

# Reports and portraits of female lives and their experiences<sup>1</sup>

## Relatos e retratos de vidas e vivências femininas

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### Abstract

This study is focused on female interaction with the environment in the State of Mato Grosso. The environment here consists of spaces for experiences with nature and the consequent use of natural resources. The objective is to learn about the relationship between women and nature, and we propose to listen to women. Qualitative and ethnographic research was used as a study method, with an interface in participatory research, based on life history. What can be observed in the women's statements is that they consider themselves, like nature, generators of lives. Even though they are endowed with this capacity for creation, this does not eliminate the fact that they are constantly violated, perpetuating the model of predatory relationships which is the prism of male power. Therefore, it is urgent to distinguish, within human action, the processes of belonging and reciprocity, typical of the female universe, from the predatory sexist model.

**Keywords:** nature; education; feminism; Mato Grosso.

### Resumo

Este estudo é focado na interação feminina com ambiente, no Estado de Mato Grosso. O ambiente aqui se constitui em espaços de vivências com a natureza e consequente uso de recursos naturais. O objetivo é conhecer como se dá a relação mulher e natureza, nos propomos a ouvir as mulheres. Como método de estudo foi utilizado a pesquisa qualitativa e etnográfica, com interface na pesquisa participativa, pautada na história de vida. O que se observa nas falas das mulheres que estas se consideram, assim como a natureza, geradoras de vidas. Mesmo sendo dotadas da condição criadora, isso não afasta o fato de que são violadas constantemente, perpetuando o modelo de relação predatória que é o prisma do poder masculino. Por isso, é urgente distinguir, dentro da ação humana, os processos de pertencimento e reciprocidade, próprios do universo feminino, do modelo predatório machista.

**Palavras-chave:** natureza; educação; feminismo; Mato Grosso.

### INTRODUCTION

Understanding and analyzing the consequences of the developmental model on the environment is without a doubt one of the most important points and which are most present in the agendas, both of those who carry out research and those of governments around the world. This prominence of the environmental themes also stems from social pressure and the engagement of entities dedicated to the environmental causes. All of this creates a bigger need for research and policies that handle themes such as the depletion of natural resources by excessive use, contaminations and inadequate handling of the environment. But it is important to state that the worries with the ecosystem and with ecology cannot, for

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<sup>1</sup> This research is linked to the following institutions: FAPEMAT: Process 0261532/2017, CNPQ: Process 406528/2021-7, UNEMAT: Ordinance 1141/2021.

granted, exclude human presence in various corners of planet earth. This means to say that part of the already visible effects of the environmental issues is precisely in human life as a whole, but more severe in the poorer populations.

This implies that part of the scientific researches on the environmental themes bring a perspective precisely to the presence of peoples who live outside of the axes of the economic centers. It is on these people that fall a large part of the responsibility for the environmental impacts, resultant from the conception that the environment is to be regarded as nature preserved at the expense of the exclusion of the man who lives closer to nature. This perspective has been reinforced by ecological studies, which normally present data of impacts measured by formulas which induce the reading that human presence is always negative for the environment.

Thus, it is indispensable that there may also be readings which involve other dimensions of life, including economic, social, cultural and educational issues, basing the construction of other concepts. And that these concepts may dissuade the idea that there is a separation between man and nature, reinforced by the thesis that there are two humanities: one that holds power, considered to be correct and superior, and another that lives subjugated and for that is determined as outcast and vulnerable. Krenak (2020) defends that humanity, which is conceived as superior and extraordinary, in its alienating walk on Earth, produces "sub-humanity", comprised of *caiçaras*<sup>2</sup>, indigenous people, *quilombolas* and aboriginal peoples, forgotten on the edges of the planet. To these marginalized peoples pointed out by Krenak (2020), are added the homeless, landless and so many other peoples that struggle for and dream of a land of belonging.

This is the scenery in which a developmental model is constituted, conceived through the perspective of masculine domination, which is, by itself, predatory and which generates socio-environmental problems with consequences, both for nature and for people, especially people who live in peripheries or in places which rely mostly on nature's resources. This is why Vieira (1995) states the researches that highlight the environmental impacts associated to the damage caused to the populations which are submitted to or exposed to risk situations and of continuous impoverishment are still incipient.

As the sexist, predatory and colonialist perspective influences several sectors of society, even when there is some initiative to the policies which deal with environmental impacts, these have not targeted the environment as a system of relations between the social and the natural. This absence implies that the decisions made by governments and nature protection and conservation bodies, not rarely, ignore the presence of vulnerable populations in their environmental policies.

And as such, it is necessary and urgent that the research scope, the proposition of public policies for the environment and the projects of economic development are not carried out without the minimum distinction of the differences between human occupation and the exploration model whose bases still are those of colonialism, sexism and predation. The notion of human occupation as a practice of reciprocity with other forms of life present in nature, very common to indigenous, *quilombola*<sup>3</sup> and *ribeirinha*<sup>4</sup> populations, takes place through a sense of belonging and reciprocity, interaction and interdependence. As per the masculine domination model, whose moral framework is the judaic-christian logic of domination of nature, which is conceived as a source of resources, and as such should be continuously explored.

When the action of the public power in general or the entities and organizations for nature protection and conservation do not carry out this re-orientation of parameters, besides expanding even more the consequences of environmental degradation on the most vulnerable populations, it intensifies these effects on the bodies and ontologies of women. Within the context of sexism, the female body is conceived as being in common to what is determined of nature: a source of resources to be continuously explored.

This validation of the colonialist logic says that "anthropocentrism is an idea/practice which places, in the center of everything, man, with the use of nature having to be justified, in first

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<sup>2</sup> Caiçaras are traditional communities that live in the seaside of Brazil, especially in the states of São Paulo, Paraná and Rio de Janeiro, and mix traditions from African, Indigenous and European origins.

<sup>3</sup> Quilombolas are the members of Quilombos, autonomous communities in Brazil created by enslaved people as a means of social and cultural resistance during the Colonial Times.

