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INHABIT, RESIST, REEXIST: A Feminist Critique of the Metaphysics of Progress in the Brazilian Countryside

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Critical Review of:

PAIM, Elisangela S.; FURTADO, Fabrina P. Furtado (Orgs.)

Women in defense of territory, body, land, waters. Rio

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Introduction

The challenge of looking at the countryside not only as a space of production, but as an intricate complex of social, economic, cultural and environmental relations must be a constant in the exercise of various disciplines and not anthropology and sociology and rural. It is in this context that the work organized by Elisangela S. Paim and Fabrina P. Furtado is characterized as a work that proves to be important for the understanding of nuances and dynamics that shape life in the Brazilian rural environment. Published in 2024 by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in conjunction with Editora Funilaria, this collective book is not only a compilation of texts, but a powerful manifestation of women's voices that resist and build alternatives in the face of an often exclusionary and predatory model of agrarian development, born in one of the worst moments in the collective history of humanity, the Covid-19 pandemic.

The design proposed for this review follows the expected academic rigors, but, above all, seeks to maintain a critical presentation with fluidity and lightness of reading. The objective, therefore, is to contextualize the relevance of the work, especially with regard to agroecology, rural public policies and

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technological innovation in the field, from a socio-anthropological perspective and its respective value for research and professional practices in technical areas that work in the field, such as Agronomy. This is because the very nature of the analyzed work suggests this type of content, since it is a compendium of a singular nature, which compiles experiences and reflections as a result of university extension courses that promoted the encounter and exchange of knowledge between academia and social movements. This origin, in turn, gives the work an authenticity and a direct connection with the reality experienced by women in the countryside, making it a valuable resource to deconstruct superficial and hegemonic views on agribusiness, since it invites us to deepen the struggles for land, water, and territory, highlighting the centrality of the role of women in the construction of a fairer and more sustainable future for rural areas. Thus, the book unfolds into a series of articles that, in a cohesive way, explore the intersection between women's experiences in the countryside and the impacts of a development model that often marginalizes them. Thus, the collection *Women in defense of territory, body, land, water* offers a forceful and multifaceted critical analysis of the power relations that unfold in the Brazilian countryside, not limiting itself to a mere survey of problems, but deepening the understanding of the structural causes of

inequalities and their respective contractions of resistance that emerge from communities.

By addressing the confluence between gender domination and the extractivist logic of capital in rural areas, the book dialogues directly with contemporary debates on feminist political ecology (Rocha, 2018), critical agrarian sociology (Wanderley, 2009), as well as with empirical experiences reported by researchers such as Bendini (2006) and Flores (2012). The work is structured to guide the reader through a journey of awareness about women's struggles and knowledge, starting with the conceptualization of the "body-territory" as a central axis of analysis. This concept, which runs through the entire collection, broadens the understanding of space beyond its physical dimension, encompassing the cultural, social and economic relationships that are established between women and the environment in which they are inserted. The first article, *"Political and epistemological contributions of women in defense of the territory-body-land-waters"*, signed by Elisângela Soldateli Paim, Fabrina Pontes Furtado and Cristiane Faustino, sets the tone of the work by discussing the importance of an analysis that incorporates the categories of gender, race and class by emphasizing that the knowledge produced by women, often disregarded by the dominant academic and social structures, It is essential for a more complete

understanding of socio-environmental crises. Underlying this, therefore, is a critique of Eurocentrism and patriarchy that permeate the production of knowledge, gaining screen through the defense of the valorization of diverse experiences and practices as legitimate sources of knowledge. In this sense, there is the position of invitation to the decolonization of thought and the construction of new epistemologies based on the experiences of women in resistance.

Next, the chapter "*Agribusiness: a reflection from organized peasant women*" presents agribusiness as a phenomenon historically resulting from an aggressive capitalist facet and, from this point of view, completely linked to colonial, patriarchal and even racist logics. To this understanding, the authors detail the consequences of this model, such as land concentration, rural exodus – which disproportionately affects women – and pesticide contamination, which translates into health problems for communities. On the other hand, the text highlights the resilience and organization of the Peasant Women's Movement (MMC), which, over decades, has built the Popular Project for Feminist Agroecological Peasant Agriculture as a concrete alternative for life and production based on the defense of life and autonomy.

