy and authority. Through the incorporation of international standards and institutions into labour law, environmental policies, and sustainable development goals, the text has been created for inclusion into a pre-existing policy discourse within global governance networks such as diplomatic and intergovernmental panels, that prioritise compliance with global standards while promoting interstate economic advancement through trade. Yet at the same time, this circulation adds to the solidification of technocratic discourse, whereby socio-political issues pertaining to all three areas are framed in terms of management and procedure. Thus, the discourse becomes the power exertion mechanism through which legitimacy and coherence are achieved at the expense of contestation and conflict.

### 4.1.3 Social Practice Dimension of CDA

Furthermore, the social practice dimension includes the insertion of the TSD chapter and Annex 18A into the larger politicoeconomic dynamics of international relations. The agreement between the EU and Mercosur occurs in the context of global asymmetries in power relations between developed nations and regions and underdeveloped countries. Thus, as a rule-setting trade actor, the EU seeks to impose regulatory standards for labour rights, environmental protection, and sustainable development using trade conditionality. However, such normative efforts operate within the broader structure of the global economy in which liberalisation and market access are the major driving forces, thus undermining the effectiveness of social and environmental obligations imposed through trade conditionality that have economic carrot and stick features.

In the given setting, the discourse of sustainable development becomes a justification narrative that allows the linking of social and environmental dimensions into a single piece of regulation. The mention of indigenous peoples, local communities, and small stakeholders becomes part of a globally accepted progressive development framework such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which places human and environmental rights at the epicenter of global efforts for socioeconomic advancement. Furthermore, from a critical point of view however, such an approach may lead to depoliticisation of governance in socioenvironmental areas as structural aspects of labour exploitation and environmental pollution become acknowledged without addressing them effectively and imposing any enforceable obligations.

Furthermore, one needs to consider the positioning of indigenous peoples and local communities in the context of historically entrenched patterns of marginalisation, both within Latin America and globally in terms of politics and economics. Despite the fact that these actors receive formal recognition in the context of sustainable development, labour rights, and environmental protection, the way they are positioned within the Agreement speaks to a larger trend in global governance to view such actors as vaguely defined vulnerable stakeholders and not as active political subjects with specified identities and willpower to overturn and counter the very specific causes to their vulnerability, with the relationship between these two aspects being highly ideological.

Lastly, the EU-Mercosur trade agreement embodies the logic of neoliberal governance in the context of modern international trade, in which regulation becomes contingent on cooperation, soft law, and flexible mechanisms. As a result, the idea of “*sustainably managed*” processes, such as that of managing forest harvesting, becomes prominent, according to which labour rights, environmental protection, and sustainable development become mere symbols subordinated to other more urgent issues related to economic development. This being said, as a consequence, despite the fact that the TSD chapter and Annex 18A establish a coherent triad of socio-environmental discourse, their effect is limited by broader structural priorities influenced by turbulence in international affairs that are reflected in its vague and passive language in terms of agency and modality, translating to weakened levels of duty and commitment by involved actors and stakeholders such as the Brazilian government or corporations operating under the trade agreement.

## 4.2 CDA on the APIB January 2026 Report

Now, once the TSD Chapter text was analysed, and the framing and promotion of the three socioenvironmental values in relation to Indigenous peoples was showcased and unveiled, the same three level CDA based on Fairclough's three dimensional model is applied to the antagonising text of the APIB 2026 Report published in the 30th of January 2026 (APIB, 2026), which contrasts the TSD Chapter's narrative and challenges the three normative values of labour rights, environmental protection and sustainable development and raises concerns regarding issues related to harmful agribusiness expansion, uncontrolled deforestation and unjust land use. The application of CDA to this report at the textual, discursive practice and social practice levels effectively reveals the discursive tensions and amplifies the voices of the Indigenous people of Brazil, who are the ones actually at the epicentre of the land use and deforestation processes of the EU-Mercosur Agreement. During this phase of the analysis, the APIB report was downloaded as a file so that it could be referred to in terms of page numbers to make it as understandable as possible to the reader.

### 4.2.1 Text Dimension of CDA

Beginning with the title on page 1, this is claiming that this piece of discourse is "*APIB's political statement on the EU-Mercosur trade agreement and its impact on the rights of indigenous peoples*". This use of language is strong and cynical right from the start, its formatting also being in capital letters. The use of the lexis "*political statement*", and "*impact on the rights of indigenous peoples*" symbolises a vibrant and critical emotional emphasis when responding to the trade effects of the Agreement, signifying that the indigenous people are truly the ones experiencing its direct effects.

Moving on to the main body of the text, the vocabulary used in the first few phrases of the introductory paragraph in pages 1-2, the APIB report goes on to explain who they are and what their critical standpoint is in a very direct manner stating that “*the organization that represents nationally and internationally more than 300 indigenous peoples from all regions of Brazil, reaffirms its opposition to the signing and ratification of the EU-Mercosur Trade Agreement*”. The use of the words “*nationally*” and “*internationally*” shows the magnitude of representation of the APIB Indigenous Articulation network, giving it vigorous ethical legitimacy right from the start of the presentation of their critical argumentation. Also important here, is the use of the word “*opposition*”, which emphatically signals a clear antithesis to the trade agreement, but also a dissatisfied and unapproving critical stance against the current state of the agreement with an unapologetic tone. Moreover, in the following sentence the trade agreement is described vividly using the strong, symbolic and categorical phrase “*predatory economic model*”, meaning that it aggressively seeks resource extraction for solely financial profit without protecting vulnerable and sensitive social and environmental aspects of Indigenous life, and then going on to explain that this model “*increases pressure on indigenous and traditional territories, and seriously compromises the climate, social, and human rights commitments made by the countries involved*”, as expressed in the first paragraph of page 1.

In this above part, the three socioenvironmental normative values of environmental protection, labour rights and sustainable development that are promoted in the TSD chapter of the agreement are clearly addressed and critiqued as falling short and lacking in practical implementation on the ground, as the populations are already underrepresented in the Brazilian political landscape internally, with the government not recognising all declared territories by the Indigenous people (Appendix A and B). The reasoning is also clearly given,

pointing at pressure on their territories which goes against the very values that are promoted, signalling that the trade agreement is hypocritical and contradictory in itself, as it does not implement the TSD chapter's proclaimed and boasted socioenvironmental commitments (Appendix A).

Then, in the second paragraph that spans across pages 1-2 of the APIB 2026 report, the problem faced by the Indigenous People is elaborated in even more detail using clear, technical and specific language as well as vigorous vocabulary to explain the issue they are facing cynically and explicitly. Specifically, the report states that, *"For indigenous peoples, the EU-Mercosur Agreement represents a direct and systemic risk"* and that this phenomenon occurs through the process of *"Tariff reductions on agricultural and mineral commodities"* which is enabled by the Agreement, that ultimately:

*"will intensify the expansion of the agricultural frontier and aggravate the impacts of mining, putting pressure on forests, savannas, grasslands, and other biomes, as well as driving the establishment of major logistics infrastructure projects... factors that are responsible for the invasion of more than 90% of indigenous territories"*.

This will result *"in territorial conflicts that promote deadly violence for the indigenous people in all regions of the country"*. This part unequivocally emphasises the socioenvironmental concerns of the Indigenous peoples in a logical but simultaneously emotionally loaded linguistic manner. What is more, lexical choices throughout pages 2-4 such as *"direct and systemic risk"*, *"aggravate"*, *"invasion"* and *"deadly violence"* are very expressive and critical which strengthen the ethos -pathos- logos Aristotelean rhetorical pattern that is followed from the beginning of the report, constructing a clear and visible morally virtuous stance of safeguarding against labour rights violations, environmental



degradation and truly inclusive sustainable development related rights from their standpoint that is very vividly communicated in this part of the text, achieving high modality that puts transitivity of responsibility on the actual agreement and its signatories, and frame themselves as vulnerable and unfairly treated within a victim-harm structure enabled by the trade agreement.