<sup>4</sup> Traditional populations in Brazil that live near rivers and survive through fishery, hunt, swidden, and vegetable extraction.

order, only to satisfy his interests"<sup>5</sup>. And this "man is understood also as the masculine gender and a synonym of humanity and which, in this dominant anthropocentric view, androcentric as a consequence, perpetuates the historic oppression of Nature and women". (Ferri et al., 2017, p. 61)

Starting from this premise, and based on the ethnographic study carried out in the context of the research projects: Fapemat - Gender and Environment: use and handling of natural resources under the perspectives of the women of Mato Grosso<sup>6</sup>, and CNPq - Education, Corporeity and Territory: intertwining wisdoms and knowledges with Indigenous Women in the State of Mato Grosso<sup>7</sup>, we present an argument in which we put into debate the impacts of this invisibility to which part of the women are submitted.

## THE METHOD: LOOKING, LISTENING, FEELING, EXPERIENCING AND WRITING

The methodological arrangement conducted in this research is based on the scope of social sciences, especially anthropology. Hence the use of ethnographic work as a registration tool, because, as Oliveira (1996) explains, it is necessary to know how to look and know how to listen. In fact, the premise is that listening takes place when the voice of those who speak is assured, for that reason, dialogue is established. A dialogue which was carried out in person in the homes of each of the women to whom we were able to talk, as well as their workplaces.

Since ethnographic work waives also writing as a registry of the experiences had, it is necessary to take into account that description has an ethical commitment. Geertz (1989) explains that, in the interpretation of symbols and of culture, the meanings need to take place consistent with the perspective of who is being heard. In this sense, the foundations for a research, like the one that is reported here, could not be done, all the more when attributing the lead role of the speeches to the interviewed women, without the scope of social sciences.

The choices of the themes, all intertwined with the binomial *woman* and *environment*, started from this methodological perspective. Consequently, the categories to organize the conversations, as if it was a script scheme, were listed without there being any hierarchies amongst themselves. For this reason, in each of the conversations with the interviewed women, the themes would present themselves spontaneously in the dialogue. The lightness which the methodology of the ethnographic work brings to an interaction between who carries out the research and who collaborates with the research work is essential so that every dialogue is fruitful and without pressure.

There is also, as a methodological foundation, the notion of humanizing discussed in the book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (A Pedagogia do Oprimido), from Paulo Freire (2005). The author explains that the overcoming of the logic of oppression begins with the establishment of a dialogical human relationship. Thus, in every process of visiting, conversation and interaction with the women, we took into account that the guiding principle of the research work is overcoming oppression. For that, assuring the voice, as a premise of the dialogue, is a path for this work to also be, in its form, a possibility of speaking about women through the voice of women.

And for it to be possible to establish the conversations horizontally, with no hierarchies or labels, we started from the notion of invisibility of the life histories of the women, even more severe when focusing on the ethnic perspective. The situation of social, economic and educational vulnerability hits women far more, especially those who are within the intersectionality of indigenous, *quilombolas*, *ribeirinhas* and settler peoples. To provide an example, it is enough to realize how the impact of a construction, typical of the predatory model of development, as the construction of a hydroelectric power plant, can be heavier on the lives of women.

As Seluchinsk (2019) reports, indigenous women conceive the body as a first territory and in this premise rests the idea that by implanting a hydroelectric power plant and causing damages to the environment, may also impact the bodies of women. Thus, besides the huge

<sup>5</sup> "o antropocentrismo é uma ideia/prática que coloca, no centro de tudo, o homem, devendo em primeira ordem o uso da Natureza se justificar somente para satisfazer seus interesses".

<sup>6</sup> Fapemat - Gênero e Ambiente: usos e manejos dos recursos naturais na perspectiva das mulheres de Mato Grosso

<sup>7</sup> CNPq - Educação, Corporeidade e Território: entrelaçando saberes e conhecimentos com Mulheres Indígenas no Estado de Mato Grosso

and deep changes in the ecosystem, the river dam to produce the electricity generation also affects the body, the soul and the perspective of women.

It is possible to notice how the model of control over nature, the predation of life, is the motto of the development logic typical of capitalist society. The social conditions that push women, how their histories are perceived, is almost similar to the conditions that lead man to labor in these big constructions<sup>8</sup>. (Seluchinesk; Simplício; Castorino, 2015. p. 11).

In terms of global politics, forums of international reach or multilateral bodies still grant small visibility to gender policies, even more those which make clear the relationships between gender and environment. One of the few mentioned is the Agenda 21 of the United Nations Conference for the environment and development. In this agenda, which, strictly speaking, is a merely recommendatory document, with no power of regulation nor legal determination, is expressed in article 24, according to CNUMAD (Conferência das Nações Unidas sobre Meio Ambiente e Desenvolvimento, 1992), that the international community endorsed several plans of action and conventions for the integration women in all activities relative to development, in particular, those which emphasize the participation in the national and international handling of the ecosystems and in the control of environmental degradation.

According to Conceição (2009), women are guided by a sexist logic that prevents them from having autonomy. This social condition is distinguished and also characterized by material goods, this model of social construction of the female existence makes women even more reliant on the presence of a man, be that a father or a husband.

Santos (2011) states that society sees the woman as a more fragile and incapable being, unable to assume the direction of institutions, even the family. Thus, man starts to be seen as the strong one, the holder of all of the authority and power of command resulting from his physical strength, taking on the social control within society.

Starting from the logics of the exercise of power as a masculine assumption, the environmental issue is also perceived as the typically sexist control of power. This is also evident in the perception and management of the environment, which for women also is reflected in their condition of caregiver and the men in that of explorer. The differences following from it compose the phenomenon of feminization of poverty, reinforcing the group of women as being one of the most affected by socioeconomic crisis or the effects of environmental crisis.

It is not about stating here that women are the exclusive victims of environmental degradation, but to highlight that they have a key role in the management of natural resources which takes as its premise elucidating the model of development that has perpetuated the production of negative impacts on the quality of life of the population. The differences presented by men and women also interfere in their relationships and interactions with the environment which, according to Buber (2004), is based on two word-principles: Me-you, Me-this. In these words, two possibilities for carrying out existence are merged. The word Me-You is the mainstay for dialogical life, and Me-This establishes the word of This, the place and support of experience, of knowledge, of usage.