Delving deeper into the theme of the impacts of agribusiness, the text "*Cornered by agribusiness: conflicts and resistances experienced by women in territories of peasant*

communities", headed by Rafaela Lopes de Sousa, Sarah Luiza de S. Moreira, Camila Dutra dos Santos, Ana Paula Pereira Sousa and Josimeire da Silva Lemos, brings clear examples of reality. The case of the Zé Maria do Tomé Camp in Ceará, therefore, illustrates how the expansion of agribusiness results in the loss of territory, environmental degradation and the destructuring of traditional ways of life. Emphatically, the discussion moves towards revealing the impacts of pesticides on women's health, including the increase in cases of cancer and reproductive problems, with the acts of resistance being materialized in the agroecological productive arrangements of the productive backyards and in the organization of the group "Mãos que Criam", which, through fairs and exchanges, seeks to make peasant and agroecological agriculture visible and strengthen as a path to food sovereignty and social cohesion.

Within this context, the indigenous perspective is introduced by Elisa Pankararu in *"Traditional knowledge, an indigenous inspiration in the contemporary debate"*. The author shares the vision of her people, the Pankararu, who organize themselves in a matriarchal way and maintain a sacred relationship with the land-territory. It contrasts the logic of domination of agribusiness, which is aligned with sexism and racism, with agroecology, seen as an act of resistance and a path to equality and social justice. From this perspective, the importance of

traditional knowledge, transmitted and kept by women, as pillars for the construction of a more harmonious and equitable society, where violence against women does not find room for reproduction, is highlighted, since underlying this idealized social delineation is the premise of social empowerment.

The work follows the path of reflection with the impactful testimony of Cleomar Ribeiro da Rocha, in *"Shrimp farming took us out of the mangrove, the wind farm took us out of the dune"*. As a quilombola woman and fisherwoman from the territory of Cumbe, in Ceará, Cleomar narrates the voracity of interests behind the installation of a wind farm and the expansion of shrimp farming in her community. The argument is in the sense of "unmasking" the discourse of clean energy and development, revealing the oppression, violence and environmental and cultural destruction imposed on its people through the expansion of this economic activity. The story is, with that. A kind of cry of pain and resistance, which shows how the loss of territory means the loss of autonomy, identity and health of women, who find themselves deprived of independence in their own home-territory.

Ailce Margarida Negreiros Alves and Larissa Pereira Santos Mestra, in *"Women and mining: feminist resistance to mega-enterprises and illegal mining in the Carajás iron corridor"*, bring to light the harshest face of

mining, describing the Carajás iron corridor as a colonial, patriarchal, sexist, sexist and racist extractive system, which imposes high rates of violence and human rights violations, disproportionately affecting women, especially black women and those from traditional communities. The concept of "body-territory" is again central, illustrating how the female body becomes the first stage of oppression and resistance. Between the lines is the denunciation of the complicity of the State and the impunity of large corporations, whose economic operation processes impute to women the most arduous conditions for the continuity of life, sustenance and permanence in the territories in which they resist.

The chapter *"Women affected by Samarco's crime: the case of the Middle Doce River region in Minas Gerais"*, by Camilla Laranjeira Brito, deepens the discussion on the so-called "sacrifice zones" and environmental racism. The author analyzes the rights violations suffered by women as a result of the collapse of the Samarco dam in Mariana, showing how the majority of those affected are black women. The text details the devastating impacts on life, income, health and access to water, even criticizing the reparation process conducted by the Renova Foundation, which, according to the interviewees, did not recognize the losses and deepened existing inequalities. Once again, the importance of social mobilization is brought to light, under the rubric of the

organization of women in the Movement of People Affected by Dams (MAB) as a form of struggle for a full and fair reparation.

In their journey, Emília Maria de Souza, Paula Máximo de Barros Pinto, Carolina Câmara Pires and Virgínia Totti Guimarães, in *"History and memory cannot be discarded: the struggle for permanence of the Community of Horto (Rio de Janeiro) and the attempt to erase history through the use of law"*, bring the reality of a bicentennial community, mostly black, who resist eviction attempts in an elite area of Rio de Janeiro. The chapter denounces the authoritarian use of legal instruments to disregard the history and memory of the community, labeling them as invaders. The invisibility of institutional racism and the narcissistic pact of whiteness are pointed out as central elements in this land conflict, which seeks to erase the existence of a historical community in the name of real estate speculation. The persistence of women, through the creation of the Horto Museum and the legal struggle, is a testimony to the strength of memory and identity.

Closing the collection of articles, Nilce de Pontes and Natália Lobo, in *"Green Economy, environmental compensation and financialization of nature: threats and resistance of women in the Ribeira Valley"*, demystify the Green Economy and the financialization of nature, explaining how these concepts, apparently beneficial,

transform common goods into commodities and directly affect the autonomy of communities. The authors show how the women of the Ribeira Valley, through the Agroecological Network of Women Farmers (RAMA), question these projects and build economic alternatives and ways of life based on agroecology and traditional agriculture, from a perspective of sustainability of life and autonomy. The text also emphasizes that the fight against the financialization of nature depends on strengthening the ways of life and the economy of peoples, so that there is no dependence on capital to live with dignity.

