



## Insurgent pathways to people's sustainability in Brazil

### *Caminhos rebeldes para a sustentabilidade dos povos no Brasil*

Ferreira, J.; Felício, E. *Por terra e território: caminhos da revolução dos povos no Brasil*. Arataca: Editora Teia dos Povos, 1ª edição, 2021.

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This book, written by Joelson Ferreira and Erahsto Felício, inaugurates the first wave of autonomous publications from Teia dos Povos. In it, the authors present an empirical political program for the autonomy of people, primarily based on the reconquest of the Earth, life in the territories, and the protection of biomes. The book was released in February 2021, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. A year later, in February 2022, they released a second book: "A Escola da Reconquista" by Mestra Mayá – Maria Muniz, an indigenous teacher and descendant of the Tupinambá and Pataxó – Hã hã hã ethnicities from Southern Bahia. I consider it important to highlight these releases together as they are autonomous and autobiographical produc-

tions by these grassroots leaders, illustrating the conceptual value of these works and the capacity for collective social achievement of Teia dos Povos.

Teia dos Povos is a network of communities, self-managed territories, social movements, and supporters. It was founded in the first Agroecology Journey of Bahia in 2012, and in a parallel and convergent way, the Web of Traditional Peoples and Communities of Maranhão also emerged in the same year. Since its inception, Teia has inspired the creation of local networks in 11 other Brazilian states, namely: Bahia, Maranhão, Ceará, Pernambuco, Alagoas, Rondônia, Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Rio Grande do Sul, and Goiás-DF.

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From then on, the organization has promoted meetings, training actions, policies, and Agroecology Days in various territories throughout Brazil, uniting social movements and organizations of traditional peoples and communities, such as quilombolas, settlers, agrarian reform fighters, extractivists, indigenous peoples, fishermen, seafood restaurants, riverside dwellers, coastal and pasture villages, among others. The organized territories represent the core nuclei and provide the guiding principles for actions and struggles, while other organizations, collectives, movements, and de-territorialized individuals – referred to as "links" – cooperate in building the "Teia dos Povos" (web of peoples) Web of Peoples.

With the rebel motto "Peace among us, war against our masters" (p. 21) – inspired by a Malê teaching –, this coalition advocates for a "Great Black, Indigenous, and Popular Alliance" (p. 17) to promote and strengthen solidarity among diverse communities. Their common objectives include the struggle for land, territory, and agroecology, while respecting diversity, autonomy, traditional knowledge, and organizational methods. The intricate cover art of the book and the black-and-white illustrations by Iago Aragão at the beginning of each chapter perfectly encapsulate the imagery of the revolution proposed by authors Joelson Ferreira

de Oliveira and Erahsto Felício de Sousa, incorporating elements of nature, spirituality, and popular enchantments.

Master Joelson is a farmer, leader of his community, agrarian reform settler, former national director of the Landless Movement (MST), father, husband, grandfather, creator, and main spokesperson of the Teia dos Povos organization. In 2019, he earned the title of Doctor for Notório Saber – in Architecture and Urbanism – from the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG)<sup>1</sup>. Master Joelson is a landscape architect who imagined, planned, and executed transformations in his community, valuing local socio-biodiversity and ancestral knowledge. The Terra Vista Settlement in Arataca, Bahia – led by him – became a model 30 years after its foundation. It is currently a reference in agroecological transition, conservation, and restoration of the Atlantic Forest, with emphasis on the production and sale of "rebel chocolates" from bean to bar, the production of essential oils from native species, among other lines of action.

Erahsto Felício is a historian, master in history from the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), and professor of basic education at the Federal Institute of Bahia (IFBA), campus in the city of Valença. He is the father of two girls and a great thinker and organizer who worked in the communications di-