The way this occurs, as well as its causes and consequences, is still something that needs to be better analyzed. This is because not even the women that experience this process are clear about their condition of explored body, or their secondary role before the process of development. This absence of the idea of female exploration, as it happens with the exploration of nature, will only be overcome when more and more women have autonomy to speak. The right to female voice is also a way of protecting the environment.

As Beauvoir (1970) explains, women have been managing to put themselves as Subject, for this reason, there are no myths which reflect their projects; they do not possess neither religion nor poetry which belongs exclusively to them; it is even through the dreams of men that they dream. It is the gods made by men which they adore.

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<sup>8</sup> É possível notar como o modelo de controle da natureza, de predação da vida é o mote da lógica do desenvolvimento típico da sociedade capitalista. As condições sociais que empurram as mulheres, como se percebe nas histórias delas, é quase similar às condições que levam os homens ao labor nessas grandes obras.

Other categories that are also important for the composition of conversations came from Federici (2019), in which the author says that domestic work, for example, is a way of maintaining the exploration of the female body. Domestic work would be, as explained by Federici, a way of valuing the ideal of family, religion and social order.

Women, in the context of this development logic, via predation of the natural resources, as occurs in the State of Mato Grosso, have their existences marked by exploration. And, when they are workers, that is, when they have an occupation through which they can earn some income, they work in small rural properties or in family farming, others work in extractivism, some are informal traders, workers in commerce, domestic workers, besides those that are prostitutes.

It is on the women of Mato Grosso and their relationship with nature that this study deals with. This scenario is the stage for the story of indigenous, black and poor white women who live, in common with nature, a process of continuous degradation with violences veiled or hidden by silencing. As pointed out by Dias (1992) and Sato (1997) the destruction of nature is similar, specially in terms of procedures and support in sexist logic, to the process of exploration of women.

Ruether (1992) and Ariza (2009) speak of some symbolic connections between the domination of women and the domination of nature in western culture. For this reason, it is possible to find the patterns of domination and destructive violence which treat both women and nature as matter to be explored. In this kind of symbolic connections, even if noticeable only at the level of moral values, the implications of the degradation of nature and on the bodies of women brings the same mark: continuous exploration.

Deepening oneself in the studies on the consequences of these processes, as well as the investigations of the forms of appropriation of natural resources and their transformations as means of livelihood, is a possibility of recognizing the subtext of economic politics implanted in this State that integrates the Amazon region. It is even a premise which favors the understanding of how an investigation of the relationship between gender and environment may promote the understanding that the macro and microeconomic policies in force directly impact the socio-environmental variables. Besides that, the knowledge produced here may be a step in granting visibility to the values and results of the environmental cost of implanting developmentalist policies which, according to Becker (2001), is based on the assumption that nature consists of a resource to be explored.

Based on the experiences which take place in this development model, we understand that it is necessary to review the understanding of men and women as social beings who are part of and interact with their history through the way in which their existence is produced, taking into consideration the context in which they are inserted. Women in this context of occupation, will be forged by their culture of origin, but also by other cultures which will share in this region. According to Beauvoir (1970), the female condition is not determined only by the biological, but it is necessary to take into consideration the ontological, economical, social and psychological contexts for the biology data to be clarified.

This is evident though the fact that the subjugation of women to the species and the limits of their individual capacities are extremely important facts; in the same way in which the body of the woman is one of the essential elements of the situation they occupy in this world. With this understanding, the study in question allowed for the knowledge of these women and how they produce their existences in a broader sense, as pointed out by Freire (2005) as being a reading of the realities that surround them and thus the understanding of how the activities developed by them have impacted and still impact, producing various effects on the development of the region.

## **ON THE EXPERIENCES WITH AND OF THE WOMEN OF MATO GROSSO**

With this emblematic proposal, due to, also, the fact that there is within the team which carried out this research, women researchers that comprised this study, and that here organize and present the women's speeches, are women that live and study in this predominantly masculinized environment. Therefore, the first challenge is speaking scientifically of a study which is also a study on themselves. This reverberates in questioning a first point, the

conception of positivistic science which is considered neutral, which in this case cannot be so, given that there is a belonging, both of who speaks and who writes.

Thus, this research positions itself as another option of reading in which the ideas, sensations, feelings, thoughts, memories and other manifestations of the women who present themselves as protagonists of their histories, times and spaces in which they live, will be considered.

Another aspect to be considered in the design of this research is the fact that the study area encompasses a state with three biomes and with completely different occupations. In the state of Mato Grosso, there are the three biomes of *Cerrado*<sup>9</sup>, Amazon Forest and *Pantanal*<sup>10</sup>, according to the geographical and biological aspects. However, when dealing with cultural issues, one must consider other times and spaces of occupation, such as the colonial occupation guided by the search for gold. According to Seluchinsk (2008), since immemorial times, the lands named Mato Grosso, considered to be part of the Brazilian Amazon, were territories of several ethnicities, amongst which today there are registers of 43 indigenous peoples.

In the period of foundation of the capital of the state, *Vila Bela da Santíssima Trindade* (Beautiful Village of the Holy Trinity), and later, Cuiabá, this scenery was modified and finally there started to be the first villages of the region, known as "baixada cuiabana" (cuiabá lowlands), whose occupation was conducted by the *Bandeirantes*<sup>11</sup> from São Paulo, representatives of the colonial model and also the presence of black people, at the time, massacred by the mining exploration and slave labor. In the official history of the state of Mato Grosso, therefore, it is written the version of those who explored nature and black people, massacred indigenous peoples.

It is not, however, that all of the political processes in Mato Grosso had, explicitly, the idea of domination of nature and authoritarian forms of government. This is how in 1970, in the middle of the military dictatorship<sup>12</sup>, policies of settlement in the Amazon were established by the federal government and with this, there was the occupation of the so-called *Amazônia Norte Matogrossense* (Mato Grosso's Northern Amazon), by big businessmen from São Paulo.

