

**WOMEN: (RE)EXISTING BETWEEN STRUGGLES AND ACHIEVEMENTS IN
THE FIELD AND IN THE AMAZON CITY**

***MULHERES: (RE) EXISTINDO ENTRE LUTAS E CONQUISTAS NO CAMPO E NA
CIDADE DAS AMAZÔNIAS***

***MUJERES: (RE)EXISTENTES ENTRE LUCHAS Y LOGROS EN EL CAMPO Y EN LA
CIUDAD DE LA AMAZONÍA***



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Introduction

The recent release by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) (2022) of data on the Brazilian population confirmed what had been trending since the last demographic census in 2000: women are the majority of the Brazilian population. Brazil has a total population of 203,080,756 inhabitants, of which 104,548,325 are women and 98,532,431 are men³.

When examining demographic data regionally, we find that the female population is distributed as the majority in the five Brazilian macroregions. In the North, the region with the lowest population density in the country, out of a population of 17,355,778, women numbered 8,692,198, and men numbered 8,663,580. This region shows the smallest absolute difference between the number of men and women when compared to other parts of Brazil; until the 2000 Census, the North had a higher number of men than women, equaling the different regions in the 2022 census.

In the Northeast, women number 28,240,280 and men 26,417,341 out of a total of 54,657,621 inhabitants. The Southeast remains the most densely populated region in the country, with 43,980,290 women and 40,859,823 men out of 84,840,113 inhabitants. In the South of Brazil, out of 29,937,706 inhabitants, 15,353,502 are women and 14,584,204 are men. In the Midwest, out of 16,289,538 inhabitants, 8,282,055 are women, and 8,007,483 are men.

When analyzing demographic data by state, various variations are observed, with the majority of the population in some of them predominantly male. Let's take, for example, the states of the Legal Amazon⁴, such as Amazonas, Acre, Roraima, Rondônia, Pará, Tocantins, Mato Grosso, and Maranhão:

³ We would like to remind you here that the criterion used by IBGE to gather data is sex and not gender.

⁴ The Legal Amazon corresponds to the area of operation of the Superintendence of the Development of the Amazon (SUDAM) delimited in accordance with Article 2 of Complementary Law No. 124, of January 3, 2007. The Legal Amazon was instituted with the objective of defining the geographical delimitation of the political region of SUDAM's operation, aiming to promote inclusive and sustainable development within its area of operation and the competitive integration of the regional productive base into the national and international economy. The region comprises 772 municipalities. It has an area of 5,015,146.008 km², corresponding to 58.93% of Brazilian territory (IBGE, 2022).

Table 1 - Population by sex in states in the Legal Amazon (IBGE Census 2022)

States	Women	Men	Total
Acre	414.686	415.332	830.018
Amazonas	1.975.803	1.965.810	3.941.613
Amapá	369.243	364.516	733.759
Maranhão	3.446.843	3.328.962	6.775.805
Mato Grosso	1.817.408	1.841.241	3.658.649
Pará	4.068.751	4.052.274	8.121.025
Roraima	316.315	320.392	636.707
Rondônia	793.209	787.987	1.581.196
Tocantins	754.191	757.269	1.511.460

Source: 2022 Demographic Census, organized by the authors

With minor variations, the discrepancy between the number of men and women is modest in the nine states, except for Maranhão, which has a female population with a difference of over 117 thousand compared to men. Following, the states of Pará, Amazonas, and Rondônia also register a numerical predominance of women.

Despite composing the majority of the Brazilian population, women are a minority in political decision-making spaces. This scenario is relevant in a governance model where laws are predominantly crafted from a male perspective, influencing public policies and reflecting a predominantly male management bias. This situation becomes even more concerning when considering the diversity of experiences involving being a woman.

In addition to the scarce representation of women in political decision-making spaces, the existing regional inequalities in the country, resulting from the historical process of constructing its spatial peculiarities, are reflected in the lack of access to essential services such as healthcare, education, public safety, and mobility. These disparities impact the lives of Brazilian women in various ways. Generally, gender inequalities are not separate from regional inequalities; on the contrary, they intertwine and contribute to these disparities.

The data regarding education reveal that women, in addition to constituting the majority of the population, are also the ones who seek access to this service the most in Brazil. They represent the majority of candidates registered for the High School National Exam (ENEM) and also make up the majority of enrollments in higher education institutions, according to data from the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research (INEP, 2023). This trend is corroborated by the numbers related to pursuing higher education in the Amazon region, where women are also in the majority.