Next, in the third paragraph and the three bullet point structured phrases that follow it on page 2 of the APIB 2026 report, bold font is used to further captivate the attention of the reader to what is actually being said. To elaborate, the first sentence of this paragraph claims in bold font that *“The EU-Mercosur Agreement will intensify deforestation, territorial conflicts, violence against communities, and the systematic violation of collective rights.”* achieving a revised summary of the main issue of concern that the Indigenous people face, and highlight as well as position the three key norms of labour rights, environmental protection and sustainable development as being clearly violated. This same lingual motif of explaining the threat to and deterioration of these three socioenvironmental values is maintained for the rest of the third paragraph and the following three bullet points, claiming, using the same strong and cynically critical wording, that the

*“APIB condemns the fact that the Brazilian government did not conduct Free, Prior, and Informed Consultations with the indigenous peoples and territories that will be affected by the Free Trade Agreement, as required by Convention No. 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO), to which Brazil is a signatory party. Furthermore, the Agreement fails to provide for minimum fundamental safeguards for indigenous peoples, such as: unrestricted respect for the right to Consultation and Free, Prior, and Informed Consent, in accordance with ILO Convention No. 169, for any project or investment that may directly or indirectly affect indigenous territories*

*and ways of life; effective protection of traditional knowledge in the area of intellectual property, preventing its appropriation and patenting by companies;”, and “the strengthening of Indigenous and family farming, rather than the prioritization of a conventional, large-scale, and predatory production model oriented exclusively toward exportation”*

Key to be highlighted here is that vigorous evaluative language is used in this aforementioned extract of the text of the report, such as “condemns,” “fails to provide,” and “predatory production model”, emphasising insufficiency in terms of crystal clear legal safeguards protecting them and their environment. This has the purpose of emphatically highlighting the negative impacts of the Agreement. Transitivity is also highlighted in this extract, especially in the phrase “preventing its appropriation and patenting by companies” blaming companies as the responsible harm-causing actors and through allocating responsibility to the Brazilian government and the Agreement, constructing them as enabling agents of the harmful processes of the agreement, while indigenous peoples are framed as the affected vulnerable and unfairly treated recipients, highlighting the infringement of labour rights, such as “Free, Prior, and Informed Consent”. In addition, nominalisation is also used in words such as “way of life”, “consultation”, “protection,” and “strengthening”. Importantly, this formalises the discourse and highlights institutionalised rights struggles and the urge to defend traditional knowledge system lifestyles that stem in the harmonious interconnectedness of the traditional social and ecological lifestyle practices, relating to the norms of environmental protection and sustainable development. Intertextuality is also highlighted in the extract, as “ILO Convention No. 169” is mentioned. In whole, this linguistic technique is posed to give more moral authority and legal legitimacy to this piece of Indigenous discourse. Through this being said, the systematic presentation of the infringement of the three normative dimensions, such as environmental protection, labour rights protection and sustainable development, is

effectively achieved in a direct, clear and organised manner in terms of phrasing and amplified wording, maintaining a critical, emotional, but also serious tone throughout the clear explanation of their position challenging the agreement. Another important phrase in page 2, reflecting the view of the Indigenous people on the political climate in Brazil being changed towards the better after the election of Lula, is the claim that: *“The election of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva represented the comeback of a social, environmental, and climate agenda in Brazil, which had been severely attacked and dismantled during the Bolsonaro administration”*. Also, it added in the same paragraph at the end of page 2 of the report, that:

*“After years of institutional setbacks, the dismantling of public policies, and the encouragement of violence against indigenous peoples, the electoral defeat of the far right paved the way for the reconstruction of spaces for dialogue and the resumption of policies aimed at protecting human rights, the environment, and traditional territories”*.

This being said, when looking at page 3 paragraph 2, even though some progress is acknowledged to have been made through a shift away from the far right in Brazilian internal politics, the conservative *“Bolsonarism”* rooted in an *“organized”* manner in Brazil’s National Congress causes a stalemate in the enforcement of socioenvironmental rights. This is reflected in the claim that:

*“ the current government, elected on the basis of a broad pro-democracy coalition, faces internal and external pressures that often result in concessions that jeopardize the rights of indigenous peoples and environmental protection”*.

Furthermore, in the following nine paragraphs of the report throughout pages 2-4, the vocabulary and wording shows that the lexical field contains a strong evaluative component, which constructs the EU–Mercosur Agreement not just as a trade deal, but as an instrument

for generating inequality and ecological harm in antithesis to the three socioenvironmental values of labour rights, environmental protection and sustainable development that are promoted in the language of the TSD Chapter of the trade agreement. In more detail, in these next 9 paragraphs of the 2026 APIB report, environmental protection is conceptualised in terms like *“environment”*, *“costs of climate change”*, *“territorial protection,”* *“climate justice”*, *“protection of territories”*, and *“defense of life”*, in pages 2-4. In this context, environmental protection is depicted as something intrinsically linked to the territorial rights of Brazil’s indigenous peoples and their well-being rather than just an ecological problem. Most noteworthy is the employment of the concept of *“sacrifice zones,”* a vivid metaphor that casts indigenous territories as areas that have been historically subject to dispossession and environmental destruction. This specific term suggests that some territories and populations are expendable when it comes to the desire for economic profit and that the costs of development are disproportionately shouldered by some groups that are already in a vulnerable status. Another crucial phrase in page 3 of the report states that:

*“despite repeated complaints from civil society, indigenous peoples, and socio-environmental organizations regarding the lack of transparency, participation, and social control in the negotiation process”*

In this way, the discourse undermines the dominant discourses of economic development and presents the TSD Chapter of the EU-Mercosur trade Agreement as one more example of the extractivist logic that mainly exploits indigenous populations and the environment. In addition, the discourse uses another linguistic strategy based on the contrast between the terms that refer to economic power and responsible actors of agency, such as *“profit”*, *“economic benefits”*, *“concentrating economic benefits in large corporations”*, *“agribusiness”*, and *“mining”* on page 3, and terms that relate to sustainable development

and labour protection values such as “*justice*” “*solidarity*”, “*human rights*”, and “*protection*” found throughout pages 2-4 of the report. This linguistic pattern builds an ideological confrontation between the development model based on profit and that of inclusive socioenvironmental justice. Another important phrase highlighting the problem faced by Indigenous people in Brazil is that from page 3 paragraph 3 which claims that: “*Violence, land conflicts, and legal uncertainty persist*” under the EU-Mercosur Agreement, pointing to a lack of allocation of responsibility of the Parties and corporations involved in the economic supply chain and decision-making processes of the agreement due to the vague legal language of the TSD Chapter of the trade deal. Within this framework, sustainable development is implicitly understood as contradictory to the model of development that prioritises corporate profits and produces environmental destruction and social injustice. While the issue of workers' rights is not explicitly introduced into this part of the discourse as a separate topic, it is embedded in the mention of socioenvironmental inequalities through phrases such as “*collective rights*”, “*human rights*”, “*violence*”, “*land conflicts*” and “*peoples of the Global South*”. that indicate structural exploitation of indigenous ways of life and labour conditions in sectors such as mining and agribusiness as well as the execution of large-scale infrastructure projects which lead to land dispossession and limited labour protections overall.

As for the patterns of transitivity in the text, these actually lend themselves to this aforementioned normative construction mosaic through the creation of asymmetrical relationships of agency. The actors involved with economic and political power under the Mercosur agreement, including “*large corporations*”, “*agribusiness*”, “*mining*”, “*infrastructure projects*”, and “*governments*”, are discursively placed as those actors who are receiving or driving the agreement, through the processes of “*concentrating benefits*”,

*“pressuring negotiations”*, and pursuing economic interests. On the other hand, Indigenous groups, local populations, and civil society are often constructed in the context of processes that emphasise their marginalised and vulnerable condition, seen in the use of passionate terminology like *“excluded”*, *“attacked”*, *“dismantled”*, *“threatened”*, and *“sacrificed”*. This construction discursively positions these actors as being those who are affected within broader economic and political processes. Nonetheless, there are constructions of counter-agency that are made through the conscious political organising of the Indigenous people of Brazil.