The women who participated in this study are distributed through all of the regions of the state, residing in 19 districts, as presented in the [Figure 1](#).

Based on the map, we can observe that a long distance was covered to the meetings with the women, and on our way we observed a natural landscape being swallowed by the extensive soy deserts. A totally masculinized activity, to the point that the rare women involved in it begin to act like men in their clothing, words, gazes hardened by the meaning of work. The plantation agriculture as practiced in Mato Grosso is an example of the strength of the colonialist model, for this very reason sexist, is still in full force, carrying out massive settlements in sensitive areas, destroying the forest for monoculture plantations and depleting the rivers to make hydroelectric dams.

It is important to inform that amongst the criteria of choices of the women there was, according to the project, the indication that they should be people recognized by the community as a representative part of the cultural, environmental, political, educational and also economic aspects of the region. The women that were heard must have, as a basic criterion, a dialogical relationship to nature and be open to dialogue.

Based on the methodology of the project, the conversations always had a light tone, from broad themes, as *who are we*. Thus, to the extent to which the conversation was engaged, the dialogue would travel other roads, as the theme of "women and nature". These conversations unfolded easily because, for most women, especially within the profile of the interviewees, Mato Grosso is a state which is recognized, politically and strategically, as a producer of riches, which in this given moment is comprised by the soybean and bull's head, but that once was mining, logging, fur, amongst others.

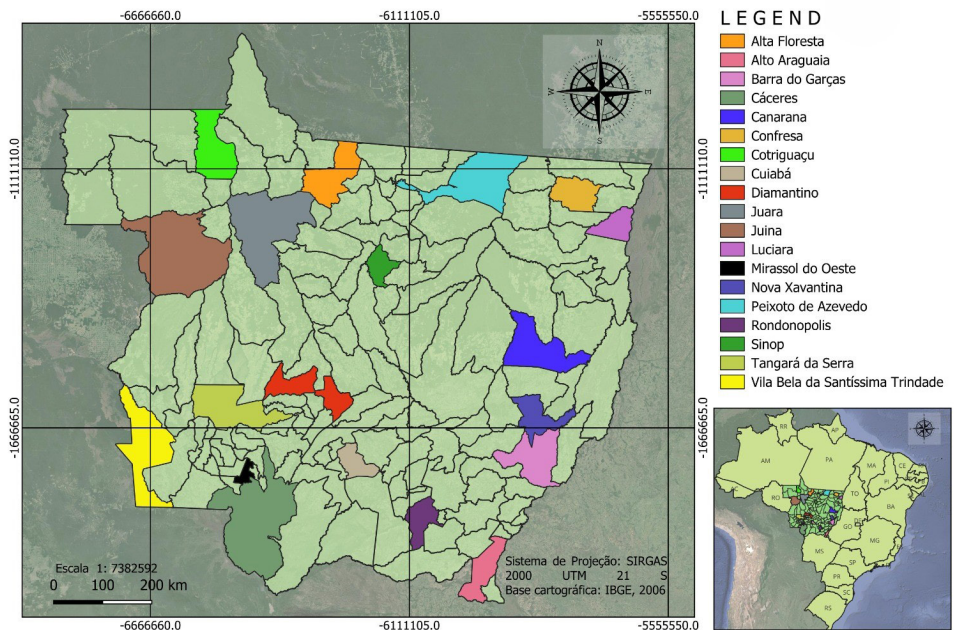
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<sup>9</sup> *Cerrado* is a tropical savanna biome which covers a large area in Brazil.

<sup>10</sup> *Pantanal* is the biome which encompasses the world's largest tropical wetland area, as well as the largest flooded grassland, found mostly in Brazil in the states of Mato Grosso do Sul and Mato Grosso, but also extending to their neighboring countries, Bolivia and Paraguay.

<sup>11</sup> *Bandeirantes*, meaning flag-carriers, were settlers in Colonial Brazil who were responsible for expanding the borders of Brazil to the countryside, through the enslavement and murder of thousands of indigenous peoples.

<sup>12</sup> Brazil underwent an extreme right-wing military dictatorship from 1964 to 1985.



**Figure 1.** Map of the state of Mato Grosso with the home location of the interviewed women. Source: Map elaborated by GeoPaisagem lab. Universidade do Estado de Mato Grosso (State University of Mato Grosso) - University Campus in Alta Floresta-MT.

Contrasting with this scenario defined as a place of development at the cost of any form of exploration, the women, literate or not, when listening to the term environment, which immediately would start being called 'nature', would seek in their thoughts words that could translate feelings into concepts.

*Nature is sacred because it is life, it creates life for life. And if it is life, it needs to be taken care of, protected and to do what we can so that it continues to be beautiful, wonderful, which is what many human beings are not doing*<sup>13</sup>. (Teacher, Mirassol do Oeste, 2023).

*Nature is strong, it relaxes, tranquilizes, eases, nature is God materialized and for that it inspires. It is like a mother who creates and inspires creation*<sup>14</sup>. (Trader, Barra do Garças, 2020).

Everything I do comes from nature. Nature is just like a big settlement, a land where everyone needs to learn. I teach my children to take care of nature because it gives us everything we need to live. But if we don't take care of it, it dies<sup>15</sup>. (Professora Indígena, Juara, 2021).

The dimension of nature as a place for creation and/or source of inspiration demonstrates a proximity of women to concepts which defend nature as a place of doing, of life happening. In the same way in which women receive for themselves the task of creating life. However, this power of creation attributed to both is also the motto to imprint in their bodies and territories the possibility of exploration. The concept of maternity imputed to women and nature, notably within the context of Mato Grosso, gives them the aura of a divine being, reached by donation and sacrifice. This conception, based on judaic-christian religions, places women and nature as beings that are at the disposal of men, for they were granted by the creator to serve them.

Reason in western tradition was constructed as the privileged domain of the master who conceived nature as a wife or another subordinate, containing and representing the sphere of materiality, subsistence and the feminine, which the master separated and built beneath him<sup>16</sup>. (Plumwood, 1993, p. 3).

