

Life stories of *Sem Terra* women: the sexual division of labour in agroecology

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Abstract: *In this article, we analyse the sexual division of labour in the agroecological work of women living in Agrarian Reform territories in Paraná. Research data point to women's increased autonomy, 'agency' and active subjectivity. However, we identified the persistence of patriarchal sexual divisions of labour. This leads to longer working days and exhaustion of women's bodies. In addition, we identified reduced socio-political organization and migration to the realm of agroecological production and trading. These inequalities are reduced by generational factors, schooling, gender education, and countryside-city transience. Given this scenario, the feminist demand for an egalitarian sexual division of labour is relevant in the political struggle for gender, land, agroecology and decoloniality.*

Keywords: Rural women; Gender; Labour; Agroecology; Agrarian reform.

Histórias de vida de mulheres Sem Terra: divisão sexual do trabalho na agroecologia

Resumo: Neste artigo, analisamos a divisão sexual do trabalho no trabalho agroecológico de mulheres que vivem em territórios de Reforma Agrária do Paraná. Os dados de campo apontam para o aumento da autonomia, 'agência' e subjetividade ativa das mulheres. Entretanto, identificamos persistências de divisões sexuais do trabalho patriarcais. Esse quadro conduz à ampliação de jornadas de trabalho e esgotamento do corpo das mulheres. Além disso, identificamos redução da organização sociopolítica e migração para o âmbito da produção e comercialização agroecológica. Essas desigualdades são reduzidas por fatores geracionais, escolaridade, formação de gênero e transitoriedade campo-cidade. Mediante tal cenário, a reivindicação feminista da divisão sexual do trabalho igualitária é relevante na luta política de gênero, pela terra, agroecologia e decolonial.

Palavras-chave: mulheres rurais; gênero; trabalho; agroecologia; reforma agrária.

Historias de vida de mujeres Sem Terra: división sexual del trabajo en agroecología

Resumen: Este artículo analiza la división sexual del trabajo de mujeres agroecológicas que viven en territorios de Reforma Agraria en Paraná. Los datos de campo apuntan a un aumento de la autonomía, la 'agencia' y la subjetividad activa de las mujeres. Sin embargo, identificamos la persistencia de divisiones sexuales patriarcales. Esta situación genera la ampliación de la jornada laboral y agotamiento de sus cuerpos. Además, identificamos reducción de la participación sociopolítica y la migración al ámbito de la producción y comercialización. Estas desigualdades se reducen por factores generacionales, educación, formación de género y transitoriedad campo-ciudad. En este contexto, el reclamo feminista por una división sexual igualitaria es relevante en la lucha política por el género, la tierra, la agroecología y la decolonialidad.

Palabras-clave: mujer rural; género; trabajo; agroecología; reforma agraria.

Introduction

In contemporary times, there is an increasing number of social research studies that aim to provide visibility and understand how rural women are engaged in the processes of social construction within agroecology, seeking to analyse, among other issues, how and to what extent these actions generate changes in gender relations in the countryside. Along these lines, intersections between gender, agroecology, sexual and ethno-racial diversities, and other topics are discussed.

From the research carried out so far in this field of studies, it can be seen that agroecology enables rural women to reclaim their productive role in agriculture, as well as to build autonomy and new social skills. However, issues related to the sexual division of labour remain or are recreated within the alternative forms of production. To better understand these social dynamics, in this paper we aim to answer the following question: what transformations are observable in the social relations that constitute the sexual division of labour in agroecological experiments led by Sem Terra (MST – Landless Rural Workers' Movement) women in agrarian reform territories in the state of Paraná? Through this research, we hope to understand the relationship between the sexual division of labour and the construction of agroecology in Agrarian Reform territories based on the experience of Sem Terra women.

The theoretical-conceptual approach adopted in this study is based on critical theory, and bridges the gap to the field of feminist epistemologies from the South (María LUGONES, 2008; 2014; Yuderlys Espinosa MIÑOSO; Diana Gomes CORREAL; Karina Ochoa MUNHOZ, 2014; Catherine WALSH, 2005). To this end, two concepts become key: 'agency' and 'experience'. We chose to use this theoretical framework because of the analysis perspective it allows us to construct. We contend that the feminist epistemologies of the South bring us closer to realities more analogous to the realities of Brazilian ruralities, taking as a starting point the understanding that Brazil was established as a colony of exploration, in a similar way to what happened in the colonization of other Latin American countries. Brazil and other Latin American countries were constituted as colonies of exploration, whose paradigm of society is based on exploitation, expropriation and violence, both of human labour and the non-human resources of the Earth. And it is this common trajectory that brings us closer together and distances us from countries in the North, whose hegemonic paradigm of society is based on Eurocentric conceptions, and whose social formation was based on a paradigm of regulation. According to Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2001), the regulation pillar is about establishing norms for regulating life in society. This generates specific implications for the formation of social relations related to gender, class, and race in our countries. Thus, without denying valid contributions by first and second wave feminism, while also pointing out its limits, we maintain that Southern feminist epistemologies enable us to analyse social gender relations more in accordance with what constitutes us as a paradigm of exploitation, expropriation, and violence, and what makes us as a society up to the present day. These epistemologies enable the construction of other views on our gender relations, especially regarding the intersectionalities of gender, class, and race, qualifying collective understandings, as well as the construction of alternatives to the hegemony of the modern-colonial-world system. They allow us to understand the historicity of the oppress-resist relationship, to visualize the "concrete, lived resistances to the coloniality of gender" (LUGONES, 2014, p. 942), and to build decoloniality processes from experiences of re-existing to coloniality, through the assumption and the material and symbolic transformation of those traits and patterns that constitute us to this day as colonized subjects, territories, and cultures (WALSH, 2005).