In the 2023 National High School Examination, out of 3.9 million registered candidates, 61.3% are women (approximately 2.4 million). This predominance of female registrations is also evident when analyzing the states belonging to the Amazon region, as was the case in the 2016 Exam, when in the nine states that compose this region, the majority of registrants were women. In states like Pará, Maranhão, Roraima, and Rondônia, the proportion in 2016 was approximately 60% for women and 40% for men. The predominance of women in the National High School Examination contrasts with the access conditions provided by the Amazon region to its potential candidates for higher education. In addition to hosting the fewest Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), access and retention conditions are challenging, especially for women.

According to data from the Higher Education Census for 2022 (INEP, 2023), the distribution of higher education institutions in Brazil, including public and private ones, is quite unequal. The North, a region that concentrates most of the states belonging to Legal Amazon, had the lowest number of HEIs⁵ that year, compared to other regions of Brazil, totaling only 201 institutions.

In addition to the scarcity of HEIs in the Amazonian states compared to other regions, most of these institutions are not public, which becomes relevant considering the per capita income in this macro-region, which is one of the lowest in Brazil in relation to the national average⁶.

INEP's numbers indicate that out of the 2,595 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) active in Brazil in 2022, 2,283 were private, and only 312 were public. The location of these HEIs in the states is also highly concentrated in regional urban centers, which hinders the opportunity for access for women who reside far from these centers, both due to physical distance and the inefficiency of the mobility network, both urban and intra-regional, in Amazonian localities.

This issue of accessibility inefficiency due to the lack of a transportation structure, both within the city and between cities, affects women and penalizes them more. Structurally, they are more tied to private spaces, with few opportunities to access public spaces, especially if

⁵ According to the INEP research, the distribution of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) by geographic region is as follows: Southeast 1,098, Northeast 611, North 201, Midwest 289, and South 395.

⁶ The per capita income of the North region in 2022 was \$1,107.00, the second lowest, only higher than that of the Northeast region, which was \$1,023.00. The national average was \$1,625.00. Available at: <https://agenciadenoticias.ibge.gov.br/agencia-sala-de-imprensa/2013-agencia-de-noticias/releases/37023-ibge-divulga-o-rendimento-domiciliar-per-capita-e-o-coeficiente-de-desequilibrio-regional-de-2022>

they are mothers and/or wives. Thus, these regional difficulties in access and urban mobility end up affecting women more than men. For them, spending hours traveling to another location to study or even having to stay weeks or months away from their municipality of residence, even for studying, is very expensive, depriving them of the support network necessary for their daily survival.

According to the document titled *A Educação na Amazônia Legal: diagnósticos e pontos críticos*, produced by the Amazon 2030 collective (<https://amazonia2030.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/AMZ2030-A-Educacao-na-Amazonia-Legal.pdf>), the states of Legal Amazon present low enrollment rates in higher education, with rates of 19.1%, while the national average is 27%. Additionally, according to the same document, the states in the region show a significant disproportion in relation to the appropriate school age group, not only in higher education but at all levels of education. This means that in the Amazon, children, young people, and adults are not accessing educational institutions at the appropriate time more often than in the rest of the country.

The reason for this imbalance, as indicated by the cited document, is related to the absence or insufficiency of public policies capable of addressing the specific difficulties of the region, such as "mobility deficiencies" and the lack of "engagement" of students (AMAZÔNIA 2030, 2021, p. 42, our translation). Regarding this latter point, it is essential to consider that as Amazonian women, we do not recognize a pertinent evaluation, as "engagement" does not arise out of nowhere. How can one be engaged in studying if the majority of Amazonian children come from families that have not had opportunities to attend formal education, not even at the basic level? It would be interesting, before reproducing stereotypes about the inhabitants of the Amazon, to question the reason for the lack of engagement and disinterest in formal education. Thus, we believe that the lack of "engagement" is more of a consequence, an effect, and less of a cause of the low rates of formal education in the region.

In the practical experience of Amazonian women, statistical data reveal themselves as objective barriers that hinder their daily lives and spatial and social mobility. The insufficiency of public policies capable of engaging Amazonians in education encounters practical obstacles, such as the lack of daycare centers where they can leave their young children to attend school or university. These absences paralyze women and make them more susceptible to poverty and violence.

The states of the Amazon present daycare attendance rates of only 25.6% compared to the national average of 44.8%. The availability of early childhood education is also deficient

compared to the national average, with rates of 51% and 66.4%, respectively (AMAZON 2030, 2021). The absence of these public policies puts the Amazonian population in a cycle of poverty and inequality that is difficult to break, especially for women, who, burdened with the care economy, cannot secure paid employment or study, not only in cities but also in rural areas.

In addition to the difficulties arising from the unequal structure that provides different opportunities for men and women in general contexts, Amazonian women face specific violence stemming from the particular characteristics of the region.