To add, terminology linked to resistance and advocacy, including terms such as *“reaffirm”*, *“advocates”*, *“mobilize”*, *“denounce”*, and the phrase *“forge national and international alliances”* in pages 3-4, construct these actors as political agents that are actively fighting for their emancipation and for their rights, although they have been treated unjustly and are being pushed to the periphery. Furthermore, this discourse uses strong modality by means of statements like *“no legitimacy”*, *“no climate justice without full protection of indigenous territories”*, *“no sustainable development, when peoples are sacrificed in the name of profit”* and *“must no longer be treated as sacrifice zones”* in pages 3-4, which convey absolute certainty and exertion of moral power to shape public opinion and influence policy-making and legislative processes. Additionally, future-oriented language that is present in page 4 like *“continue to mobilize”*, *“block the ratification”*, and *“strengthen multilateralism”*, suggests an ongoing process of resisting and acting collectively to contest the trade Agreement as it is, from their point of view, a greenwashed neocolonial resource extraction mechanism for purely economic profit of corporations to the expense of Indigenous people. In light of the use of evaluative language, asymmetrical agency, and strong modality, this text generates a discourse wherein Indigenous territories are portrayed as the *“front line”* of the *“defense of*

*life*”, “*climate*”, and wholesomely “*humanity’s future*” in the last paragraph in page 4, which is implying that protecting the environment, safeguarding their territory, and ensuring justice are interdependent elements of sustainable development.

All in all, the position of the Indigenous people of Brazil challenging the legitimacy of the EU-Mercosur trade Agreement is expressed very cynically and vividly in the final paragraph of page 3, when it claimed that:

*“There is no legitimacy in a trade agreement that is based on the violation of rights, the destruction of territories, and the worsening of the climate crisis. APIB advocates for the strengthening of multilateralism based on a model that prioritizes the defense of human rights, solidarity among peoples, and the protection of territories and the environment “*

Also in the second-to-last paragraph of page 3, the unaddressed and unprioritized issue of territorial protection for Indigenous people and the environment in which they live in is made clear when it is claimed that:

*“It is in this context of structural fragility in territorial protection that the accelerated resumption of negotiations on the EU-Mercosur Agreement takes place. The Agreement has been treated as a political priority by governments, with strong pressure for its conclusion, despite repeated complaints from civil society, indigenous peoples, and socio-environmental organizations regarding the lack of transparency, participation, and social control in the negotiation process”.*

These two extracts add to the nominalisation linguistic feature of the APIB report of 2026 as they are key in understanding the logical reasoning of the report in terms of exclusion of Indigenous people from active agency and participation in decision-making, as they are

pieces of strongly critical language emphasising the need for truly legally enforceable ecocentrism and humanitarianism, illustrating that the Indigenous people of Brazil are advocating for a multilateral form of change through a strengthened sustainable development model, signalling the need for stronger synergy to enforce UN-based socioenvironmental principles that promote and establish a regime of fair trade and ethical supply chains in the international politicoeconomic relations, calling for more action to achieve truly sustainable trade standards worldwide.

#### 4.2.2 Discursive Practice Dimension of CDA

Moving on to the meso level of Fairclough's CDA, the discursive practice dimension of the text of the 2026 APIB report can be viewed as a political and communicative act by the Articulation of the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil within the larger debate on the EU-Mercosur Trade Agreement. As an advocacy body of the Indigenous peoples on national and international levels, the APIB creates such a discourse in order to impact the decision-making regarding the ratification of the agreement among the stakeholders through the influencing of public opinion. So, the discourse is interpreted as to be used in circulation and distribution between the national governments, European institutions, civil society groups, and international advocacy groups, influencing how the EU-Mercosur Accord is read within the discourses on environmental protection, workers' rights, and sustainable development. At the same time, the discourse challenges the current state of affairs and introduces an ideology of opposition towards what is described as the "*predatory economic model*," which includes symbolic signalling to neoliberal and extractivist forms of economic development that are to the expense of the vulnerable Indigenous populations. In this way, three core socio-environmental values of environmental protection, labour rights, and sustainable development are raised by the discourse, as these norms are considered to be challenged by



the development of agriculture and mineral production for export purposes, according to the permissions given to corporations under the new trade agreement.

Intertextuality is thus essential in establishing the legitimacy of the discourse being produced. As the text utilises legal and institutional sources as its primary frame of reference in constructing its argument, it makes an attempt to place the criticism within the context of internationally accepted laws. This can be seen by the mention of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent, which is included as one of the major principles under the International Labour Organization Convention No. 169. With such a legal framework being used as a reference to the expected standards under which the economic operations of the EU-Mercosur Agreement will take place, the text seeks to prove that the process leading to the formation of the agreement was not conducted in accordance with and in compliance with international labour and indigenous rights standards. At the same time, there is a mention of developments in Brazilian politics as related to the victory of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva against the previous president, Jair Bolsonaro, but also a realistic recognition of the deeper institutionally-rooted challenges that remain, which are the problematic rulings of the Supreme Federal Court with respect to indigenous territorial rights related to their historical displacement (Reuters, 2023).

Moreover, it can also be seen that this text exhibits a high level of interdiscursivity, as it draws upon the elements of discourse on human rights, discourse on environmental governance, discourse on labour rights, and discourse on development. Different discursive spheres are brought together to synergistically form a critical stance towards the prevalent models of economic development, which are built on the extraction and exportation of resources. The issue of environmental protection is approached by mentioning such notions as deforestation, territorial pressure, and the impact of climate change. Labour rights, in turn,

are referred to through allusions to international standards of labour protection and the preservation of Indigenous peoples' livelihoods and traditional means of production. Thus, sustainable development is offered as an alternative model, in which attention is drawn to the issues of ecosystem protection, the development of Indigenous and family farming, as well as the adherence to collective civil rights.

### 4.2.3 Social Practice Dimension of CDA

In terms of the macro social practice dimension of the text of the 2026 APIB report, this can be understood within the framework of structural conflicts in the global political economy of trade, development, and environmental management. Specifically, the issue of the EU-Mercosur Trade Agreement is discussed in an environment characterised by the growth of international markets for goods and the growing need for agriculture and minerals in EU external policy. What is more, South American states are truly essential in providing these products to international markets, especially to the European Union, so they are a strategic economic ally in the geopolitical arena. The 2026 discourse of the Articulation of the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil opposes this system, illustrating cynically and critically how trade liberalisation could lead to increased deforestation, mining, and construction activities in areas with significant ecological value if fair trade practices are not legally enforced in practice, leading to labour and environmental protection and more ethical supply chains that allow for inclusive sustainable development. In other words, the discourse could be understood as being part of wider ideological conflicts in the international system, regarding the negative effects of neoliberal economic globalisation and alternative forms of development focused on countering injustice and exploitation through fair trade with legally enforced environmental sustainability and labour rights protections and standards embedded in market-driven trade agreements.

Adding on, the language of the report also demonstrates the historical processes involving territorial dispossession and environmental exploitation that have been characteristic of indigenous populations in Brazil. Crucially, the development of the agribusiness sector, as well as mining operations and other major infrastructure projects, has been common in areas where indigenous and traditional communities lived, leading to disputes related to environmental problems, social injustices, and the lack of protection for the rights of indigenous groups, a concept that is core to the APIB report of 2026 and the purpose of the APIB as an actor, being a political advocacy network for indigenous populations in Brazil. In this regard, the mention of the international legal convention, specifically the ILO 169 Convention, serves to draw attention to the current state of affairs in which the right of the indigenous population to be consulted regarding certain decisions is being increasingly accepted worldwide as part of global governance mechanisms.

To end, the discourse is a symbolic representation of the larger contemporary debate globally concerning the concept of sustainable development and its actual practical implementation. In Brazil, for instance, the lands occupied by indigenous people, especially in areas like the Amazon basin and the rest of the country's natural biomes, have been shown to play a pivotal role in the protection of biodiversity and climate change regulation. By positioning the issue of climate justice in relation to protecting the rights of indigenous territories, the text ensures that the rights of the indigenous population are put in the wider context of sustainable development. In so doing, the discourse questions the models of development that emphasize growth and production through exports rather than taking into consideration environmental issues and socio-economic factors. Based on such an approach, it becomes possible to understand that the agreement takes place against the background of larger overarching ideological antagonisms concerning the dominance of the model of neoliberal economic

globalisation in contrast to other models of development that focus on environmental protection and workers' rights. This, in turn, is connected with the more general debates that exist in the global political economy concerning power and resources, and how global trade standards can become truly fair for all humans and the environment in practice, and synonymous with sustainability standards and inclusive justice for vulnerable populations, such as Indigenous people.