From this perspective, some concepts are key. The first of them is that of 'agency', which implies the construction of an active subjectivity capable of resisting the subjection and naturalization of male domination (LUGONES, 2014). This is made possible through denaturalizing and deconstructing self-inferiority, devaluation, passivity, and complacency, and at the same time releasing active capacities to express speech, will, creation, and active action through oppressive situations. It means a break from domination and violence, encompassing subjective, symbolic, and material dimensions, on an individual and collective level (Teresa de LAURETIS, 1994). From this perspective, another key concept is that of experience. Lauretis (1994) defines experience "[...] as a complex of effects, habits, dispositions, and associations and meaningful perceptions that result from the semiotic interaction of the self with the external world [...]" (LAURETIS, 1994, p. 288). The experiences construct the social practices, cultures and social norms of coexistence, as well as the senses and meanings that they attribute to their existences.

As such, capturing the experiences and agency of Sem Terra women in the work of building agroecology through oral history methodology becomes crucial, insofar as it enables a deeper and more attentive look at the theme.

On the methodological path taken

To make the work of the women in agroecology visible, we conducted field research in the period from March to September 2018, based on oral history as a method of knowledge construction, from memory and history narrated by the social subjects (Cristiane CORADIN, 2020).¹ Associated or not with other methodological tools, field research enables researchers to reconstruct, in conjunction with the research interlocutors, narratives about changes and persistence of social dynamics, as well as the sense and meanings that they attribute to their experiences (Alistair THOMPSON, 1997; Alessandro PORTELLI, 1997).

As a subjective method, oral history implies the recognition of the interference of the interlocutors' and historians' subjectivity in its production. It is the subjects, through their material and subjective life dynamics, who unveil and produce meanings for their life stories and trajectories (PORTELLI, 1997), so that "[...] oral history documents are always the result of a relationship, a shared project in which both the interviewer and the interviewee are involved, even if not harmoniously" (PORTELLI, 1997, p. 35). In this research, we opted for topical oral history, which is that which "focuses on a stage or a certain sector of the experience in question" (Maria Cecília de Souza MINAYO, 2012, p. 59-60).

As for the choice and number of research subjects, Jaques Marre (1991) emphasizes the importance of diversifying the sample, as a criterion for defining the group to be interviewed. In addition, he mentions saturation, which is when the interviews start to repeat themselves, allowing us to obtain a parameter to close the research. In this way, the researcher can achieve the construction of the plot in a dense and comprehensive way. In all, 33 in-depth interviews were conducted. To meet the criterion of diversifying the sample (MARRE, 1991), we interviewed women of different ages, with different levels of education, economic and socio-political engagements, and from different agrarian reform territories in the state of Paraná.

Based on our previous insertion in the Emiliano Zapata Encampment and in the organization of the Agroecology Days, we chose to analyse these two experiences. Based on this, we identified the first key interlocutors, who pointed us to other women who live in both the Emiliano Zapata Encampment and practice agroecology, as well as in other agrarian reform territories in Paraná where there have been Agroecology Days – which are events² built by networks of ecological social movements in the state of Paraná and encompass rural social movements, public research and rural extension agencies, universities and non-governmental organizations that work with family farmers and agroecology. To understand the relationship of women with work, the construction of agroecology and their relationship to the Agroecology Days, we interviewed 17 Sem Terra women, of whom 8 live in the Walmir Motta Encampment (Cascavel); 4 in the Eli Vive I and II Encampments (Londrina); and 5 more Sem Terra women working as state and national mediators, with different links (land, and/or family and/or socio-political relations) to agrarian reform territories in the region of Londrina, Francisco Beltrão, Irati and Lapa.³ To further our understanding of gender relations in the territory, we developed a case study in the Emiliano Zapata Encampment. In this territory, 16 interviews were conducted, with the objective of understanding the trajectories and daily lives of women's social practices in production, trading and social organization, and agroecological politics. The Emiliano Zapata Encampment is an Agrarian Reform territory located in the Campos Gerais region of Paraná, in the municipality of Ponta Grossa. Since it was occupied in 2003 by 80 families, the local subjects have sought to develop agroecological projects, where women's participation stands out.