In the Amazon territories, as a result of the unequal and often violent way in which this space was produced, women are subjected to violence arising from gender inequality, as well as from the unequal form of capitalist reproduction. In conflicts over land resulting from the occupation of these territories by capitalist development megaprojects, women, due to the subaltern position they occupy in the structure of the mode of social reproduction, are victims of violence ranging from the invisibility of their work to the extermination of their existence.

In addition to the violent process of deterritorialization faced by their families and communities when development projects occupy their territories, women face risks of rape, unwanted pregnancy, loss of their children, husbands, and other loved ones, food insecurity, and mental health problems. Furthermore, as women, they are preferential targets of the brutality of capital representatives (big businessmen), the state (police), and organized groups (militias, gunmen, illegal miners) who compete for territories and natural resources with communities.

Women lead the processes of defending territories affected by capital, often perceiving disasters affecting communities even before men. They are responsible for extractivism, agriculture, and community water supply, as well as for children's early education in a community context. They fear for the lives and integrity of their partners, parents, and children, and confront the capital that invades their territories. Local narratives suggest that men (direct or indirect representatives of megaprojects) do not tolerate women's resistance, even when this resistance is passive, as it challenges the dominant patriarchal model in these regions.

In addition to the lack of tolerance regarding the presence of women in public spaces claiming rights, they face mistrust from their partners when they decide to fight to defend their territories. In situations where women do not remain silent, thus challenging pre-established gender patterns, they risk becoming victims of domestic violence by husbands, ex-husbands, and fathers, being labeled as "disobedient," "uninterested in the family," or even "lazy." In this

context, activism for these women often represents not only a challenge to their public interactions but also an act of rebellion within their homes.

These forms of restriction and limitation are most intensely manifested for Black, Indigenous, *quilombola*, extractivist, unionist, uneducated women, and other identities marked by difference. Ana Beatriz Rosa (2016), addressing the situation of Indigenous women, notes that violence in rural areas is exacerbated when laws and institutional practices designed to combat violence treat them as a "universal" being. This occurs because the State cannot encompass all women, and many of them do not feel represented by public policy aimed at protecting them from violence.

Regarding the complexity of the dynamics between being a woman and being a leader in a structurally patriarchal society, and the difficulty men face in recognizing and validating female leadership, Maria Querubina Silva Neta, who is a coconut breaker and union leader in Maranhão, recounts in her autobiographical work, *Uma mulher praticamente livre*, the effort women need to undertake to be recognized as leaders by their peers. Historically, unions, associations, universities, and other entities have been spaces of power predominantly occupied by men. In the Amazonian context, characterized by the historical process of reproducing patriarchal relations, combined with the typical characteristics of frontier spaces, as emphasized by José de Souza Martins (2016), women are often relegated to secondary roles, even when they play leading roles, as evidenced in Silva Neta's biography (2018).

Female agency, which has always existed, although often invisible, gains prominence when socio-territorial conflicts focus on communities, where women's actions are central due to their prominence in the care economy. Research conducted in Amazonian contexts, but not exclusively, has highlighted the central role of women in the struggle to defend their territories, both in rural and urban areas. These analyses have approached the territory from the female body, understanding it as a body-territory, a space of conflict but also of shelter, and have shown women not only as participants in the struggle processes but as protagonists.

Studies, such as those conducted by Erica Santos and Vanda Pantoja (2023), analyze the situation of women leaders facing criminalization and legal proceedings initiated by the company Vale S.A. for defending their rights in territories affected by mining in the states of Pará and Maranhão. In these regions, there is a faint presence of the welfare state, but a strong influence of the State as an orderer, contributing to the organization of territory from the perspective of capital rather than the citizen. Companies, in turn, adopt various strategies to suppress leaders who, organized, denounce violations of their rights.

In addition to intimidations, threats, and enclosures that restrict freedom of movement, contaminate local water bodies, and increase food insecurity, the criminalization of leadership through legal proceedings violates women's right to defend their territories. These practices, besides functioning as terror instruments in the community, serve as pedagogical means, transmitting the message that people should not interfere with capitalist practices in mining territories, under the risk of facing severe consequences.

The reports of the Pastoral Land Commission-CPT on violence and conflicts in the Brazilian countryside, published since 1985, have denounced violence against rural workers. In recent years, the data from these reports have highlighted specific violence against women in rural areas, something that was not common in the early publications. An analysis of the Pastoral Land Commission reports between 2007 and 2022, using the keyword "woman," reveals that the term was present in the publications with some regularity, showing variations over the years. The lowest incidence was recorded in 2015, with thirteen (13) references to the term, while the highest occurred in 2018, with ninety-three (93) mentions. However, in the mentioned series, only in the years 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021 did the publication specifically address violence in rural areas, addressing the situation of women. In the other publications, they were mentioned as victims of violence in rural areas in general, with emphasis only on cases of murder.