## 5. Conclusion: Fragmented Allocation of Responsibility for the Coercive Enforcement of Socioenvironmental Norms

To conclude, the research question for this thesis was formulated in such a way to find out how the Trade Agreement between EU-Mercosur, more precisely, its TSD Chapter and Annex 18A, and the APIB Report on January 2026 discursively constructed and challenged the construction of the normative role of the European Union with regard to Brazil's well-being and environmental policies. By using the three-dimensional framework of Critical Discourse Analysis developed by Norman Fairclough and by considering NPE, CNT, and CT theories, this study shows that the normative role of the European Union is not static but demonstrates it to be constructed, negotiated, and contested in terms of the uneven power relations existing in the world today.

To directly answer the research question: *How do the EU–Mercosur Trade Agreement, signed in 2026, and the 2026 APIB report discursively construct and contest the European Union's role as a normative power in relation to Brazil's welfare and environmental governance?*, the EU–Mercosur Trade Agreement signed in 2026 attempts a construction of vague and legally unenforceable fair trade norm promotion, and the APIB report published in 2026 contests and undermines this attempted EU protagonistic role as a market-driven normative power by

showing how the TSD chapter's vague language in truth only achieves the facilitation of a fragmented allocation of enforcement responsibility for the socioenvironmental norms of environmental protection, labour rights and sustainable development, which actually weakens accountability for environmental and welfare governance while resource extraction processes for economic profit are taking place in Brazil, as experienced by the Indigenous populations there. This is because the EU-Mercosur Trade Agreement discourse uses a strategically ambiguous and depoliticized language that features weak modality, transitivity, and omission, thereby upholding socioenvironmental norms ideationally without seeking their coercive enforcement in practice through assigning organised responsibility to specific and explicitly mentioned agents and actors such as organs of the Brazilian government for example to impose market-based sanctions in case of potential violations of labour, environmental and sustainability values and to regulate corporations who are extracting forest or mining resources. However, the APIB 2026 report on the other hand, critically challenges and contests this blurry discursive construction of weakly linguistically promoted socioenvironmental norms in terms of degree of practical enforceability by using strong modality, agency, and normative re-signification to reveal these omissions and uncover the structural inequalities inherent in the EU's involvement in the social and environmental well-being of the Indigenous population of Brazil affected by the resource extraction practiced under the EU-Mercosur trade agreement, calling for more welfare protection and responsible environmental governance in practice, that will contribute to truly inclusive sustainable development, enabling the trade agreement to become a vehicle assisting its realisation in Brazil and other Mercosur countries that signed it.

More specifically, in the textual dimension, the EU-Mercosur TSD chapter and its Annex 18A build up an institutionalised and coherent discourse based on labour rights,

environmental protection and sustainable development. Nevertheless, as the results of the CDA analysis have shown, this coherence can be obtained through particular use of language, namely through modality, transitivity, and nominalisation. The use of high modality verbs such as “*shall*” might give the impression that there are binding obligations in the document; however, in truth, all the mentioned expressions are counterbalanced by lower modality verbs such as “*should*”, “*encourage*” and “*strive to*”. As for the transitivity, most of the time, the agent in the process is identified only as an abstract entity “*the Parties*” with concrete actors and organisations not being named, so the accountability disappears. The same role belongs to nominalisation and passivisation, which lead to depersonalisation and framing socio-environmental protection as an ongoing process rather than an obligation. Finally, this discourse can be supplemented by omissions, which are, namely, the absence of effective enforcement measures and relegation of indigenous people as passive beneficiaries of the policy to the margins and adding on to this, the Normative Power Europe approach allows for the projection of the EU’s soft diplomatic normative power while avoiding practical enforcement obligations through obscure and abstract language in the legal texts.

Moreover, according to the perspective of CNT, the above-discussed results provide a perfect paradigm of how norms like sustainable development are actually not static constructs, but rather discursively produced dynamic ones that are always flexible innately by nature. The TSD Chapter and its equivalent Annex 18A present these norms as universally valuable and at the same time makes them open to renegotiation via hedged phrases like “*as appropriate*” as per paragraph 40 of the Annex for instance and as per paragraph 6 of Article 18.4 of the TSD Chapter itself, and “*in of their different national circumstances*” as per paragraph 13 subparagraph (a) of the Annex. Crucially, the flexibility of these norms makes it easier for different actors to reach an agreement, but at the same time, makes the norms themselves less

universal and less binding. Furthermore, another point supporting this interpretation through the dimension of discursive practice is that the EU-Mercosur Agreement may be understood as a consequence of an institutionally embedded interdiscursive process involving the combination of trade diplomacy, environmental policy, and labour regulation. In this context, the use of language based on consensus-building and vagueness is seen as a reflection of the accommodation of different economic and political interests. Nevertheless, what is actually created through such an approach is a technocratic discourse where collaboration and administration become more important than conflict and responsibility. Based on Critical Theory, the latter constitutes one of the main factors for the depoliticisation of socio-environmental problems by reducing structural differences into administrative concerns. Additionally, as an address to institutions, the EU-Mercosur Agreement is unable to include indigenous people and other local communities within the normative discourse of the agreement.

What is more, on the social practice level of things, the EU-Mercosur Agreement can be understood within the framework of the neoliberal global political economy. Even though the European Union attempts to be a normative actor by setting standards in labour, environment, and sustainability, such an approach is always conditioned and constrained by the need for market liberalisation and growth. As revealed through Critical Theory, the normative rhetoric of the EU is combined with conditions where extraction, trade growth, and corporate benefits reign supreme. Hence, the oversights found in the text-based analysis become indicative of the underlying ideology of power relations between the Global North and the Global South, reinforcing a form of economic neocolonialism masked under the guise of promoted practically unenforceable sustainability commitments for the protection of labour rights, the environment and the promotion of inclusive sustainable development.

On the other side of things, the discursive construction put forth by the APIB 2026 report represents an entirely new construction, which challenges the normative claims made by the EU. In terms of linguistic elements used in constructing its argumentation, the APIB report makes extensive use of modality, explicitly marked transitivity, and evaluation. The EU-Mercosur Agreement is constructed as a “*predatory economic model*” responsible for creating “*systemic risk*”. In contrast to the TSD Chapter's abstraction of agency in the process of discourse creation, the APIB report locates agency in governments, corporations, and even the Agreement itself as being responsible for causing environmental destruction, dispossession of territories, and social injustices. Indigenous peoples are portrayed as agents of politics through the use of verbs such as “*reaffirm*”, “*mobilize*”, and “*denounce*”.

Ending things off, from the point of view of CDA, this change in modalisation and transitivity is important. Whereas the Agreement relies upon weak modalisation and depersonalisation of agency, creating an amorphous and fragmented allocation of responsibility of actors to enforce the socioenvironmental norms of the TSD chapter, the report by APIB relies on strong statements and conveys urgency and moral absoluteness to counter this lack of allocation of responsibility for actors who will enforce the TSD chapter in practice in Brazil. This rhetorical move reveals the silences in the TSD Chapter, namely the lack of provisions concerning accountability and guarantees. Moreover, the APIB rhetoric brings back into political discussion the socio-environmental values presented by the Agreement in generalising ways, thus associating them with violence and dispossession. Here, CNT is very helpful in analysing this scenario in terms of a norm contestation and re-signification process. Instead of dismissing the norms of environmental protection, labour rights, and sustainable development entirely, the APIB report contests their meanings by



redefining them. Firstly, environmental protection becomes an integral part of territorial rights and “*the defense of life*” on page 4 of the APIB report of 2026. Importantly, labour rights are defined in the context of collective and human rights, while sustainable development is said to be incompatible with the extractive economy promoted by the EU. Thereafter, in the realm of discursive practice, the 2026 APIB report constitutes an intervention in politics intended to make an impact among not only domestic but also international constituencies and forged legal texts of trade agreements such as the EU-Mercosur Agreement. Through the usage of the technique of intertextuality, the report cites legal documents such as the ILO Convention No. 169 in order to increase its credibility while placing it within established global norms that challenge the EU’s normative power. On the other hand, through interdiscursivity, the report becomes part of a larger political advocacy movement that contests dominant models of development that offer vague and misleading measures for environmental and humanitarian protection.