<sup>13</sup> A natureza é sagrada porque ela é vida, gera vida para vida. E se é vida, precisa ser cuidada, protegida e fazer o que a gente pode para que continue linda, maravilhosa que é o que muitos seres humanos não estão fazendo.

<sup>14</sup> A natureza é forte, ela relaxa, tranquiliza, ameniza, a natureza é Deus materializado por isso inspira. É como uma mãe que cria e inspira a criação.

<sup>15</sup> Tudo o que faço vem da natureza. A natureza é assim como uma grande aldeia, uma terra onde todos precisam aprender. Eu ensino meus filhos a cuidar da natureza porque é ela que dá tudo que a gente precisa para viver. Mas se não cuidar dela acaba

<sup>16</sup> A razão na tradição ocidental foi construída como o domínio privilegiado do mestre que concebeu a natureza

Even if women talk about the similarity of the power to create and take care of life, culturally it is up to the men the rational thinking which enables him to live on the production of women and still hold control over it. In this model of development, the relationship between men/women and men/nature intensified even more the sense of exploration, reaching the dimension of acts of violence and destruction. We can see that this dimension is also reflected in the statistics on domestic violence and femicide. According to Bueno et al. (2024), Mato Grosso, as indicated in the Brazilian Forum of Public Security, has the highest rate of femicide among women, with 2.5 deaths per 100,000 women in 2023.

Whereas, regarding nature, environmental crimes have been distributed in several fronts, such as deforestation, air pollution, use of pesticides, illegal mining, pollution and silting of rivers and invasion of protected lands.

In terms of degradation, also monitored by Deter/Inpe, Mato grosso concentrated 66% of the 1,645.2 km<sup>2</sup> degraded in the Legal Amazon in this time period, with a total of 1,086.9 km<sup>2</sup>. [...] In 2022, Mato Grosso was responsible for 54% of the degraded area in Amazon in the first semester<sup>17</sup>. (Oliveira, 2023, p. 1).

Analyzing the violences practiced in both cases, we understand that, even if there are laws that support the victims and also hold the culprits accountable, there is still an advancement in the practices which are justified by the advent of a culture based on rights established by the men and for the men. Every time women, in this context, have the opportunity of speaking, report the violences to which they are or were submitted to or otherwise under the same situation in relation to their mothers, grandmothers and in some cases, their daughters and granddaughters. This demonstrates a continuous cycle which begins in the private relationships within families, until arriving in the collectivity of society.

Beyond physical violence, other forms of violence which condition women to live under the decision of men are still present, even if at times they are able to leave the family environment to perform some form of profitable work to contribute to the family's income.

*In Brazil, this culture that women are only inside the house, and men, all of the decisions, it was men who made them, right? Women didn't have, many times, even voices, right? And we were also challenging this, from the women standing out, right? And it was becoming an interest, feeling this need, right?*<sup>18</sup>. (Businesswoman, Peixoto de Azevedo, 2019).

*When I was a child, we already had to start working to buy school material, even to buy a pair of sandals. Men, my dad and my brothers hunted, fished. Women stayed in the settlement making necklaces to sell, but they never left the settlement. Today we have an organization of the indigenous women of Mato Grosso. We have meetings. We talk about women's rights, empowering indigenous women. And we sell our crafts to buy what we want*<sup>19</sup>. (Indigenous teacher, Juara, 2020).

*My parents were very strict. They found out my husband had another woman and made me separate from him. I even thought of continuing to be married and let it go. My father went to talk to him and found out his interest was just in the assets. Then my father told him to have it all. He said: the plate where she eats and the bed where she sleeps are at home. Then I went to live with my parents. They were hard times, seven years in my parents' house. It was a time when separating wasn't a thing and I was a separated woman. I went back to study and passed a competition exam to work at Empaer*<sup>20</sup>. *The job was good, but there was a lot*

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como uma esposa ou um outro subordinado, contendo e representando a esfera da materialidade, da subsistência e do feminino, que o mestre separou e construiu abaixo dele.

<sup>17</sup> No quesito degradação, também monitorado pelo Deter/Inpe, o Mato Grosso concentrou 66% dos 1.645,2 km<sup>2</sup> degradados na Amazônia Legal no período, com um total de 1.086,9 km<sup>2</sup>. [...] Em 2022, o Mato Grosso foi responsável por 54% da área degradada na Amazônia no primeiro semestre.

<sup>18</sup> No Brasil essa cultura de que mulher era só dentro de casa, e os homens, todas as decisões eram os homens que tomavam, né? Mulher não tinha muita vez, nem voz não, né!? E a gente foi também desafiando pra isso, das mulheres que foram se destacando, né? E foi interessando, sentindo essa necessidade, né?

<sup>19</sup> Quando eu era criança já tinha que trabalhar para comprar material escolar, até para comprar um chinelo. Os homens, meu pai e meus irmão caçava, pescava. As mulheres ficavam na aldeia fazendo colar para vender, mas nunca saía da aldeia. Hoje temos uma organização das mulheres indígenas do estado de Mato Grosso. A gente faz reuniões. Conversamos sobre direitos das mulheres, de empoderamento das mulheres indígenas. E vendemos nosso artesanato para comprar aquilo que queremos.

<sup>20</sup> Empresa Mato-grossense de Pesquisa, Assistência e Extensão Rural (Mato Grosso Company of Rural Research, Assistance and Extension)



*of political persecution and they sent me to Rosário, and later Cuiabá, so I quit and started to sell pastries*<sup>21</sup>. (Artisan and businesswoman, Cáceres, 2021).

The woman's exit from the restricted space of the home, understood as patrimony firstly of the parents and later of the husband, is related to her capacity to insert herself in the job market. This process experienced by the women of Mato Grosso, notably by the most vulnerable ones, is intimately connected to their confrontation of their condition of women and, therefore, second sex in the social hierarchy. To speak of the differences in access to the world of work by the women is referring to their origin and cultural belonging which will determine their choices both in studies/formation and professional activity.

The women of this study are teachers, artisans, micro-entrepreneurs, domestic workers, settlers, social workers, nurses and prostitutes. Part of them, already retired, report that it was not easy to leave their parents's houses to study, be that through financial or affective dependency, and for this reason many of them have abandoned their studies and ended up on underemployment or else opting for their own enterprises.

