"BOOTS AND LIPSTICK: WOMEN WHO MAKE AGRICULTURE GO": THE PROTAGONISM OF RURAL WOMEN IN CONTEXTS OF INEQUALITY AND INNOVATION IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

"BOTINA E BATOM: MULHERES QUE FAZEM O AGRO ANDAR": O PROTAGONISMO DAS MULHERES RURAIS EM CONTEXTOS DE DESIGUALDADE E INOVAÇÃO NO CAMPO

"BOTAS Y LÁPIZ LABIAL: MUJERES QUE HACEN FLUIR LA AGRICULTURA": EL PROTAGONISMO DE LAS MUJERES RURALES EN CONTEXTOS DE DESIGUALDAD E INNOVACIÓN EN EL CAMPO

Tarciana Oliveira da Silva Aroeira[1]

ABSTRACT

This article investigates the strategies of resistance and identity repositioning adopted by women to ensure their permanence and leadership in the rural sector, a space historically marked by patriarchal structures and gender inequalities. Using a qualitative approach and in-depth interviews, the study identifies how these women face symbolic and structural barriers—such as technical discredit, the delegitimization of authority, and harassment—and construct their own forms of leadership. Data analysis reveals a sophisticated repertoire of everyday practices, including assertive positioning, identity camouflage, the reconfiguration of the female image, leadership in management, and the formation of support networks. These strategies engage with the theoretical contributions of Joan Acker, Judith Butler, Erving Goffman, and Gianpiero Petriglieri, demonstrating that female resistance is not limited to protest, but manifests itself as performative, relational, and transformative action. The study contributes to understanding the social mechanisms that sustain the "glass ceiling" in rural areas and points to ways to promote gender equity in agribusiness. It concludes that these female leaders, by transforming their identities and management practices, also reconfigure power dynamics in rural areas, promoting innovation, inclusion, and symbolic recognition.

Keywords: Women in Agriculture. Gender Inequality. Female Leadership.

RESUMO

Este artigo investiga as estratégias de resistência e reposicionamento identitário adotadas por mulheres para garantir sua permanência e liderança no setor rural, um espaço historicamente marcado por estruturas patriarcais e desigualdades de gênero. A partir de uma abordagem qualitativa, com base em entrevistas em profundidade, o estudo identifica como essas mulheres enfrentam barreiras simbólicas e estruturais — como o descrédito técnico, a deslegitimação da autoridade e o assédio — e constroem formas próprias de liderança. A análise dos dados revela um repertório sofisticado de práticas cotidianas, incluindo posicionamento assertivo, camuflagem identitária, reconfiguração da imagem feminina, protagonismo na gestão e formação de redes de apoio. Tais estratégias dialogam com os aportes teóricos de Joan Acker, Judith Butler, Erving Goffman e Gianpiero Petriglieri, evidenciando que a resistência feminina não se limita à contestação, mas se manifesta como

---

[1] Doctorate in Administration. FUCAPE Business School. E-mail: profatarciana@gmail.com

ação performativa, relacional e transformadora. O estudo contribui para a compreensão dos mecanismos sociais que sustentam o "teto de vidro" no campo e aponta caminhos para a promoção da equidade de gênero no agronegócio. Conclui-se que essas lideranças femininas, ao transformarem suas identidades e práticas de gestão, reconfiguram também as dinâmicas de poder no meio rural, promovendo inovação, inclusão e reconhecimento simbólico.

Palavras-chave: Mulheres no Agro. Desigualdade de Gênero. Liderança Feminina.

RESUMEN
Este artículo investiga las estrategias de resistencia y reposicionamiento identitario adoptadas por las mujeres para asegurar su permanencia y liderazgo en el sector rural, un espacio históricamente marcado por estructuras patriarcales y desigualdades de género. Mediante un enfoque cualitativo y entrevistas en profundidad, el estudio identifica cómo estas mujeres enfrentan barreras simbólicas y estructurales —como el descrédito técnico, la deslegitimación de la autoridad y el acoso— y construyen sus propias formas de liderazgo. El análisis de datos revela un complejo repertorio de prácticas cotidianas, que incluyen el posicionamiento asertivo, el camuflaje de la identidad, la reconfiguración de la imagen femenina, el liderazgo en la gestión y la formación de redes de apoyo. Estas estrategias se vinculan con las contribuciones teóricas de Joan Acker, Judith Butler, Erving Goffman y Gianpiero Petriglieri, demostrando que la resistencia femenina no se limita a la protesta, sino que se manifiesta como acción performativa, relacional y transformadora. El estudio contribuye a la comprensión de los mecanismos sociales que sustentan el "techo de cristal" en las zonas rurales y señala maneras de promover la equidad de género en la agroindustria. Se concluye que estas líderes, al transformar sus identidades y prácticas de gestión, también reconfiguran las dinámicas de poder en las zonas rurales, promoviendo la innovación, la inclusión y el reconocimiento simbólico.

