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Cyclic Agroecosystems under Threat by Neo-Extractivism: The Answers from Peasant Women

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Abstract

The current *feminisation* of agriculture, poverty and hunger relies as a contradictory problematic of the contemporary global food and economic systems announced by international agencies such as FAO and the World Bank. Mining mega-projects represent one of the activities playing a core role in the dynamics of the International Division of Labor. They cause escalating conflicts over land and natural resources in the named *developing countries*, many times impacting peasant livelihoods. In Latin America, this process has been called Neo-Extractivism, especially to discuss the boom

of mining and monocultures for exportation in the last decade. This paper analyses contrasting metabolic dynamics within environmental conflicts: the one from mining megaprojects and the one from peasant agriculture, discussing then the concepts of Food Sovereignty in the Neo-Extractivist context.

The case study focusses on the two locations most affected by the Minas-Rio mining megaproject in the Southeast Brazil. The territories are inhabited by communities holding traditional farming rationalities and sociabilities which are under threat and give important answers for sustainable food systems. Through participative observation during six months and interviews with 26 peasant women, the author analysed three pillars of Agroecology: ecological rationality, social-economic efficiency and agrobiodiversity, specifically by looking at elements of reproductive work, gender relations and sexual division of labour inside farming units. The results demonstrate that social reproduction of peasant agriculture under threat by extractive megaprojects is dependent on cyclic agroecosystems characterised by short circuits, cooperation and diversity. Those practices over food show specific gender relations which have been impacted by the linear metabolic dynamic of the mining megaproject. The second result is that mining megaprojects and agribusiness practices on land follow the same linear dynamics, what puts them both in the conceptualization of Neo-Extractivism. Additionally, the surveys indicate that peasant women in these affected territories represent potential responses to the Neo-Extractivist approach by re-creating farming and collective practices that question the global proposals to *end hunger* and suggest alternatives to peoples' food sovereignty through women's autonomy.

Keywords: Agroecosystems, food sovereignty, gender, neo-extractivism, peasant women