In a specific case brought to this study is the report of a woman who came to the north of Mato Grosso to be a cook in a big company and ended up becoming a prostitute. Her fame was so great that she became a local myth. It was through her hands and her body that men, of all shades, began their sexual activities amidst the 1980s, in northern Mato Grosso.

The relationship with the women in these lands was apprehended under the orientation of the father figure and/or of the prostitutes who taught the men how to treat a woman, which in this case, would be a wife. Besides the initiation, many others put themselves on the same line, for in those times of the goldrush and the aggressive policies of occupation and deforestation, especially in the north of Mato Grosso, there was a severe scarcity of female presence, and the women were disputed for at the price of gold.

During the day, men would cut down and burn wood, tear the land and sow seeds from other regions, in a continuous act of imposition of logic. At night, they hunted down women, even if they had to be in a line, to then repeat the same ritual in their bodies. The bodies of the women, who worked as prostitutes, were as if mortified and torn apart by the violence inherent to this function.

This masculinized conduct contains the portrait of the destruction of the environment, given that it was the men that reduced nature to a set of resources for them to explore and transform into merchandise. According to Capra (1999), by seeking to dominate nature and glorifying the power of reason, the project of these men is destroying the planet, with theses that it is necessary to tame nature and violate the earth so that it becomes productive. In the same way in which the method of interacting with nature was designed, so was foreseen for the women, given that both consist of objects of use and domination.

The position of men has become, therefore, simultaneously interior and exterior, with their exteriority and objectifying capacity of the colonial gaze, simultaneously managing and pornographic. In summary, I anticipate that sexuality is transformed, being introduced as a morality unknown before, which reduces to an object the bodies of women and at the same time inoculates the notion of nefarious sin, heinous crime and all its correlates<sup>22</sup> (Segato, 2012).

The domination and control of nature and consequently, women, gave men ideas that women were afraid of nature and for that they must keep them separated from it. Stories of women and children who had been devoured by wild animals or even that had been lost in the forests

<sup>21</sup> Meus pais eram muito rígidos. Eles ficaram sabendo que meu marido tinha outra mulher e fizeram eu me separar dele. Eu até pensei em continuar casada e deixar passar. Meu pai foi conversar com ele e descobriu que o interesse dele era só nos bens. Então meu pai mandou ele ficar com tudo. Ele disse: o prato que ela come e a cama que ela dorme está lá em casa. Então fui morar com meus pais. Foram tempos difíceis, sete anos na casa dos pais. Era um tempo em que separação não existia e eu era uma mulher separada. Voltei a estudar e passei num concurso da Empaer. O concurso era bom, mas tinha muita perseguição política e me mandaram para Rosário, depois para Cuiabá, então eu pedi demissão e fui vender salgados.

<sup>22</sup> A posição dos homens tornou-se, dessa forma, simultaneamente interior e exterior, com a exterioridade e capacidade objetificadora do olhar colonial, simultaneamente administrador e pornográfico. De forma sintética, antecipo que a sexualidade se transforma, introduzindo-se como uma moralidade antes desconhecida, que reduz a objeto o corpo das mulheres e ao mesmo tempo inocula a noção de pecado nefasto, crime hediondo e todos os seus correlatos

and had never been found were very common. In addition, there was the fear of venomous animals and of the giant snake who had swallowed an entire person.

*When I arrived here, he went to live in the area that my father had bought. It was a small area and there was nothing there. Only a tent of black canvas and our things all crammed. My mother cooked on an earthen stove that my father made on the floor. And there wasn't any water around. We had to go to the river to get it. Then we would go to that small river and pick up water, wash our laundry and go there to take a shower. One day some guy came and told my dad to not let the women go alone to the river anymore. There was a jaguar that had eaten a woman around there. We were really scared. And my mom didn't let us go freshen up there on the river anymore<sup>23</sup>. (Civil servant, Cotriguaçu, 2019).*

As the women were adapting to the region, these concerns were being replaced by the needs, then plenty, to venture out of their homes even if it was to become teachers in nearby schools or in the small villages. This allowed for new world readings and the women who had not done nor do the history of this state started to make their own stories. It is not the history of the conquistadors who self-proclaimed new *bandeirantes*, but this is the history of female struggles for space and assurance of attendance to their rights.

In this new life drawing, the women found themselves with nature in an ancestral way, with belonging, with a new dialogue, a desire to look beyond the walls. Even if in the first moment, home was a safe shelter, gazing at the forest was inviting, as in the case of the artists and artisans, who find there inspiring elements for their creations. Here it is befitting to bring to the debate the importance of the arts as an element of access to feelings and sensations which encourage the rise to other dimensions of human life.

All women recognize the beauty of art, but due to their cultural condition of women, fear the strength which art produces when it accesses the female intensity of both the woman and nature. It is with an art of sounds, shapes, colors, flavors, that women dialogue with other women, even if inside a territory with routes and itineraries of over three thousand kilometers. The woman of the Settlement who produces her craft prepares a piece that will be worn by another woman who she does not even know or will know.

*Craft is our identity, that is why we have to teach it to children. It is when you are young, in child games, that we learn the craft from our mothers. I learned it from older women and now I teach the girls, the younger ones to make everything well made according to the traditions of my people. We have to teach how to search for seeds, feathers, embira<sup>24</sup>, all of it is in nature. It gives everything to us to make crafts. And when we see a seed, a feather we already think it could be a necklace or a bracelet.<sup>25</sup> (Artisan, Juína, 2023).*

*I'm always adjusting, creating. Nature gives me the elements to compose my life, my products, everything is manipulation of nature. We are part, we are beings of nature. So I only make the alchemy of nature being part of it<sup>26</sup>. (Micro-entrepreneur, Cuiabá, 2022).*

*A canvas is the portrait of a feeling. It is not a Brazil-nut tree, the river or the person, it is my interpretation, inspiration. And nature is what inspires me the most. Sometimes I look at a stone and see a house, I look at a net and see the smile of a person that could have eaten the fish. That is it. I look and see and imagine what has to be. The colors, traces, the brushes,*

<sup>23</sup> Quando eu cheguei aqui fomos morar na área que meu pai comprou. Era uma área pequena e não tinha nada. Só um barraco de lona preta e as coisas tudo amontoadas. Minha mãe cozinhava num fogão de barro que meu pai fez no chão. E não tinha água perto. Tinha que ir no rio buscar. Então a gente ia naquele rio pequeno e buscava água, lavava roupa e ia lá tomar banho. Um dia veio um moço lá e falou para meu pai não deixar mais as mulheres irem sozinhas no rio. Tinha uma onça que havia comido uma mulher ali pelas redondezas. Ficamos com muito medo. E minha mãe não deixou mais a gente ir se refrescar lá no rio.