Palabras clave: Mujeres en la Agricultura. Desigualdad de Género. Liderazgo Femenino.

1 INTRODUCTION

This article explores the multifaceted roles of rural women, examining how their agency is shaped by intersectional forces of inequality and the potential for innovation in agricultural and socioeconomic settings. Despite their crucial contributions to food security, poverty eradication, and family well-being, rural women often face significant challenges stemming from gender stereotypes and systemic discrimination that impede equitable access to opportunities, resources, goods, and services (Mohapatra et al., 2020). This analysis will delve into how these disparities manifest themselves, particularly in access to land and financial support, while highlighting the innovative strategies that rural women employ to overcome these obstacles and promote development in their communities (Masuku et al., 2023). These challenges often include a lack of stable employment opportunities, variable incomes linked to agriculture and livestock, low educational attainment, and exclusion from decision-making processes (Vallejo & Kerchis, 2019). Their roles often remain unrecognized due to cultural norms that privilege male contributions, obscuring women's vital involvement in agricultural systems and decision-making processes (Farnworth et al., 2020). The persistent marginalization of rural women is further exacerbated by their limited access to agricultural resources and the disproportionate impact they have on gender roles on water accessibility and management (Ali et al., 2019) (Kevany & Huisingh, 2013).

The female presence in the Brazilian rural sector, although growing, is still marked by significant symbolic and structural barriers that limit the recognition and ascension of women to leadership positions. In this context, the research problem that guides the present study emerges: **what strategies of resistance and identity repositioning are adopted by women to ensure their permanence and leadership in the rural sector?** In view of this issue, the general objective is to **investigate such strategies in the light of the contexts of exclusion, inequality and gender stigmatization**, which permeate the trajectories of these women. To this end, the specific objectives propose: **(i)** to map the main contexts of inequality faced by rural women, especially with regard to barriers to permanence and leadership; **(ii)** analyze the daily practices of resistance that aim to legitimize their competences and authority in masculinized spaces; **(iii)** to investigate the processes of identity repositioning, observing how practices of camouflage, adaptation, and resignification are mobilized in the construction of new social and gender roles; and **(iv)** to understand how these strategies contribute to the consolidation of women's leadership styles, capable of promoting innovation, inclusion, and reconfiguration of power dynamics in the field.

Agribusiness is one of the most relevant sectors of the Brazilian economy, but it still reproduces historical inequalities in terms of the presence and recognition of women in leadership positions. Despite the advances in female insertion in rural areas, the permanence and ascension of these women continue to be crossed by symbolic and structural barriers that hinder their full performance in decision-making spaces. In this context, investigating the **strategies of resistance and identity repositioning** adopted by women in the rural sector is essential to understand how they have transformed the ways of leading, resisting and innovating in traditionally male environments. The social relevance of the research lies in valuing women's experiences and making visible their contributions to sustainability and equity in the field. From an academic perspective, the study broadens the debate on gender and power, incorporating intersectional and Latin American perspectives on leadership and resistance. In practical terms, the results can subsidize public policies, training programs, and institutional actions that are more sensitive to gender dynamics in rural areas, contributing to a more inclusive, innovative, and fair agribusiness.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review synthesizes existing research on the socioeconomic contributions of rural women, critically analyzing the theoretical frameworks that explain their limited participation in formal economic sectors and their resilience in the face of systemic marginalization.

A recurring theme in several studies indicates that rural women, especially in developing countries, face marked discrimination in relation to employment, access to social and productive resources, education, health status and family decision-making (Aderinto, 2001). This systematic disadvantage significantly restricts their autonomy and potential for economic empowerment, often trapping them in cycles of poverty (Singh, 2021). This is further compounded by their increased vulnerability to chronic food insecurity and the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on their livelihoods, particularly in natural resource-dependent regions (Njuki et al., 2022) (Saeed et al., 2021). These structural limitations are deeply rooted in patriarchal practices prevalent in many societies, which restrict women's access to land ownership, control over broader food value chains, and participation in market activities (Synnestvedt et al., 2025). Such restrictions not only decrease their productivity but also impede the overall development of agricultural sectors and rural economies (Ashagidigbi et al., 2022). The gendered division of labor, often

___

Expanded Science: Innovation and Research
"BOOTS AND LIPSTICK: WOMEN WHO MAKE AGRICULTURE GO": THE PROTAGONISM OF RURAL WOMEN IN CONTEXTS OF INEQUALITY AND INNOVATION IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

relegating women to unpaid or low-paid agricultural activities, perpetuates their economic invisibility and limits their ability to accumulate capital or achieve financial independence (Sethi, 1992) (Dhingra & Sharma, 2021). In addition, the design of agricultural tools, particularly for male farmers, often leaves rural women reliant on traditional and less efficient methods, leading to reduced productivity, increased physical load, and reduced income (Majumder & Shah, 2017).