The interviews with the Sem Terra women were recorded, with the permission of the interlocutors.⁴ The stories recorded and transcribed in their entirety allowed us to understand the experience and agency of women in the construction of agroecology. From the systematization of the interview transcripts, the narratives of the interlocutors were separated into different themes (construction of knowledge, production and trading, sexual division of labour and meanings of ecologies), which were analysed based on the categories of agency, experience and active subjectivity. From listening carefully to the life stories of these women, we were able to weave narratives that allow us to fully understand the social relations that permeate both the everyday

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² These events, which have been held in Paraná since 2002, include conferences, workshops, thematic seminars, artistic activities, and fairs for seeds and Agrarian Reform products. Since then, they have taken place every year at a different location in the state.

³ For objective research reasons, we were not able to interview Sem Terra women from the Maringá region, where events also took place.

⁴ To maintain the anonymity of the interlocutors, we identify them by the popular names of trees, fruits, medicinal plants and flowers, which in agroecology symbolize strength, resistance, resilience, flavor, beauty and harmony. To standardize, we will use the same procedure for the testimonies that have already been published in documentaries.

life and the extended social relations experienced by women in networks of rural, ecological, and feminist social movements.

The experiences and agency of Sem Terra women in the construction of agroecology

Adopting the political strategy of land occupations, since the formation of the Movement of Landless Rural Workers (MST) in the 1980s, Sem Terra began to occupy unproductive land and territorialize social struggles for Agrarian Reform in all regions of Brazil. Throughout its trajectory, the movement's political agendas have expanded beyond access to land, to demands for technical assistance, education, health, housing, and financial resources for infrastructure and productive investments, integrating feminist claims and also culminating with its adherence to agroecology.

It was at the IV National Congress of the MST, which took place from August 7th to 11th, 2000, that a specific resolution on this issue was approved, affirming the need to "[...] stimulate agroecological practices and respect for the environment" (Marcelo HARSEN SCHLACHTA, 2008, p. 59). At this congress, the MST officially took on agroecology as a category for the construction of Popular Agrarian Reform and the Popular Peasant Project for the countryside.

Since the initial formation of the MST, Sem Terra women have problematized gender inequalities within and outside this social movement, claiming equal conditions for women's participation in the struggle for land and Agrarian Reform (Gema G. S. L. ESMERALDO, 2013; Andrea BUTO, 2017; Sônia Fátima SCHWENDLER, 2015; 2017). Within this class struggle, "the Sem Terra women occupy spaces and become protagonists of the land struggle" (SCHWENDLER, 2015, p. 92). Moreover, they coordinate with networks of countryside social movements - which are characterized by linking the heterogeneity of multiple collective actors around normative, relatively open and plural units of reference.

As part of the feminist project, they put on the agenda food and nutritional sovereignty and security, as well as the defence of agroecology (SCHWENDLER, 2015; 2017). In this struggle, "women accumulate the political force of knowledge to understand the agrarian question in the national and international context and the role of peasant agriculture in the production of food sovereignty" (SCHWENDLER, 2015, p. 101). Equally, they problematize the production and reproduction of the subordinate condition of women in society and in the specificity of the countryside, having as reference the theoretical category of gender, articulated to the class category (SCHWENDLER, 2015). It is within this context that the feminist agenda meets the ecological movements, and from where the Sem Terra women also begin to assume the construction of agroecology as a constitutive category of their popular feminist and peasant construction.

For MST women, this peasant and popular feminism is built upon the resistance struggles of rural women linked to the Latin American Coordination of Rural Organizations (*Coordenação Latino-americana de Organizações do Campo* - CLOC). It is made up of an intersectional perspective on class, gender, and race, and directly confronts colonist, extractivist, racist, and patriarchal capitalism. Accordingly, this feminism assumes the centrality of the struggle for land; the struggle for social control and management of natural resources (soil, water, forests, etc.); the struggle for food and nutritional sovereignty and security; the fight in defence of agrobiodiversity; the stand for women's right to access land; as well as the battle against violence and for gender equality in the multiple dimensions of domestic, social, and work life (MST, 2020).

In Brazil, agroecological projects have been undertaken by family farmers and non-governmental organizations since the 1960s. Brazilian farming is a political category that displays social traits of permanence and transformation with respect to peasant social formations, and is marked by the constant struggle for relative autonomy in the face of domination by global agrifood systems (Maria de Nazareth B. WANDERLEY, 2009; Jan Van der PLOEG, 2008). For this category, agroecology therefore represents an important collective strategy of peasant and family resistance against the domination of global agrifood systems.

From contemporary changes, we can trace three possibilities for defining the concept of agroecology: 1) as agroecological production systems in the strict sense; 2) as food systems and; 3) as a study of the relationship between food production and society more broadly (Pierre STASSART et al., 2012). For these authors, the senses and meanings of agroecologies should be sought from within the experiences.

From this perspective, based on the experiences of rural women, Emma Siliprandi (2013; 2015) argues that agroecology, because it is built through the valorisation of activities historically and culturally practiced by women, such as productive backyards and vegetable gardens, can potentially generate greater economic autonomy for them, and deliver transformations in gender relations in a more egalitarian sense. In addition, the author stresses the importance of the inseparability between women's socio-political organization and socioeconomic autonomy, as conditions for the production and support of gender equality in agroecology. (SILIPRANDI, 2013; 2015).