One of the strongest points is the adoption of a perspective that crosses all chapters. The authors clearly demonstrate how gender, race, and class oppressions are intertwined and enhanced, resulting in disproportionate impacts on women, especially black, indigenous, and peasant women. This approach is crucial for Agronomy, as it forces us to recognize that the solutions to the challenges of the field cannot be unique and do not come as "a cake recipe". On the contrary, they need to be contextualized and sensitive to the specific realities of each social group, considering their histories, cultures, and vulnerabilities. The work, therefore, invites us to a more empathetic and socially responsible Agronomy,

which understands that environmental and social justice must go hand in hand with sustainability.

The criticism of agribusiness and the extractivist model is a central pillar of the book. The set of articles demystifies the discourse of "progress" and "development" associated with these practices, revealing their devastating consequences: the concentration of land and wealth in the hands of a few, the contamination of soils and waters by pesticides, the destruction of ecosystems, and violence against communities. For an agronomist in training, this criticism is an invitation to deep reflection on the role of our profession. It challenges us to question dominant patterns and to seek models of production that, instead of prioritizing profit at any cost, put life first. The work shows us that technological innovation, if detached from a socio-environmental ethic, can become a tool of oppression, not liberation.

Valuing agroecology and resistance practices is another fundamental and inspiring aspect. The book does not stop only at denunciation, but presents the alternatives built by the communities themselves, with women as protagonists. Agroecology is defended not as a niche market, but as a way of life, a science, and a project for society that opposes capitalism, patriarchy, and racism. The emphasis on native seeds, productive backyards and slash-and-burn agriculture (with conscious management) demonstrates the richness of

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traditional knowledge and the communities' capacity for self-organization. For Agronomy, this means a call for research and development of agricultural systems that respect biodiversity, promote the autonomy of farmers and strengthen solidarity networks, instead of perpetuating dependence on external inputs and the logic of monoculture.

However, the work, despite its richness, has some loopholes that could be exploited in future discussions. Although the reports are powerful and the analyses pertinent, the depth with which some solutions are presented can be somewhat idealized at certain times. It would be interesting, perhaps, to deepen discussions on the practical challenges of scaling large-scale agroecological initiatives, or the complexity of implementing public policies that really contemplate the demands of communities in a scenario of strong agribusiness lobbying. The energy transition, for example, is criticized for its negative impacts, but a more in-depth discussion on how a just and inclusive transition could be built, considering local realities, could further enrich the debate.

Another point to be considered is the relationship with theoretical dialogue. Although the work draws on concepts such as Feminist Political Ecology and Decolonial Ecology, the exploration of these theoretical frameworks could be further developed for an academic

audience that, like Agronomy students, may not be familiar with these currents. Without falling into unnecessary jargon, a greater articulation between the narrated experiences and the theoretical foundations that support them could strengthen the argumentation and facilitate the transposition of this knowledge to other contexts of research and intervention.

Finally, the work could explore in more detail the practical mechanisms for the knowledge and knowledge of communities to be effectively recognized and integrated into academic institutions and the formulation of public policies. The denunciation of the disqualification of this knowledge is clear, but the discussion on how to build more solid bridges between scientific knowledge and traditional knowledge, in order to promote true exchange and collaboration, could be expanded. This would involve, for example, the proposition of better elaborated participatory action research methodologies or the discussion about the training of professionals who act as mediators and facilitators in this process.

Despite these observations, the book's contributions far outweigh its eventual shortcomings. The work is an irresistible invitation to critical reflection and transformative action, fundamental for the formation of agronomists aware of and engaged with the challenges of our time.

The reading of this compendium represents a significant advance in the understanding of complex relations existing in rural areas, especially with regard to power relations, struggles for social justice and socioeconomic and ecological sustainability. The possible gains with this reading come from the clear and concise way that correlates the hegemonic model of agribusiness and extractivism to the domain of the logic of profit and accumulation, driving not only the degradation of the environment, but also violence to bodies and territories, deepening inequalities of gender, race and class. The main value of the book lies in its ability to give voice to women who, historically, have been silenced and made invisible in narratives about rural development. Through her reports and analyses, she demonstrates that resistance is not only an act of denial, but an active process of resisting, existing, remaining and rehabilitating, of construction and alternatives and of reaffirmation of ways of life that prioritize harmony with nature and social justice. Agroecology, traditional knowledge, the defense of native seeds and community organization are presented as pillars of a more just and equitable future, in contrast to the predatory logic of capital.