This disparity in access to essential resources such as credit, information, and agricultural services significantly limits their autonomy both within their families and in their communities (Huyer et al., 2024). Despite their deep involvement in sectors such as water, agriculture, livestock, forestry, and fisheries, women often face systematic exclusion from the equitable distribution of benefits derived from natural resources (Upadhyay, 2005). In addition, prevailing sociocultural norms and beliefs often disadvantage women, compounding their challenges by limiting their ownership of economic resources such as land, labor, and capital (Ngong et al., 2025). This systemic disadvantage contributes to women farmers being 20% to 30% less productive than their male counterparts, mainly due to insufficient access to information and knowledge (Kamala et al., 2019). In addition, women are often not recognized as women farmers despite their significant contributions, which leads to a lack of knowledge transfer and declining agricultural engagement among the younger female generation, although this trend has seen some reversal due to recent global events (Jarial & Sachan, 2021). However, active policies that explicitly support women's access and participation, rather than just general access, are crucial to eliminate these persistent gender disparities and achieve substantial gains in land productivity and overall agricultural production (Croppenstedt et al., 2013). However, women farmers generally have lower production per unit of land and are less likely to engage in commercial farming than their male counterparts, a disparity widely attributed to gender differences in access to crucial inputs, resources, and services (Croppenstedt et al., 2013). Meanwhile, disadvantaged communities often allocate a substantial portion of their monthly income, approximately 62.76%, to livelihoods, with women disproportionately represented in the informal agricultural workforce (Abidin & Prasetyani, 2021). This often results in women receiving 10% to 20% less in wages for the same work as men, further deepening their economic vulnerability (Weerakoon & Motebennur, 2017). This is further complicated by social norms that often force women to perform time-consuming tasks such as collecting water and firewood, often in hazardous conditions, thereby increasing their exposure to climate-related vulnerabilities (Singer, 2018).

This productivity disparity is further evidenced by a 23.4% gender differential in agricultural productivity, favoring male land managers, with a significant share attributable to unequal access to resources and variable returns to productive inputs (Aguilar et al., 2015).

This disparity is further compounded by significant challenges in land acquisition, where women farmers consistently face more formidable obstacles than their male counterparts (Ahmed & Fasilat, 2020). This is especially true in contexts where customary laws or cultural norms restrict women's land ownership or inheritance rights.

This exclusion significantly limits the effectiveness of conservation efforts and development initiatives, underscoring the need to integrate gender perspectives into environmental policies and practices to achieve truly sustainable outcomes (Thomas-Slayter & Sodikoff, 2001). Their deep knowledge of local ecosystems, often stemming from generations of agricultural practices and resource management, positions them as key innovators in developing sustainable solutions to environmental challenges (Olayta & Dy, 2021). This traditional, often neglected ecological knowledge, when combined with contemporary scientific approaches, has immense potential to promote resilience and sustainability in rural communities (Upadhyay, 2005). Despite this, rural women have been largely excluded from contemporary approaches to natural resource management, which are often dominated by government agencies, thus limiting the potential for more inclusive and effective conservation strategies (Torre-Castro, 2019). This exclusion can be attributed to the historical underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in these agencies, despite their significant involvement as natural resource managers and their vital contributions to global food production (Shinbrot et al., 2019) (Torre-Castro, 2019). Such oversight not only marginalizes a critical demographic, but also deprives environmental governance of valuable insights and practical expertise essential for effective and equitable resource management (Chukwu, 2014). Consequently, there is an urgent need to integrate women's perspectives and knowledge at all levels of natural resource management to ensure more holistic and sustainable outcomes (Davidson, 2001). Such integration would recognize their significant roles in agricultural food chains and enable them to influence conservation and sustainability practices, especially if armed with knowledge in natural resource management (Francis & Ibim, 2011). In addition, addressing the issue of women's access to and control of resources is critical, as this aspect is often overlooked in both academic literature and policy discussions, despite its direct impact on their ability to engage in sustainable resource management (Egenhofer et al., 1994). This neglect further exacerbates existing inequalities

and makes it difficult to fully realize women's potential as agents of change in rural development and environmental management (Glazebrook & Opoku, 2020). This often results in women being systematically disadvantaged in terms of access to resources, decision-making power, and overall power relations, despite their critical role in natural resource management (Molden et al., 2014). This systemic marginalization underscores the crucial importance of a gender-sensitive approach to rural development, one that actively seeks to dismantle these barriers and promote equitable access to resources and decision-making platforms for women. This is especially pertinent given that women contribute significantly to agricultural production, often representing a substantial portion of the workforce in this sector (Ashagidigbi et al., 2022).