Other recent studies in the field of gender and agroecology in the context of the Brazilian Northeast (Laeticia Medeiros JALIL; ESMERALDO; Maria do Socorro de Lima OLIVEIRA, 2017) demonstrate how participatory methodologies and gender education influence the participation of women in collective and productive processes in the construction of agroecology. Through these actions, women gain self-confidence from access to knowledge about gender inequalities and violence against women, which contributes to the promotion of transformations in gender relations at the domestic and community levels.

In the context of Southern Brazil, Valdete Boni et al. (2017a; 2017b) describe agroecological projects conducted by rural women in the three southern states of Brazil, engaged in social movements and trade unions. This research highlights the protagonism of women in promoting food and nutritional security. Along these lines, Ceres Hadich and Tânia Mara de Bastiani (2017) analyse the experience of women settlers in Agrarian Reform in western Santa Catarina and identify that “[...] as a rule, women’s work (in attributions and time) is concentrated in systems dedicated to the reproduction and self-sufficiency of the family [...]. And this is controlled, organized, and carried out by women [...]” (HADICH; BASTIANI, 2017, p. 139).

Bruna Mendes de Vasconcellos (2015), in a study on the participation of women in Agrarian Reform settings in the construction of agroecology, analyses that women’s work in this activity generates an expansion of their political participation, which occurs through the recognition of the importance of activities historically performed by women in the peasant economy.

However, in the context of the sexual division of labour, these authors (JALIL; ESMERALDO; OLIVEIRA, 2017; VASCONCELLOS, 2015) analyse that, even as they expand their productive and political capacity, Sem Terra women continue to face traditional sexual divisions of labour, where the classic reproductive dimension of women’s work is maintained.

Given these reflections, we consider it relevant to deepen our theoretical and practical understanding of the specificities that the sexual division of labour assumes in the construction of these agroecological experiences in the context of Agrarian Reform, in order to better understand if and how these experiences effectively enable or not the reconstruction of labour divisions from a more egalitarian gender perspective.

The sexual division of labour from the analysed experiences

To carry out this study, we sought to cover the diversity of voices, experiences and agencies of women in the construction of agroecology in all the territories described. As there were 33 interviewees in all, we have no way of detailing the profile of each one. Therefore, we compiled the researched profile into three main groups. Some of them are young women up to 27 years old, daughters of settlers, campers and/or settlers, from cities close to these agrarian reform territories, married, and starting to form agroecological family and production units. These women have concluded high school and/or undergraduate studies, have no children yet, or have one or two children up to 10 years old. After starting to plant vegetable gardens, mixed orchards and agroforests, they have started to sell their products, participate in socio-political activities, local cooperatives, and organize consumer groups and deliver their food to the National School Food Program (*Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar - PNAE*). Their spouses work in local, regional cooperatives, and/or outside the agrarian reform territories (bricklayers etc.), and/or cultivate agroecological productions jointly with their wives. These couples are focused on income generation and the structuring of their residences and plots.

Another group of women is represented by middle-aged women (over 27 and under 60). This group of women has completed high school and some undergraduate studies. They are married, have one or two children up to 20 years old. They have been cultivating vegetable gardens, mixed orchards, agro-forestry, or small animals for a longer time. They participate in cooperatives, organize consumer groups and deliver food to the PNAE. Some actively participate in socio-political activities and in networks of agroecological, rural, and feminist social movements. Their spouses predominantly cultivate larger scale and conventional crops and/or work with the women on ecological crops. There are only a few exceptions that work outside the territories and with non-agricultural activities. This group is composed of families already more structured in terms of housing and productive infrastructure of the plots, focused on production for family supply, but mainly for sale.

The last group of women is represented by women over 60 years old. These women are usually already retired, less educated (primary and/or secondary school), have three to four adult, married and independent children. They plant small gardens, mixed orchards and agro-forests with their partners, participate in cooperatives, consumer groups, and socio-political activities, some of them being political representatives of the social movement. This group has a stable productive infrastructure, produces and sells on a smaller scale, predominantly crops for family supply, rather than for sale.

Looking at the research data, we found that agroecology emerges in territories of Agrarian Reform in Paraná from the monetization of the diversified production of spaces and crops historically and culturally linked to rural women, such as mixed vegetable gardens, backyards and orchards, spaces hitherto not valued symbolically and monetarily. This situation is similar to those identified in studies by Siliprandi (2013; 2015), Vasconcellos (2015), Jalil, Esmeraldo, and Oliveira (2017).

This work of women in gardens and orchards has historically contributed to the food and nutritional security of family members. In addition, through agroecology, these productions and spaces start to constitute significant monetary income for women - mainly through their productive inclusion in institutional programs of direct purchases (PNAE) and the construction of open fairs and consumption groups.