<sup>1</sup> Joelson Ferreira de Oliveira officially received the title of "Doutor por Notório Saber" from the Federal University of Minas Gerais in a solemn ceremony on October 17, 2022, in the city of Belo Horizonte - MG - Brasil. Along with 15 other masters of traditional knowledge and artists, five of them affiliated with the Teia dos Povos da Bahia, namely: "Cacique" (Chief) Nailton Muniz Pataxó; Mestre Mayá (Maria Muniz) - both from the Caramuru Paraguaçu Indigenous Land of the Pataxó Hã hã and Tupinambá ethnicity; Mestre Japira (Antônia Braz) - "Pajé" (Shaman) from the New Warriors village of the Pataxó ethnicity, and Chief Babau (Rosivaldo Ferreira da Silva) - a Tupinambá leader from the Serra do Padeiro village, all in the southern region of Ilhéus, Bahia, Brasil. The event is significant because it marks the first time a Brazilian federal university recognizes, at the doctoral level, other epistemologies and forms of thinking, philosophies, practices, and values. This paves the way for diverse knowledge to be formally included in the Brazilian public university through the teaching of these doctors. The action was coordinated by the Transversal Training Program in Traditional Knowledge (UFMG), in collaboration with the national network of the Encontro de Saberes of the University of Brasília (UnB), supported by the National Institute of Science and Technology – INCT (Carvalho & Vianna, 2020). For more information, please visit: <https://ufmg.br/comunicacao/noticias/ufmg-diploma-15-novos-doutores-por-notorio-saber> and <https://www.saberestradicionalis.org/> e <https://www.saberestradicionalis.org>

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vision of Teia dos Povos. Together with Joelson, he assumed the mission of systematizing the political project that has been built in this context and is now available in a very didactic way in this book.

In this book, the authors present strategic paths and practical tasks to achieve the autonomy of people and overcome the challenges imposed by the capitalist economic system. Rooted in what Quijano (2000) defines as the Colonial Matrix of Power (MCP), referring to the barbaric process of imposing Eurocentric hegemonic power over the Global South – derived from the brutal invasions during European maritime expansion over the territories of Abya Yala. What permeated the “new world” – now called America – with imperialism, colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy, racism, and other forms of oppression (Ferreira and Felício, 2021).

Ferreira and Felício (2021) argue that we, the people of this planet, will only achieve autonomy when we defend the earth, occupying the territory with forms of use and generation of wealth that respect the interdependencies between us living beings, interconnected to this great being called Earth. “Our people, organizations, movements, territories can only remain united in practice. Only if they are building another world will it be possible to maintain the alliance” (p. 49). For the authors, reflection without practice has no value. Therefore, they propose six fundamental paths towards “priority sovereignty” (others may emerge) that are detailed in practical actions and tasks capable of boosting the necessary steps to continue on the journey towards people's autonomy.

Therefore, the book – which has 13 chapters – in my opinion can be divided into four parts:

- In the first, the three initial chapters present the fundamentals: what “Teia dos Povos” (web of peoples) is, the meaning that the authors give to land and territory, the understanding of autonomy, and the temporal visions of the political struggle.

- The second part consists of seven chapters of a practical nature, indicating journeys, with suggestions for actions and concrete tasks in the fight; they start from the primordial need to search for the four sovereignties: water, food, pedagogical and energy. This also includes other essential dimensions, such as: self-defense strategies, work and income, care with militancy, appreciation of women, youth, ancestry, and spirituality, with due strategic and practical detail on each of them, carried out based on strengthening internal cooperation networks as opposed to paternalistic dependence on the State.

- The third part has a more “fine and spiritual” content (p. 25) and addresses the need for walks around caring for militancy, strengthening women’s participation, and defending a policy for managing differences in the construction of alliances. They also present the general foundations of people's relationship with faith, wisdom, ancestry, and spirituality, highlighting the influences – active and positive – of enchanted beings on several important dimensions for the construction of people's autonomy.

- Finally, the authors present reflections on the importance of union within differences, to strengthen the collective and lay bare political illusions – to confront the true enemy that is Imperialism, which has different guises – among them the Brazilian State, the latifundium, capitalism, colonialism, racism, patriarchy, among other oppressive faces.

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<sup>2</sup> In a dialogue between the author of the review and Mestre Joelson during the UFMG Knowledge Week (between October 17th and 21st, 2022, in the city of Belo Horizonte).

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With this structure, the authors fulfill their mission of indicating paths and strategies for people to achieve autonomy. They reflect on the historical trajectory of resistance and victories achieved in popular alliances of people in Brazilian territory (such as in the popular revolts of Palmares, Canudos, and Balaiada) and on the betrayals that occurred in alliances with the invaders holding hegemonic power (such as in the independence of Bahia, in the exploitation of indigenous labor in the colonial period, among others). These reflections go hand in hand with criticism of the State and the Brazilian institutional left, which tried its appeasing path – made of alliances with the elites –, without achieving significant victories for the people and their struggles in the territories, perpetuating a political legacy of genocide of the Afro-indigenous peoples of this country.