<sup>24</sup> Embira is a type of tree common in Brazil, whose branches are commonly used in craft accessories.

<sup>25</sup> O artesanato é nossa identidade, por isso temos que ensinar para as crianças. É quando se é pequeno, nas brincadeiras que vamos aprendendo com nossas mães o artesanato. Eu aprendi com as mulheres mais velhas e agora eu ensino as meninas, as mais novas a fazer tudo bem feito conforme a tradição do meu povo. Tem que ensinar a buscar as sementes, as penas, a embira, tudo isso tem na natureza. Ela dá tudo isso para nós fazer artesanato. E quando a gente vê uma semente, uma pena já pensa que dá um colar ou uma pulseira.

<sup>26</sup> Estou sempre ajustando, criando. A natureza me dá os elementos para compor a minha vida, meus produtos, tudo é manipulação da natureza. Somos parte, somos seres da natureza. Então eu só faço a alquimia da natureza sendo parte dela.

*paints, and then I get a blank canvas and put in it only what my imagination saw*<sup>27</sup>. (Visual artist, Alta Floresta, 2021).

Belonging and identity are elements which consolidate the artistic production of the women who dialogue with nature to transfer their feelings. All interviewed women use nature as an anchor and wings to their activities, be that the woman who produces spirits in a rock mountain or the woman who distributes seeds so that the plant used in crafts does not cease from existing. Be that the woman who harvests seeds in the middle of the scorching cerrado or that who dreams of birds when she cries for a whole night for the death of her child and in the following day makes a bird out of a green coconut which has not developed yet. Be that any of them and all of them, portrayed by their own words, as carriers of this imaginary that portrays that which is beautiful without disregarding the pain which nobody sees.

Belonging to be a part of, to be included, united with something which ultimately represents that to which one is united by adhesion and not imposition. With this understanding, the possible reading in relation to the belonging of women cannot disregard that, even when dealing with women and their life histories which co-inhabit in a same state, there are different contexts in which they are subdivided in spaces of cities, settlements, indigenous settlements, *quilombos* and others. Thus, even if the dialogue with nature is translated by the term inspiration, the ways of seeing and believing are translated into rituals and words which access different dimensions.

This is partly due to the worldview and beliefs constructed by the culture in which these women were conceived, gestated and educated to reproduce the same education and prepare other women to continue to perform the same roles expected by society. One of the pivotal elements in the conception of the model of woman was produced by judaic-christian religions. Under this perspective, the docile, beautiful and demure woman shows up as a resigned and saintly figure who has no right to manifest herself nor even leave her inner "shrine", understood as her home, without the company of her husband. The Husband is, in turn, the man who is declared the protector and provider of the home so that the wife and children are safe, which on the other hand, grants him the control of everything.

This image of patriarchal traditional family is mixed into the image of god as a father (man) and who for the human being becomes son (man), made by a spirit which is holy (man), but who are created and carried out in the body of the woman. This does not mean that they understand there is a contribution of the female body, but that they may control this body and dispose of it to carry out their plans. It is up to the woman only the obligation of saying yes. It is under this model that the traditional brazilian family is conceived, based on the judaic-christian doctrine, which, due to its logic, can only be sexist, does not respect other cultures and even less the cultural manifestations such as indigenous culture or african culture.

The judaic-christian religious milestone is organized only through the exclusion of all other forms of worship and all forms of organization of life in community. These exclusions will affect the decisions which may reverberate and influence the lives of people and their behaviors, especially as it pertains to matters of sexuality and unions of couples, influencing people's decision of when to be united, how many children to bear, and also may define the type of union chosen by the spouses and the very choice of spouse (Berghammer, 2010).

A datum of this research is that even under all of the ways of imposing judaic-christian religious morality, because it was always imposed violently, especially on the body and life of the women, there is resistance and that this shows up on the reports of the black and indigenous women.

*I am now living here, I have my job, my house, my family. I live with Nature. Here there is much history, much culture, much nature as well. I love this place, it is beautiful, I was born and raised in this region. I like the waterfalls, the river, the trees. I like the transformations that happen in nature all around the year, there is a cycle of changes. Everything in life changes, I change, the river changes, the trees change, everything is transformed. I sing, I dance with the women, I speak to my ancestors. I go to parties, pray, study. But what I really*

<sup>27</sup> Uma tela é um retrato de um sentimento. Não é a castanheira, o rio ou a pessoa, é a minha interpretação, inspiração. E a natureza é o que mais inspira. As vezes olho para uma pedra e vejo uma casa, olho para uma rede e vejo o riso de uma pessoa que poderia ter comido o peixe. É isso. Eu olho e vejo o que eu imagino que tem que ser. As cores, os traços, os pinceis, as tintas e aí pego uma tela branca e coloco nela o que só minha imaginação viu.

*feel is that there is a story that is mine, of my ancestors, and I'm very proud of being who I am*<sup>28</sup>. (Quilombola, Vila Bela da Santíssima Trindade, 2023).

*I work as a teacher nowadays. I'm a teacher because I want to assure that the wisdoms of my people are present in the school contents. I wanted to teach about painting in school, but I was afraid of painting the wrong way. So my mom taught me where to start. She told me to make the outlines and then fill in, and went to practice with the children. It was so good that I wanted to know more about painting, which is our history, because and when we make it. My mom taught me everything. [...] At university it was hard because when I started to study I couldn't speak. I was really shy. Nowadays, not anymore, nowadays I speak and that's it. And where I go I speak of my culture, of the knowledge of my people*<sup>29</sup>. (Indigenous Leadership, Confresa, 2021).