For research in Agronomy, this book offers a vast field of possibilities. It inspires us to go beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries, seeking a deeper

understanding of the socio-environmental dimensions of agricultural production. The work suggests that research should be engaged, collaborative, and sensitive to local realities, contributing to the development of agricultural systems that promote food sovereignty, farmer autonomy, and ecosystem resilience. Future research could explore, for example, the effectiveness of public policies that support the agroecological transition in specific communities, or the measurement of the social and economic impacts of women-led resistance initiatives. Within the scope of the professional practice of Agronomy, the book is a guide for a more ethical and transformative performance. He invites us to be agronomists who not only master production techniques, but who also understand the social dynamics, territorial conflicts, and injustices that permeate the countryside. This implies an attitude of active listening, valuing local knowledge and building solutions together with communities, especially women, who are guardians of essential knowledge for sustainability.

The collection presents itself as an epistemological and political contribution of great relevance to critical rural studies, particularly in the Brazilian context. Its main merit lies in the articulation between the empirical experiences of peasant, indigenous and quilombola women, and a structural critique of the capitalist mode of production – with an

emphasis on the new and old forms of expropriation that are updated through agribusiness, mining, the financialization of nature and so-called "sustainable" projects. The work displaces the traditional frameworks of rural analysis, which are often limited to productivism or agrarian institutionalism, to affirm a feminist and decolonial reading of the territory. Such an approach tensions the field of Agronomy, as it questions the technical and ideological foundations that sustain "modernizing" interventions in the field. As Cavalcanti (2013) argues, the analysis of ruralities requires considering the multiple forms of land appropriation and the various social subjects that inhabit it – especially those historically made invisible by public policies and mainstream science.

The concept of "body-territory", mobilized transversally in the chapters, is one of the most innovative axes of the work. It enables an intertwined critique of the forms of domination that operate simultaneously on female bodies and occupied territories. As Rocha (2018) points out, this category allows us to understand how the female body, when exploited, silenced or violated, reflects the same process of dispossession imposed on territories. Environmental violence, in this sense, is also gender, race, and class violence.

Another highlight is the criticism of development narratives sustained by the technical-scientific discourse, which legitimize extractive practices, such as the installation of wind farms, mining projects, and monocultures. The work demonstrates that these interventions rarely incorporate the perspective of the affected populations, and, when they do, they reproduce logics of instrumentalized consultation. Here, there is an affinity with Bonano's (2010) studies on neoliberal hegemony and technocratic authoritarianism in rural development projects.

From the methodological point of view, the collection also proposes an important turn: it displaces academic knowledge as the exclusive center of knowledge production, making room for popular narratives and experiences as legitimate sources of analysis and proposition. This epistemic gesture — which resonates with Haraway's (1988) writings on situated knowledge — is a relevant step towards a more democratic science, which recognizes and dialogues with other knowledges. However, the theoretical deepening of some of these references could be more robust. In some chapters, the concepts are used in a descriptive way, without more systematic articulation with the analytical frameworks of political ecology or intersectional feminism.

In addition, although the criticism of agribusiness and financialization is blunt, the work lacks a greater problematization of the scalability of the proposed alternatives. Agroecology, solidarity networks and self-managed projects are presented as viable paths, but little is discussed about the structural limits of their large-scale dissemination. This includes everything from political obstacles, such as institutional blockade and lobbying by large corporations, to the logistical and economic challenges of replicating them. As Kothari et al. (2019) point out, the construction of a "pluriverse" also requires strategies to confront concentrated power and the capture of alternatives by the system itself.

Finally, the work offers a missed opportunity to propose concrete mechanisms for the institutionalization of women's knowledge in Agronomy curricula and public policies. Although the criticism of the marginalization of this knowledge is clear, a greater emphasis on participatory action research methodologies, as proposed by Wanderley (2009), would enrich the propositional horizon. This would include, for example, conformation actions, exchange of social technologies, and official recognition of traditional agroecological practices as living and applicable science.

Despite these limitations, the strength of the work lies in its ability to combine narrative, analysis and action. By centering women's voices on the dispute for

territories and dignity, the book not only denounces the multiple forms of violence of conservative modernization in the countryside — it also announces, in action, other possible ways of inhabiting the world.

The work encourages us to plead for public policies that guarantee access to land, water and resources for agroecological production, and to combat all forms of violence and oppression in rural areas, to the exact extent that it points out how, under the logic of capital, territories are transformed into sacrifice zones, and women's bodies — especially black, indigenous, riverside and quilombola women — become the first targets of systemic violence. In summary, *"Women in defense of territory, body, land, water"* is more than a book; It is a tool for awareness and empowerment. It challenges us to rethink our role as future agronomists and to commit to building rural development that is truly inclusive, sustainable, and just. The strength and wisdom of the women who resist in the Brazilian countryside are a constant reminder that another world is possible, and that Agronomy has a crucial role in this construction.

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