Within the scope of work and gender relations, Helena Hirata and Danièle Kergoat (2007) argue that, in modern capitalist societies, different sexes establish different social roles and jobs that are feasible or not for men and women. This social division “[...] has as its characteristics the priority assignment of men to the productive sphere and women to the reproductive sphere and, simultaneously, the appropriation by men of the roles with greater added social value [...]” (HIRATA; KERGOAT, 2007, p. 599). These relations create an unequal sex-gender system that goes beyond the domestic sphere and is established in the modern world of work as the social division of labour, determining unequal conditions regarding women’s access to professional education, the labour market, and public policies. In addition, this system builds and reproduces hierarchies of value between subjects and their jobs, linked to the gender roles played in society (HIRATA; KERGOAT, 2007).

Approaching these relations in the rural world, Maria Ignez Paulilo (2016) emphasizes that one cannot separate the individual work of each individual who makes up the peasant family, because the arrangements of this work are constituted in the family sphere. It categorizes the work performed by rural women into: a) domestic work, b) productive work in the home, and c) productive work outside the home. “Domestic work was considered to be the activities of washing and ironing clothes; cooking, washing dishes, housekeeping, and childcare” (PAULILO, 2016, p. 43). Productive work performed in the home “[...] covers the tending of the garden and the domestic animals. Productive work outside the home refers to the activities performed in the fields” (PAULILO, 2016, p. 44). According to the same author, the activities undertaken by rural women are historically and culturally interpreted as ‘light’ activities, because they are performed by women and, therefore, have an inferior status, not being valued or visible, since they do not generate direct monetary income. On the other hand, productive work, considered “heavy work” because it is performed by men, is located primarily in the activities that generate the highest monetary income. These activities, in turn, have a higher hierarchical value status of superiority and are thus worthy of fulfilling the status of masculinity (PAULILO, 2016).

For Paulilo (2016), the boundaries between the activities performed by rural women are not fixed: sometimes this work is located in the domestic and productive sphere of the home, and sometimes in productive work outside the home. This depends, according to the author, on the degree of capitalization and the reproduction strategy adopted by the peasant family. From the array of these studies, she problematizes the structural invisibility of women’s work: “[...] The devaluation of women’s multiple tasks in official statistics, hence the expression ‘invisible work’ is a reflection of the devaluation that pervades all of society and its main institutions, including the family” (PAULILO, 2016, p. 192). The author also highlights the relevance of feminist social movements in the deconstruction of such inequalities and the construction of more egalitarian gender relations and sexual divisions of labour.

In the context analysed, we identified that the women interlocutors of the research divide their time between the execution of domestic and productive work ‘in the home’, which is composed of routine domestic activities, the cultivation of vegetable gardens, orchards, productive gardens and small animals, participating sporadically in productive work ‘outside the home’, composed of the cultivation of corn and bean fields, which continues under male management.

On site, we identified that their agroecological transition took place through the introduction and/or expansion of women’s activities in the cultivation of ecological gardens and mixed orchards. For those women of peasant origin who already performed domestic work inside and outside the home, we concluded that, with the advent of agroecology, they continue to perform the same actions and, in some rare cases, have also taken over the productive work in the fields, as narrated by Jasmim:

[...]In fact, I do everything, I work in the house, in the field, in the garden, I do everything. [...] because the kids don't like to do anything at home. [...] there is a boy there who helps, but it is difficult [...] (Interviewee Jasmim, 41 years old, July/2018. Oral information).

The study shows that the construction of agroecology by these women has generated an expansion of that work, considered by Paulilo (2016) as productive work of the household, which is composed of the cultivation of vegetable gardens, orchards, backyards, and small animals - but

at the same time without these families having experienced significant redefinitions in the sexual division of labour, in terms of building greater equality, especially regarding domestic work in the home. Orquídea's voice defines Sem Terra ecologist women in the following way:

[...]I believe that the woman in agriculture is twice the woman. [...] Women work more than men. The woman in the field takes care of the house, the cow, the field, the chicken, the pig, makes bread, plants the garden, goes to the cooperative, produces and cooks (Interviewee Orchid, 37 years old, June/2018. Oral information).

Orquídea states that they are both women and men, because Sem Terra women perform both what is considered 'heavy' and 'light' work. Sem Terra women perform all the activities that they need to produce, sell and promote agroecology and the social movement in the territory and in networks of ecological social movements. In addition, when they engage in work in the fields, such as harvesting and planting, this is considered 'helping' by family members. With regard to husbands and sons, when they help the women in domestic activities, this is also considered 'help'. As for the husbands, part of them work outside, either by day or as contractors. In rare cases, the couple works only on the plot (about 30%). In most of the cases analysed (about 70%), the men work outside some days of the week, or every day, and the women work on the plots, in the vegetable gardens, orchards, part of the fields, in the house, take care of the children, participate in cooperatives and local associations and in social movements.

We observed that only in cases where the family has already managed to acquire basic infrastructure and a sufficient level of capitalization, capable of being able to socially reproduce themselves solely from the family productive unit, does the man start working exclusively on the plot with the woman. This can be observed in the cases of Jasmim, Ipê Roxo, Rosa Rosa and Amora: J: "*[...]But when he started working, we already dealt with the vegetable garden, but it was only a little. [...] Then the projects increased and we both began to work here, you know? [...]*" (Interviewee Jasmim, 41 years old, July/2018. Oral information).