The historical response of the “Teia dos Povos” (web of peoples) to these lessons, and to the systemic crises we are currently experiencing, is the proposal of a “Great Black, Indigenous, and Popular Alliance, with all respect and reverence for our Mother Earth” (p. 17), uniting people from the bottom up, strengthening them to move towards their perspectives of autonomy, since “we want to be the sea because the sea is powerful, it is where all the rivers (struggles) meet. This is how we gain depth until we become a sea of struggle” (p. 38).

Autonomy is the most important word in the text and represents a multidimensional concept related to people's capacity for self-determination and self-management. For the authors, autonomy will only be achieved through presence on land and consequent action in the territory (through walks and tasks), considering that the foundations of this construction “are water, seeds, and food sovereign-

ty” (p. 47), with the ultimate goal of reaching the “decolonized territory of capitalism, racism, and patriarchy” (p. 45).

In the theoretical field, the cosmopolitical project (Pimentel, 2021) that is presented by “Teia dos Povos” (web of peoples) in this book converges with other perspectives that emerge within the scope of alternatives to development and/or post-development (Khotari *et al.*, 2021) as new sustainability paradigms and/or in response to sustainability that are gaining more and more space in academic debates. This is the case of decolonial narratives that take shape in Abya Yala and include perspectives such as Good Living, Agroecology, Permaculture, Community Feminism, among other knowledge from the south (Svampa, 2019). Such sciences, knowledge, and proposals are imbued with original and non-academic knowledge, anchored in worldviews that value the potential of nature, cultural creativity, emancipatory thinking, and ethics capable of renewing the meaning and sustainability of life (Leff, 2015).

The word sustainability appears in the text by Ferreira and Felício (2021) only once and refers to its economic dimension when mentioned in the chapter on work and income. This may initially demonstrate the authors' semantic lack of interest in this term, which – according to reflections by Joelson Ferreira himself<sup>2</sup> – gained social visibility due to capitalism's need to present answers to the negative socio-environmental consequences derived from its own mode of operation. In his words, “the term sustainability appears as a strategy of capitalism to continue degrading in disguise”. In fact, this term currently presents many concepts and definitions (sometimes contradictory), based on different values and interests (Nascimento, 2012).

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On the other hand, I notice convergences between the proposal for building autonomy that is presented by “Teia dos Povos” (web of peoples) and the academic dialogue on the direction of sustainability, especially given the reflections that I have been maturing during my doctorate at the Center for Sustainable Development (CDS) of the University from Brasília (UnB). I consider it interesting to bring a definition of the term sustainability, which was summarized by Nascimento (2012), as: a concept that evolved from biology (referring to the resilience capacity of ecosystems in the face of human aggression) and economics (related to resource management and promotion of social equity) to become a political field of dispute over the future of civilization.

When considering sustainability as a conceptual and sociopolitical field of dispute, in which we are immersed, it is opportune to critically reflect on the relevance of the experience and the political program presented in this book. And in the dissemination of the ideas contained therein, which have been and discussed collectively in different communities across the country (11 webs), as a perspective that can contribute to the autonomy of people in the territories. In my view, it is about building a vision or definition of “native and rebellious sustainability” based on life in Brazilian territories, contributing to theoretical reflections around the science of sustainability (under construction) and to practical propositions in terms of alternatives sustainable for the future of civilization (in dispute).

This is especially valid given the growing debate around the fundamental value of dialogue between academic and non-academic knowledge for the construction of transdisciplinary knowledge about sustainability (Lang, *et al.*, 2012).

With emphasis on the importance of considering local socio-ecological contexts and the integration of ethical, immaterial, and spiritual dimensions, which are based on plural knowledge, and capable of supporting the transition towards new, more sustainable territorialities.

In this context, the work “For Land and Territory: paths to the revolution of the people in Brazil” can be seen both as a valuable contribution for academics and scholars, and as a theoretical and practical contribution for anyone (territorialized or not) who wishes to walk actively – and collectively – towards autonomy and/or sustainability. “To build a world of celebration, work, and bread” (p. 71); signed in a “Great Black, Indigenous, and Popular Alliance, with all respect and reverence for our Mother Earth” (p. 17).

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