The reference to ancestral knowledge and another worldview allows the people of the forest and the *terreiros*<sup>30</sup> to have another perspective of relating to and interacting with nature and consequently, another form of facing human existence. Under this perspective, women are understood as part of the cycles and knowledge and not only as supporting roles. Resistance is a form of facing the forces that invisibilize both cultural manifestations and other forms of conceiving life. Hence, the struggle against colonial power, against sexism, against the degradation of nature, is also a struggle against exclusion and invisibility.

Butler et al. (2016) state that one of the factors that most exclude from society is putting a vulnerable person or group under the condition of invisibility. This condition of vulnerability is in itself a deliberate exposition before power, for which is demanded great effort of political challenge. And for that to be configured as resistance, it is necessary to face subjectivation and the appearance of the body at the forefront.

The reports of the women who are part of this study are also a portrayal of this condition of vulnerability and resistance in a land which carries in its very name the meaning of being a "Mato" ("bush", "woods", or "wilderness"), adjectivized by a masculinized term which provokes and evokes strength, grandeur and intensity by virtue of being "Grosso" ("bulk" or "thick"). But it was not Mato Grosso which the men appropriated violently, but the "virgin forest", as if it were a land of nobody. But there is also the underlying meaning of being a land to be violated, because it is also a land with the bodies of indigenous women, of black women, and later of white women, who were also raped, mortified and finally, invisibilized.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

This writing here on the history of women, from the conception of the project, already demonstrated an act of scientific rebelliousness. It is very important to highlight how important it is to talk about the voices of women, even more so in a context of so much exploration and silencing of women. Besides that, this research's team was also composed of scientists, women and workers in this land devastated by sexist logic. For this reason, by ending this text, one can not refrain from imagining the many possibilities of studies which arise from this research, and it becomes necessary to remember the women with whom the research team met to look, listen, feel, reflect and write. They are women who suffered, who are workers, tired, happy and dreamers, who hope for better days and to live in a state which, despite everything, is now their home.

Each programmed trip, each meeting carried out in spaces chosen by them, each report in love with their productions, each tear swollen by hidden laughter in between teeth, each

<sup>28</sup> Eu agora estou vivendo aqui, tenho meu trabalho, minha casa, minha família. Eu vivo com a Natureza. Aqui tem muita história, muita cultura, muita natureza também, eu amo esse lugar, ele é lindo, eu nasci e cresci nesta região. Gosto das cachoeiras, do rio, das árvores. Eu gosto das transformações que acontecem na natureza durante o ano, tem um ciclo de mudanças. Tudo na vida muda, eu mudo, o rio muda, as árvores mudam, tudo se transforma. Eu canto, eu danço com as mulheres, eu falo com os meus ancestrais. Vou na festança, rezo, estudo. Mas o que eu sinto mesmo é que tem uma história que é minha, dos meus antepassados e eu tenho muito orgulho de ser quem eu sou

<sup>29</sup> Eu trabalho como professora hoje. Sou professora porque quero garantir que os saberes do meu povo estejam presentes nos conteúdos escolares. Eu queria ensinar sobre a pintura na escola, mas eu tinha medo de fazer a pintura de forma errada. Então minha mãe ensinou por onde começar. Ela disse para fazer os riscos primeiro e depois preencher, e eu fui praticar nas crianças. Foi tão bom que eu procurei saber mais sobre pintura, que é nossa história, porque e quando fazemos. Minha mãe ensinou tudo para mim. [...] Na universidade foi difícil porque quando eu comecei a estudar não conseguia falar. Eu era muito tímida. Hoje não, hoje eu falo e pronto. E onde vou falo da minha cultura, dos saberes do meu povo.

<sup>30</sup> Terreiros are the places where religions of African origin are practiced in Brazil.

gesture guided by the gaze which tried to find words, was registered in the memories of the team who participated in the data collection. And this information did not fit in the research's report, in the transcription of over 40 hours of recordings, nor will fit into this article or even in a book which may be produced.

It is not only of data, results or analyses that an ethnographic research is made of, but of looking, listening and feeling another, which may create many writings, however, there will always be something to be said because ethnographing is an act of resistance. It is giving life to words never before heard and registered. And thus, by considering the colonial context of the violent history of the state of Mato Grosso, as well as the other violences of multiple factors which marked the days of today, a study such as this is also a scream.

The bodies of the women, as well as the landscape, the rivers, were devastated by the logic of exploration. This logic was also conceived in the catholic discourses, in colonial times, and reaffirmed by protestants presently, both as discourse anchored in judaic-christian logic, which, as the moral foundation of colonization, is the certification seal of a perspective of a belief in which god is man, and nature, as a symbol for femininity, is to be explored. For this reason, bringing this research to completion, being able to listen to these women, being able to reach many districts, hearing people with stories and with other languages is also to insist that other voices, even if continuously oppressed, can say that in Mato Grosso not everything is soy.

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#### Authors contribution

All of the authors are members of the team of researchers who participated in the data collection and systematization and the writing of the reports and products. The submission of the projects was carried out by Professor Dr. Rosane Duarte Rosa Seluchinesk, who coordinated the project funded by Fapemat and coordinates the project funded by CNPq. Professor Dr. Rosane Duarte Seluchinesk develops researches on gender and environment in the state of Mato Grosso, work in the line of research on Education and Diversity of PPGEduc and was responsible for the elaboration of the project, identification and dialogue with the women and writing of the final report. Professor Dr. Adriano Batista Castorino acts in the field of Anthropology and has been responsible for the theoretical-methodological framework of the project based on the ethnography and photographic registers. Professor Master of Sciences Géssica Souza Lacerda finished her masters in PPGEduc with themes related to the role of teachers in environmental education and contributed to the writing with the knowledge of the women of the center-south region of Mato Grosso.

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