Here it is important to reflect on this research data in relation to Paulilo's (2016) study on dairy farming in the state of Santa Catarina. The author analysed dairy farming as work historically and culturally carried out by women. In her study, the author saw that when men became involved in dairy farming, they came to dominate it and women lost their productive space and monetary income.

Schwendler's (2020a) studies in Agrarian Reform territories also reveal that men have decided to participate in vegetable gardens when they become profitable. In many cases, they also seek to take control of the planning and marketing process of the production, as part of a patriarchal logic in which the family is represented by men in the public and decision-making space. In the case analysed here, we identified that, even with the inclusion of men in this activity, when it takes on greater capacity to generate family income, the Sem Terra agro-ecologists have not necessarily lost their productive space or their financial management capacity. According to them, this is due to the expansion of their agency and active female subjectivity, achieved through the political gender struggle that Sem Terra undertook in this social movement, in association with the higher level of schooling attained, the transitional conditions of the countryside-city and the younger age of the women and couples.

Decoloniality of gender in agroecological experiences led by Sem Terra women

The women's narratives elucidate the relevance of the gender issue within the struggle for land and agroecology in the creation, appreciation and recognition of productive space and women's productive work in the construction of agroecology. Through socio-political gender education, they have been able to learn what gender inequalities are and how they act on family and collective relations, and to strengthen themselves as women. This has generated an increase in their active subjectivity and capacity for agency, as revealed by Hibiscus, who explains that:

[...]that's why today there is all this dynamic of production and freedom of women because of these courses [gender education]. [...] it started from there, we gathered a group of companions, four women, they planted their little vegetable gardens [...] (Hibiscus interviewee, age 42, September/2018. Oral information).

By organizing socio-political gender education and agroecological practices, women are able to set limits to the patriarchal colonialist actions of men in the construction of agroecology, bring about changes in gender relations, and ensure greater autonomy in their space and work. Autonomy, here, is expressed in women's ability to secure monetary income, associated with the expansion of their capacity for agency and active subjectivity, which is linked to the expansion of respect and greater appreciation for their female capacity for production, decision-making, trading, and socio-political agency. These actions fracture the coloniality of gender, and express their decolonizing capacity with regard to gender patterns, which agroecological ventures led

by women can carry. Equally, the interlocutors highlight the need for permanent socio-political organization of gender in agroecology, in order to prevent the loss of their gains: *"It is an issue that women have to be aware of at first, but many women are in charge of their plots here, deciding what to do, how to do it"* (Interviewee Copaliba, 41, July/2018. Oral information).

Siliprandi's (2013; 2015) studies on gender relations and agroecology highlight the importance of women's feminist socio-political organization in the construction of agroecologies based on more egalitarian gender relations. The data gathered in this study corroborate Siliprandi's analysis, insofar as for the cases analysed, we also identified that the gender issue within the struggle for land and agroecology constitutes a fundamental category of gender decolonizing action, viewed as a constant and continuous social process.

We identified that it is only when there is a combination of socio-political gender education, with better schooling, and/or younger age, and/or greater transience from countryside to city that we were able to find increased gender equality in terms of the sexual division of labour. We believe that the gender struggle in the construction of more egalitarian sexual divisions of labour, as part of the gender decolonizing process, is also a constant political struggle within the quest for land, agroecology, and gender decoloniality.

We observed that even for those couples who have made the transition to agroecology on all their plots and where both live off this activity, in only a few cases did the man help the woman with domestic care activities. We identified that, normally, younger and middle-aged couples (up to 45 years old), more educated, with more experience in the countryside-city transition and more socio-political engagement with social movements and gender issues, tend to build more egalitarian divisions of labour.

These data corroborate Schwendler's (2020b) analysis, in research carried out in Agrarian Reform areas, through workshops conducted with young settlers, which reveals that "although there are significant levels of cooperation in the peasant family space, the sexual division of labour and the naturalization and invisibility of women's work are marked, with significant effects on the new generations" (SCHWENDLER, 2020b, p. 03). However, as this research demonstrates, these social relations come to be challenged by the agency of young women through gender education, mostly obtained in the context of school and the social movement. Acquiring such agency, these young women are able to question to some extent these patriarchal family social relations and start to incite changes in the sexual division of family domestic work, in a more egalitarian sense, although this process does not occur in a generalized way.

Both the data from this study and the findings of Schwendler (2020b) reinforce the relevance of constant and continuous gender education in the promotion of women's agency and the decoloniality of gender in rural areas. In a similar vein, Celecina Sales (2010, p. 436) shows that the place of young women in the MST is beginning to be asserted and their participation is already questioning the structures of power and knowledge. They "are deterritorializing themselves, building other projects, opposing the fixed representations and behaviours that determine the role and place of women in the countryside". According to the author, access to schooling and political participation has caused changes in the behaviour of young women.