In terms of Critical Theory, the APIB discourse can be seen as an act of resistance against the power structures that permeate international trade policies. It highlights the issue of marginalisation suffered by Indigenous peoples in order to expose the ideologies behind the EU-Mercosur Agreement and re-inject conflict into the discourse that the TSD Chapter aims to render apolitical. However, it is worth noting that there are some limitations and absences that exist within the APIB report itself. Although it presents a compelling criticism of the Agreement, the report provides little information regarding concrete alternatives in terms of governance apart from those involving consultation and protection. In whole, the results of the analysis show that the EU's normative power is relational, contested, and discursively constructed. While Normative Power Europe does not merely entail the spread of values, but rather the construction of norms through language games that at once disclose and obscure

power relations in different ways. To add, Constructivist Norm Theory reveals that norms are always negotiated and contested, whereas Critical Theory shows that overarching structural constraints prevent them from having a truly emancipatory effect in reality.

From a final point of view, this thesis contributes meaningfully to larger discussions around the concept of Normative Power Europe in that the discussion of the normative construction process reveals the necessity to contextualise the role of normative claims. From the case study analysis of the EU–Mercosur Agreement, it becomes clear that the EU's ability to exercise its normative power is contingent upon the capacity to manage perceptions and legitimacy. Without concrete processes of accountability, attribution of responsibilities, and involvement of affected parties, the EU will continue to promote merely a rhetorical normative agenda. Hence, a closer look at the discourse between the EU-Mercosur Agreement and the APIB report allows understanding the highly political character of the process of norm construction in international trade governance regimes. Truly, for any discussion to make fruitful progress in terms of ensuring greater sustainable development, the issues of discursive constraints need to be dealt with in terms of alteration of the language of the text of the TSD Chapter and its Annex 18. This is because of the ellipsis of more active and explicit wording in the TSD chapter and Annex 18, which are related both to the concept of omissions and to the obscuring of the identity of actors that are allocated the responsibility to enforce the socioenvironmental norms. This above point made should be considered seriously by all signatories of the EU-Mercosur trade agreement to make it more sufficient in proving safeguards for Indigenous people and the environment, in order to improve it by making its language more explicit and avoid the current greenwashed and weak welfare and sustainability standards that is caused by vague, inexplicit and non-binding language in the TSD chapter of the EU-Mercosur trade agreement, which at its current state is unveiled by

this thesis to offer merely a fragmented allocation of responsibility due to the hesitation in the expression of which explicit actors should carry out which exact operational actions and under which exact specified time frame this should occur chronologically, in order to practically achieve market-driven coercive enforcement and legally implement these socioenvironmental norms, therefore truly contributing to the protection of indigenous people and the environment, achieving fair trade in Brazil and other Mercosur states.

## 5.1 Reflexivity, Limitations and Future Research

Finally, after the above conclusive remarks were drawn, this research recognises the importance of reflexivity in shaping both the analytical process and the interpretation of findings. This being said, as the researcher, I am consciously aware and recognise that my perspectives influence how I interpret EU and Indigenous peoples' discourse, and reflexivity allows me to critically examine these positionalities, ensuring that interpretations remain transparent, and that neither institutional nor Indigenous peoples' narratives are privileged intentionally. To add, the use of CDA in combination with Critical Theory and Normative Power Europe was a very effective and fruitful way to unveil the hidden political meanings in both the EU and Indigenous discourses as it allowed for a multidimensional and interlayered point of view to be applied when exploring the three socioenvironmental values of labour rights, environmental protection and sustainable development. Moreover, some crucial potential limitations that are worth mentioning include an asymmetrical emphasis on discourse at the expense of material factors, and for future research, studies could further attempt to examine EU trade agreements with other developing regions of the world, such as in the African continent, evaluating whether similar motifs of normative contestation exist.

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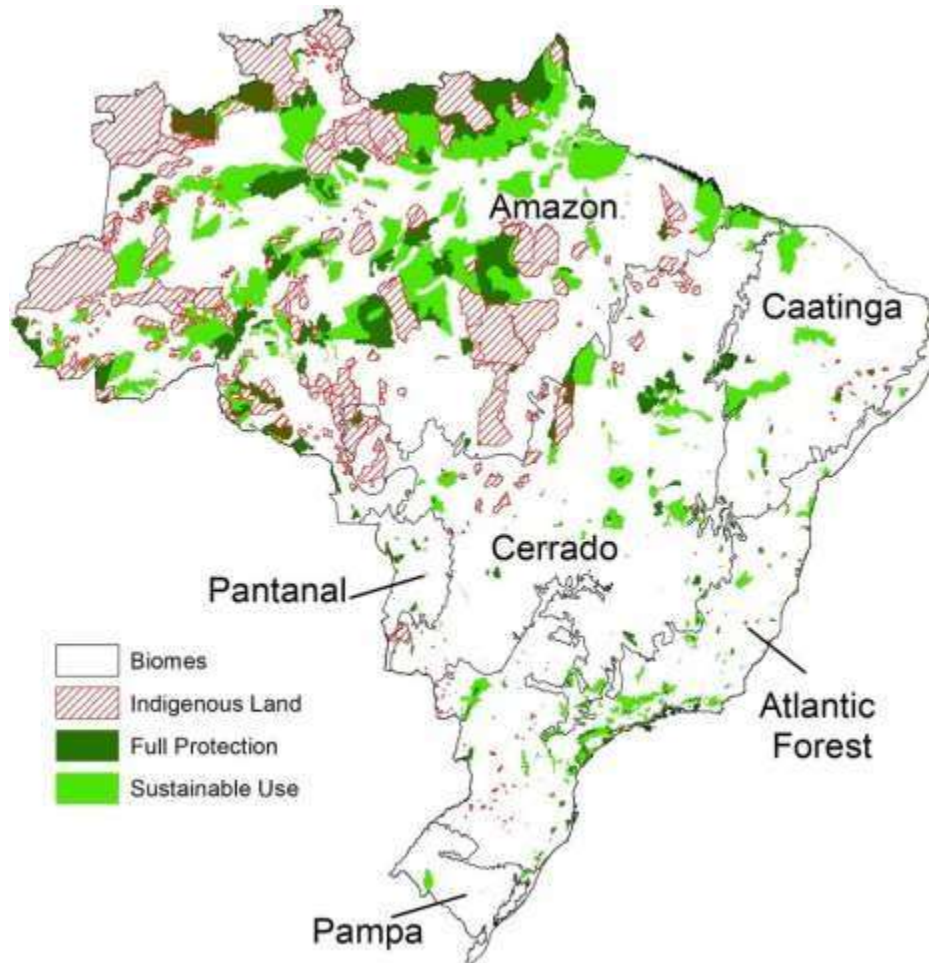
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## 7. Appendices

### A. Maps Depicting Indigenous Territories



Source: Reproduced from Jenkins, C.N., Alves, M.A.S., Uezu, A., & Vale, M.M. (2015). *Patterns of Vertebrate Diversity and Protection in Brazil*. PLOS ONE 10(12): e0145064. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0145064>