A survey conducted by Raquel Baster (2018), based on data from CPT reports from 2009 to 2018, indicates that 1,409 women were victims of some form of violence in rural areas⁷ during this period. Baster argues that the silencing and invisibility of women in rural conflicts are related to the construction of an unequal model of "development" that prioritizes extractivist for profit over subsistence extractivist and the perspective of living well, activities largely carried out in rural areas by women.

⁷ The author draws attention to the fact that the number of women victims of violence is higher because, in the methodology of the Pastoral Land Commission, the number of families involved in conflicts is computed rather than individuals (BASTER, 2018, p. 83).

Final considerations

Through this focus on the educational issue and the violence stemming from territorial conflicts, we intend to reflect on the situation of women in the Amazon as a challenge for the State and society as a whole. Overcoming it requires the development of public policies emphasizing the historical inequalities between regions, which, if not acknowledged, tend to perpetuate. Such policies, in addition to considering regional disparities, should also incorporate a gender approach. We understand that greater gender equity in the Amazon depends on greater equity both between regions and within them.

By recognizing the regional diversity within the Amazon, we refer to it in the plural: Amazons of the rivers, forests, savannah, and drought; of saints, apparitions, shamanism, and the enchanted; Amazons of indigenous peoples, black populations, caboclos, and migrants who have come here. This ecological and cultural diversity is reflected in the diverse experiences of being a woman and being a man.

This dossier, *Epistemologia Feminina: As mulheres e suas lutas no campo e na cidade das Amazônias* aimed to shed light on the experiences of women who inhabit Amazonian territories and shape distinct forms of life within them. These are women who do not fit into generic stereotypes of "being a woman" and, therefore, mostly do not identify themselves as feminists, leaders, unionists, intellectuals, academics, activists, or in other similar categories.

In this sense, classic sociological literature does not make them visible, since their actions do not follow traditionally internalized patterns of leadership. Therefore, understanding the Amazons and the experiences of their inhabitants requires conducting empirical research and, more importantly, expanding channels that allow Amazonian people to express their experiences and for these to be recognized as valid knowledge. This perspective entails the necessary democratization of access and presence of Amazonians in positions of power, especially in education at all levels.

With the aim of bringing visibility to the experiences reported here, we express our gratitude to *Cadernos de Campo: Revista de Ciências Sociais*, who worked diligently to make this publication possible. We thank the entire team of editors, represented by Lucas Flôres Vasques, with whom we interacted during most of the process of organizing this dossier. We express our gratitude to the authors of the articles included here: Ana Claudia Fernandes, Betânia Barroso, Liliam Rolim Figueiredo, Maria Mary Ferreira, Marcos Moreira Lira, Myrian

Pereira Vasques, and Thelma Mendes Pontes. We conclude by providing a summary of each discussion that follows in the articles.

Researcher Maria Mary Ferreira presents, in her article *Gender, political representation and processes for prohibition of women in Brazil*, an analysis of the limits of democracy when countries do not encourage or prevent women from running for or being elected to political office. Problematizing women's access to the power space of party politics in Brazil and other countries, the author discusses the relationship between democracy, gender, and patriarchy, arguing that gender parity in politics is a fundamental condition for democracy. She presents statistical data on the underrepresentation of women in Brazilian politics, attributing such practice to patriarchy and arguing that countries that have managed to increase the number of women in parliament are more likely to strengthen their democracies.

The relationship between higher education, indigenous motherhood, and public policies for access and retention in university is problematized in the article *Being an indigenous woman and mother at university: Challenges and perspectives of an agronomy student*, by researchers Myrian Pereira Vasques, Thelma Mendes Pontes, and Ana Claudia Fernandes. The first author is a Tikuna indigenous woman, a university student, and a mother, and based on her experience, she analyzes the situation of indigenous women and the difficulties they face in accessing and completing their education. The authors advocate for a truly inclusive, creative university that values emotions, redistributes power, and is reparative and transformative. The text invites reflection on the experiences of indigenous women in spaces outside the village and highlights the need to discuss, promote, and contextualize public policies for access and retention in higher education.

With the purpose of bringing visibility to and valorizing the knowledge of women extractives in the Amazon region, researchers Lilian Rolim Figueiredo, Betânia Barroso, and Marcos Moreira Lira present the article *Women breakers of babaçu: A process of construction of the term traditional communities, collective identities and knowledge*. In this work, they discuss the role of the babaçu breakers from the Ciriaco extractive reserve, in the municipality of Cidelândia/MA, within the context of traditional communities, identifying their knowledge as fundamental elements in the construction of the identity of being a babaçu breaker. This achievement was the result of women's organization, culminating in the formation of the Interstate Movement of Babaçu Breakers (MIQCB).

We wish everyone a great reading experience!

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