These relations also become energized to some extent from the greater experience of countryside-city transience. This category comes from a "space-time relationship that transits between rurality and urbanity" (Fabiano GONTIJO; Igor ERICK, 2015). It is understood here, on the one hand, by the experience of more egalitarian gender relations in urban contexts, which they had experienced over the years before entering the agrarian reform territories; or, on the other hand, by the relationships they establish with urban subjects, and feminist movements, from their current territories of life. Through these connections, they succeed in expanding their capacity for agency and active female subjectivity, expanding their ability to influence binary and patriarchal gender relations within the agrarian reform territories and within their current family relationships.

As such, we consider that younger and/or better educated women and/or women with greater countryside-city transience can more easily recognize sex-gender inequalities in terms of the sexual division of labour and, thus, qualify their capacity to confront and deconstruct unequal sexual divisions of labour in the domestic, home, and out-of-home environments, expanding their capacity to build and sustain agroecological experiences, as well as to decolonize gender. This is strengthened when these categories are linked to socio-political gender education and when these women take on feminist narratives.

When we identify the combination of one or more of these three categories (age, education, and countryside-city transience) with the category of socio-political gender education, we observe more significant transformations in terms of greater gender equality in the division of labour. For all the experiences analysed, the simple linking of these three categories (age, education, and countryside-city transience), whether isolated and/or only combined among themselves, but without being associated with socio-political gender education, was not enough to generate significant changes in terms of the sexual division of labour. Likewise, socio-political education alone has not proved capable of generating significant changes in the sexual division of labour.

Therefore, we feel that when socio-political gender education, and especially concerning the sexual division of labour, is combined with one or more of these other three categories (age, education, and countryside-city transience), the experience becomes more likely to generate more significant transformations in terms of the sexual division of labour, which broadens the capacity for the gender decoloniality of these experiences.

Another aspect identified in the study, and related to these analysed categories, concerning the mechanization or not of the activity, and linked to those types of jobs that can be performed by men and women, concerns the value hierarchies of work (HIRATA; KERGOAT, 2007). Men participate in the construction of agroecology as long as they can earn money in significant sums, and can mechanize at least part of this activity. Therefore, these activities are more valued by them. Esmeraldo's (2013) study is significant in highlighting how men appropriate knowledge, techniques, and tools for productive work, as hierarchical symbolic constructions of subject and work values, reproducing sexist and patriarchal relations. In the context of the countryside, "work is constitutive of male identity and authority and requires the invisibility and omission of female work that announces itself in the plantations as help" (ESMERALDO, 2013, p. 240). Men's work is based both on the "mastery and control of the processes of knowledge production that involve the management of 'doing-learning' and 'know-how' and on the planning for the realization of the entire production cycle" (ESMERALDO, 2013, p. 240), and on the symbolic order of the rules of relationship with the market, which qualifies the work of men and women in a differentiated and hierarchical way.

We noted that while agroecology work does not generate significant monetary income and is not amenable to mechanization, and therefore is not capable of fulfilling this status of rural masculinity, it remains undervalued and exercised only by women. The social reproduction of this status of masculinity, associated with the mastery of agriculture of the "plenty", the field, the grains, and the intensive use of machines, reproduces a status of colonized masculinity, which prevents men from valuing the manual productive and domestic work performed by women. This is fundamental for them to take on a more equal division of domestic work, as well as productive work in the home and outside the home, and to invest in agroecological practices.

These findings corroborate the analysis of Esmeraldo (2013) and Siliprandi (2013; 2015), insofar as we can see the persistence of binary and patriarchal sexual divisions of labour in the agroecological experiences analysed. As a result, we can affirm that agroecology alone does not generate significant changes in terms of the sexual division of labour and the valorisation of domestic and productive work performed by Sem Terra women.

As such, we have realized that, although these families have stopped practicing conventional agriculture and have begun agroecological practices, which can generate opportunities for the construction of more egalitarian and decolonial divisions of labour, this activity still reproduces hierarchical value binaries in the context of work, which relegate women to full responsibility for care activities and men only to productive work outside the home. This situation is usually modified to some extent by issues of countryside-city experience, age, education, combined with socio-political gender education, as discussed in previous paragraphs.

These research data corroborate recent studies on gender and the world of work (HIRATA; KERGOAT, 2007), which point out that despite the advances achieved in recent decades through feminist social movements, today we still find a set of gender inequalities in the professional and domestic spheres, which also affects agroecological activities.

The "gendering" of work and the lack of effective collaboration generate work overloads, fatigue, and a lack of time for women's rest and leisure. We also observed burnout and exhaustion in women's bodies in our study. The greater the volume and diversity of production, and the less capitalized these family production units are, the greater this work overload becomes: "[...] *actually I do everything, I work in the house, in the field, in the vegetable garden, I do everything. [...] there is a lot of work to do, inside and outside the house. It's all over the place*" (Interviewee Jasmim, 41 years old, July/2018. Oral information).