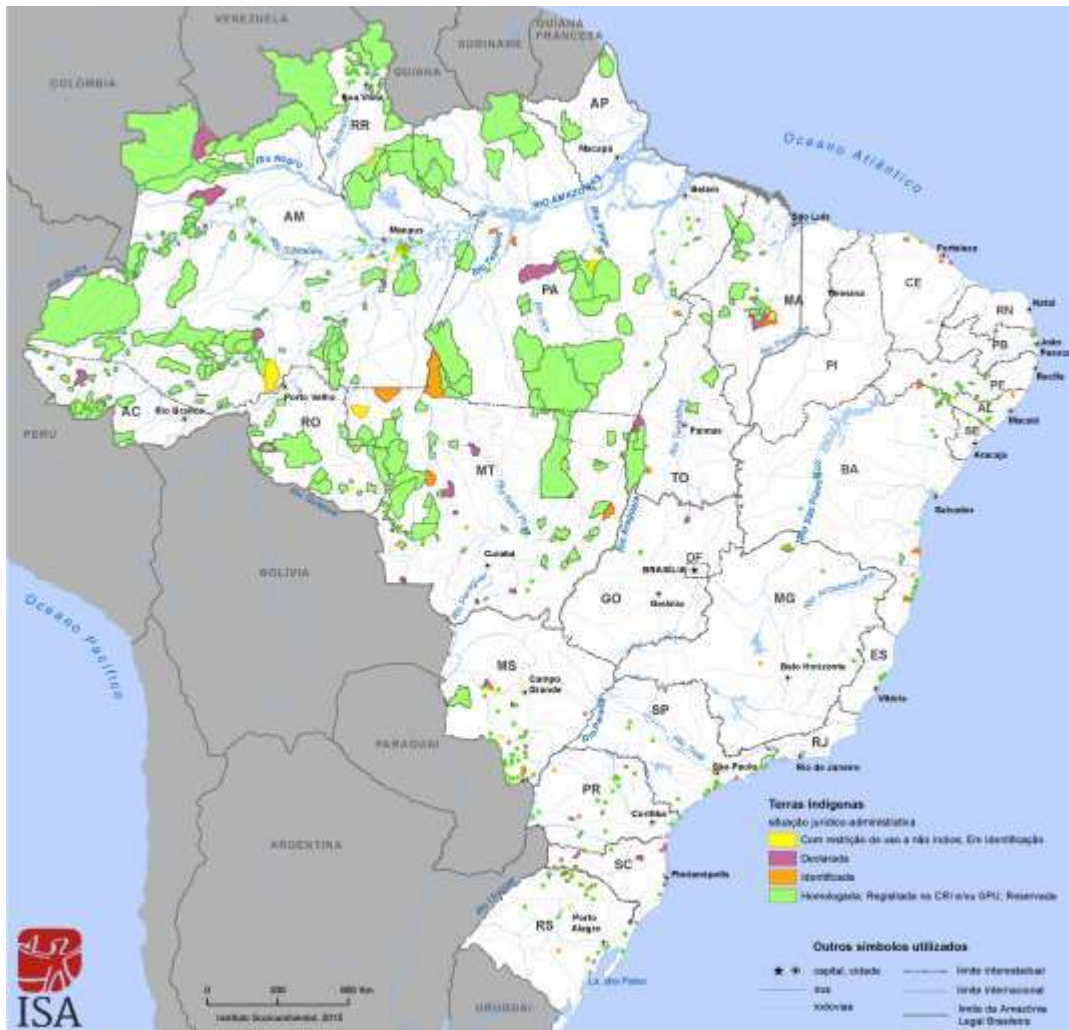
## Indigenous localities By Federation Units



Source: Censo Demográfico 2022



Source: Reproduced from Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). (2023). 2022 census: Brazil has more than 8,500 Indigenous localities. <https://agenciadenoticias.ibge.gov.br/en/agencia-news/2184-news-agency/news/42285-censo-2022-brasil-tem-mais-de-8-5-mil-localidades-indigenas-a-maioria-na-regiao-norte-2>



Translation of Legend:

Yellow:

“With restricted use by non-Indigenous people; Under identification”

Purple:

“Declared”

Orange:

“Identified”

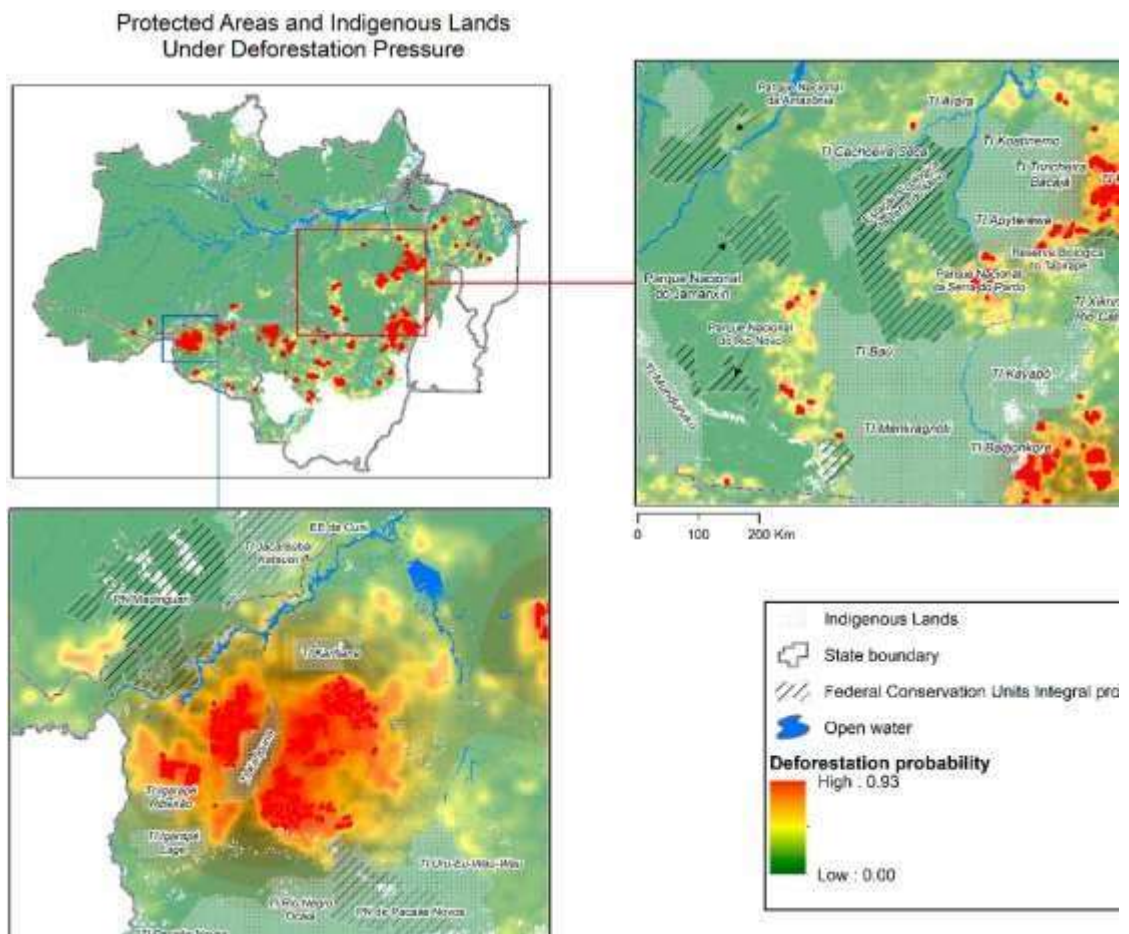
Green:

“Approved, Registered in the Land Registry and/or Federal Heritage Service, Reserved”

Source: Reproduced from Instituto Socioambiental (ISA). (n.d.). Location and extension of Indigenous lands.

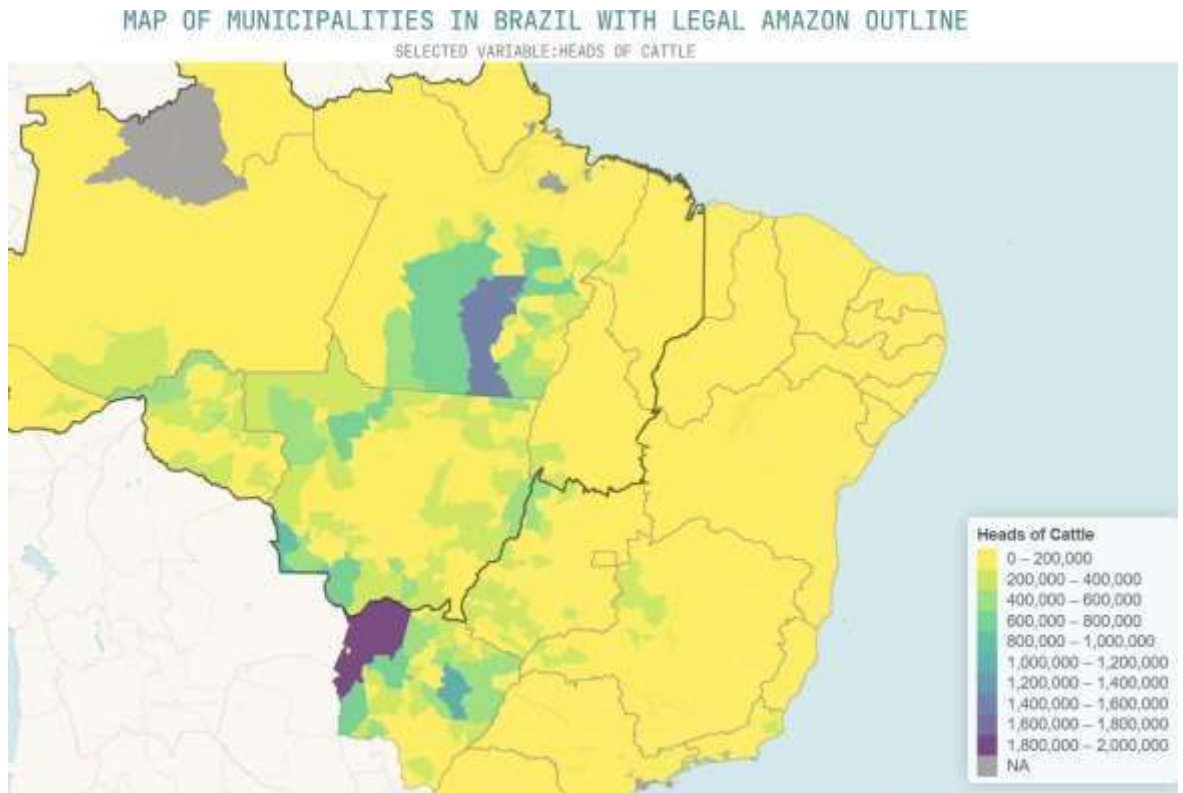
[https://pib.socioambiental.org/en/Location\\_and\\_extension\\_of\\_Indigenous\\_Lands](https://pib.socioambiental.org/en/Location_and_extension_of_Indigenous_Lands)

B. Maps Depicting Estimated Land Use for Deforestation Agribusiness and Mining in EU-Mercosur Trade Agreement



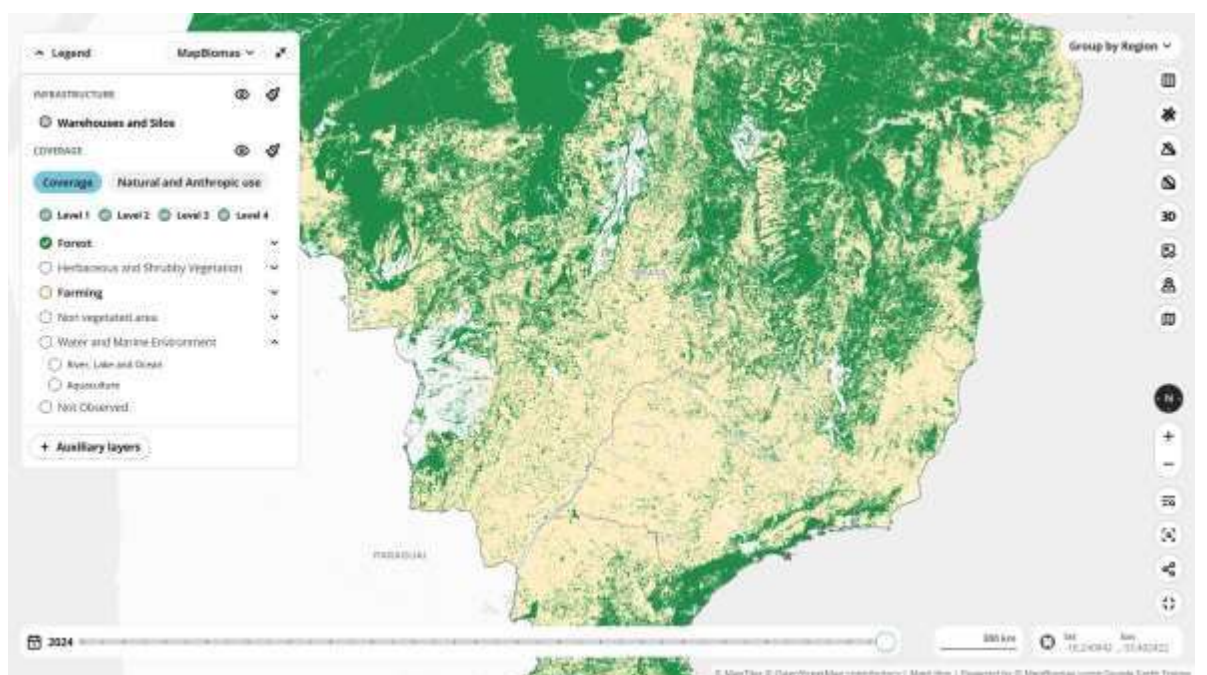
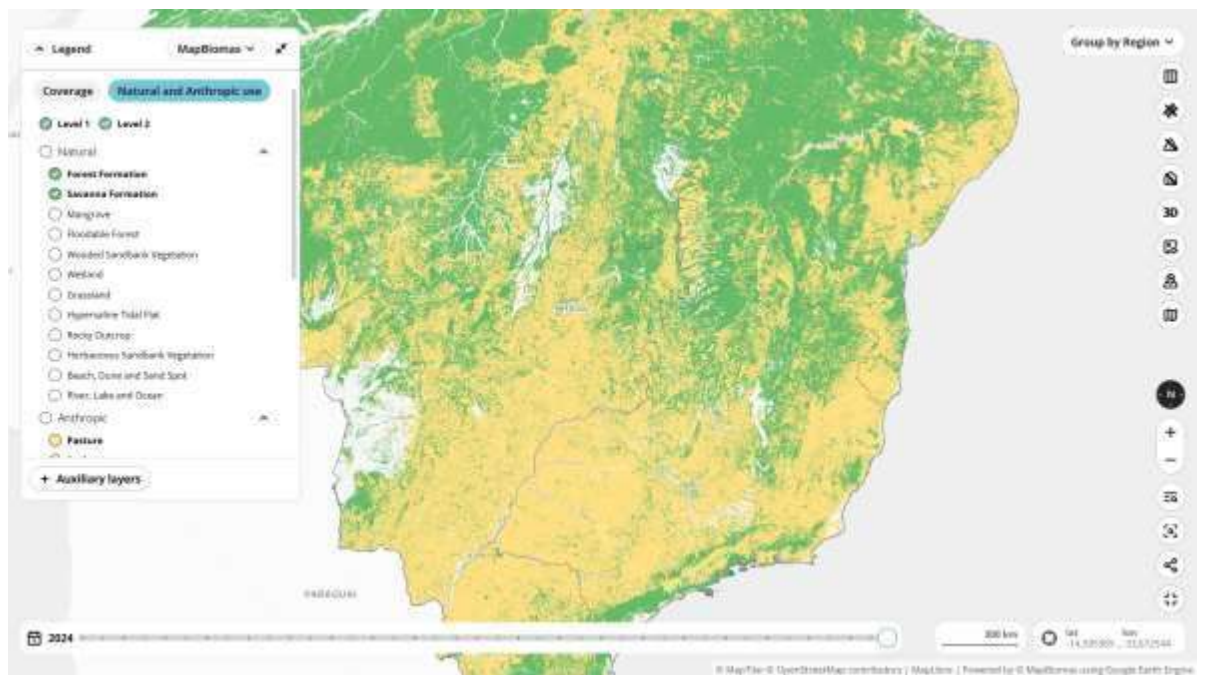
Source: Reproduced from Arima, E., Barreto, P., Taheripour, F., & Aguiar, A. (2021). *Dynamic Amazonia: The EU–Mercosur trade agreement and deforestation*. *Land*, 10(11), 1243. <https://doi.org/10.3390/land10111243>