Although there is evidence that the analysed agroecological experiences expand the autonomy, agency and active subjectivity of women, which contributes to the decolonization of gender relations in the countryside, we note that this happens in an incomplete and partial way, insofar as we have identified that these experiences have not been accompanied by significant redefinitions in terms of the sexual division of labour between men and women, as well as the valorisation of so-called "care" activities related to life, which generate longer working hours for women, resulting in overload and exhaustion of their bodies.

This argument is corroborated by the fact that we identified that the collective activities of the social movement and networks of ecological social movements are also undertaken mostly by women. Men (aged 20 to 65) generally participate in socio-political activities only when they are learning and decision-making spaces that imply monetary and productivity gains, which are therefore considered activities worthy of the fulfilment of their manhood status. Women, on the contrary, in addition to the other productive and domestic work already taken on, end up engaging in collective and community social organization. This is why many of them believe that

they are overloaded, and end up choosing not to participate in meetings anymore: “[...]they don't really get very involved, because they have household duties: ah, I don't go out because I have a child to raise, I have to send him/her to school [...]” (Interviewee Ipê Roxo, 56 years old, September/2018. Oral information).

These findings corroborate Schwendler's (2013) research on women's participation in Agrarian Reform in Brazil and Chile, which shows the impact of the sexual division of labour on the level and space of socio-political participation of women settlers, leading to work overload for those who are activists, producers, and mothers. The research also reveals family organization as the most difficult space for the modification of gender structures and relations. However, it highlights that gender awareness, monetary income, and the construction of women's collective agency have contributed to renegotiating and redefining the work agenda in the domestic and productive spheres, as well as in spaces for political participation.

As a result of this situation, as Schwendler's study (2013) also demonstrates, we identified a tendency for the migration of women's socio-political participation from the socio-political to the productive sphere, due to women's work overload, associated with the inexistence or inexpression of more egalitarian redefinitions of work between the sexes. According to Araucaria, this context represents a current impasse for agroecology in the context of agrarian reform:

But they become producers and forget that they are part of a larger collective. [So here we have an impasse [...]. It seems to me that in the organization today we have to understand what kind of debate we need to have with women so that their economic empowerment, their access to income, does not take them out of the political debate (Interviewee Araucaria, 68 years old, August/2018. Oral information).

According to our research data, we argue that, although agroecology allows women greater autonomy, agency and active subjectivity, these experiences continue to reproduce the status of masculinities, hierarchical valuations of work according to sex, as well as divisions of labour linked to colonialist and patriarchal gender paradigms. These factors are pressured to some extent by the increase in schooling, the generational factor, and the countryside-city transition, reinforced when placed alongside the socio-political gender education achieved and negotiated by both men and women.

In summary, through this analysis, we have come to a conclusion that the demand for the redefinition of the sexual divisions of labour in a more egalitarian sense constitutes a relevant category of the decolonization process of gender relations in the countryside, as well as of agroecological experiences. In this context, the struggle of peasant and popular feminism, which internalizes the demand for an egalitarian sexual division of labour, and is linked to the defence of the construction of an ecological peasant agriculture, tied to the struggle for land, democracy, justice and gender equality in a decolonial sense, becomes fundamental.

Final considerations

The construction of agroecological experiences by Sem Terra women emerges through the monetary and symbolic valorisation of diversified productions, led by women in productive backyards, vegetable gardens and orchards. These actions enable the expansion of women's autonomy, agency, and active subjectivity.

On site, we identified that these experiences have not been accompanied by the construction of more egalitarian and meaningful sexual divisions of labour. These social relations come to be questioned to some extent by women with socio-political gender education, combined with the generational factor, schooling, and countryside-city transience.

In our research, we found that being younger, having more countryside-city transience, and a higher level of education tends to increase the autonomy, agency, and active subjectivity of these women, which facilitates gender transformation processes. However, we also noticed that, on their own, isolated or combined, these three categories cannot generate significant transformations in the sexual division of labour. This is favoured to the extent that one or more of these three categories (age, education, and countryside-city transience) are combined with socio-political gender education. This gender education helps these women identify the gender inequalities experienced in the sexual division of labour, expand their active subjectivity and their capacity for agency in confronting gender inequalities in the sexual division of labour, and begin to build more egalitarian work relations, expanding their capacity to decolonize themselves as a gender.

Furthermore, we have identified that the social reproduction of binary and patriarchal value hierarchies that qualify jobs that can be performed by either countryside women or men reinforce gender inequalities in the sexual division of labour and generate overloads in women's work, posing an impasse in the construction of agroecology. The social reproduction of unequal sexual divisions of labour generates an increase in women's working hours, as well as wear and tear on their bodies, which directly impacts the quality of women's collective participation in spaces

of socio-political organization. This situation generates a tendency to displace participation from the socio-political sphere to the productive and agroecological sales and marketing spheres.

Given this scenario, historical claims made by feminist movements regarding the need for a more equal division of labour between the sexes remain current, in view of the construction of gender decolonizing processes in the countryside and within agroecological experiences. In this context, the struggle of peasant and popular feminism internalizes this demand for an equal division of labour, and is linked to the defence of the construction of an ecological peasant agriculture, associated with the struggle for land, democracy, justice, and gender equality.

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