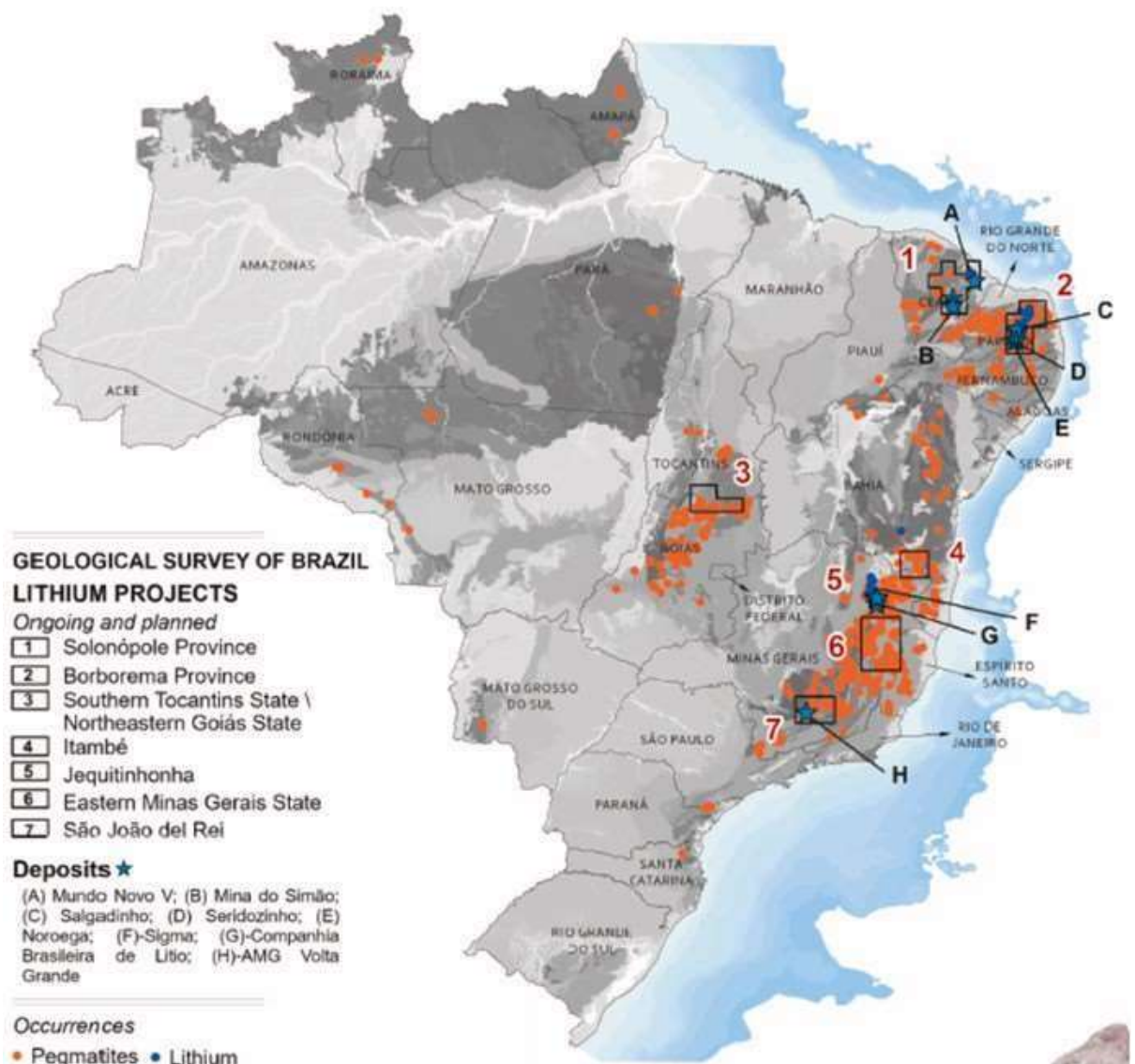


*Source: Reproduced from DataZoom (PUC-Rio). (n.d.). Map: Heads of cattle in Brazil [Interactive web application]. Retrieved March 23, 2026, from [https://datazoom.shinyapps.io/app\\_map\\_cattle\\_en/\\_w\\_e08f68015bf7444bbb91b10eba441be/](https://datazoom.shinyapps.io/app_map_cattle_en/_w_e08f68015bf7444bbb91b10eba441be/)*



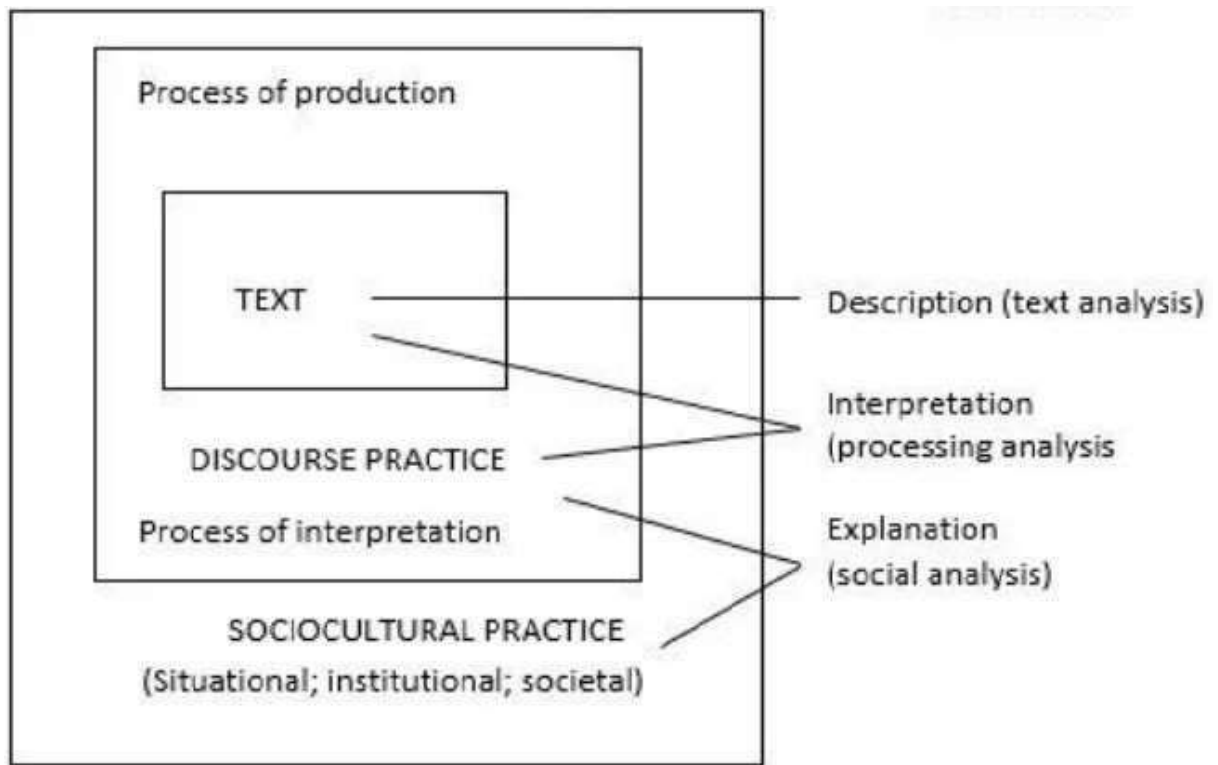


Source: Generated from MapBiomass. (2024). Land use and land cover data (Brazil).  
[https://plataforma.brasil.mapbiomas.org/coverage/coverage\\_lclu](https://plataforma.brasil.mapbiomas.org/coverage/coverage_lclu)



Source: Reproduced from Zorzal, C. B., Silva, J. M. da, Jaques, D. S., & Santos, R. de C. P. (2025). An overview of lithium mining in Brazil: From artisanal extraction to large-scale production. *Resources Policy*, 100, 105440. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resourpol.2024.105440>

C. Norman Fairclough's 1995 Three Dimensional CDA Model



Source: Reproduced from Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis*. Longman. p. 98