Recognizing their fundamental role requires a concerted effort to include women in governance and decision-making processes, as their exclusion has historically hindered the effective management of resources (Torre et al., 2019). This often extends to their limited involvement in formal farmer organisations, which can inadvertently reinforce existing gender disparities in agricultural development initiatives (Centrone et al., 2017). The integration of women in strategic planning and capacity development is crucial to achieving greater gender equality, particularly in sectors such as fisheries, where they play a key role in development and production (Harper et al., 2012). This highlights the need for policies and programs that address the systemic barriers that prevent women's equitable access to and control over resources, thereby increasing their capacity to contribute to sustainable rural development (Manoa, 2017). This is crucial not only for women's empowerment but also for optimizing the effectiveness of development interventions by leveraging their unique knowledge and perspectives (Ramoroka, 2014). This underscores the need to move beyond gender-neutral policies towards a gender-sensitive framework that directly recognizes and addresses these disparities (Куцмус & Kovalchuk, 2020). Such frameworks should consider how gender relations influence rural households' livelihoods and their ability to adopt sustainable practices, recognizing that neglecting these dynamics can lead to significant environmental and social losses (Parks et al., 2014).

To conclude, this literature review shows that the marginalization of rural women is sustained by a complex web of structural, symbolic, and institutional factors, which operate simultaneously in the economic, social, and environmental spheres. Although its role is fundamental for agricultural production, food security and the sustainability of local ecosystems, its contribution remains systematically invisible and devalued. Recognizing the

role of women in natural resource governance and production systems requires intersectional and gender-sensitive policies that go beyond formal access and promote real transformations in power relations and decision-making structures. Therefore, overcoming gender inequalities in the countryside is not only a matter of social justice, but an essential condition for sustainable, inclusive and resilient rural development.

3 METHOD

In order to fulfill the objective of this study, the Grounded Theory methodology was applied (Charmaz, 2009). Therefore, we will carry out a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews. Next, we present the precepts that characterize a theory based on data, the criteria for obtaining the initial sample, the approach to data collection and the stages of analysis and subsequent data collection. The nature of the research is primary data, collected from the answers to the questionnaire and discussions in interviews.

The main variables of the study are age, gender, level of education, marital status, access to extension, access to credit, affiliation to a farmer and perception of agriculture. Analyzing women's engagement in agribusiness; perceptions of women in the agricultural sector; pull and push factors women's involvement; socioeconomic factors on women's participation in agribusiness.

The dependent variable of this study is related to women's participation in agribusiness and the main indicators that inform their perceptions in relation to the agricultural sector. The independent variables that make up the environment are connected to women's participation by a perception of gender in agribusiness.

Appropriate techniques for analyzing research data, according to the data generated, will be by structural equation modeling. To respond to the objectives proposed by the article, the Ordinary Least Squares Method was initially considered with the model, which provides for estimating the effect of the environment.

Table 1

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol	
1.	What is your name?
2.	How old are you?
3.	Where do you live (City – State) ?
4.	How do you identify in terms of gender – what is your gender identity?
5.	What is your breed?
6.	What is your marital status?

7.	Do you have children? If yes. How many?
8.	What is your education – educational level?
9.	How was your insertion in agribusiness?
10.	What motivated you to take over the management of your family's rural property?
11.	How was the process of transition or succession of management within your family?
12.	Did you encounter any barriers?
13.	If yes. Which main ones did you find?
14.	Would you like to report anything else?

Source: Prepared by the authors

The interview protocol used in this research was designed with the objective of understanding the trajectories, motivations and challenges faced by women who work on rural properties, with special attention to gender issues. The script was structured in two parts: the first, with identification questions, sought to outline the profile of the participants through information such as name, age, place of residence, gender identity, race, marital status, number of children and level of education. The second part addressed qualitative aspects of the interviewees' experience, with questions focused on insertion in agribusiness, motivations to take over the management of the property, barriers faced and strategies adopted to overcome them. At the end, a space was reserved for the participants to freely share other information they considered relevant. This protocol made it possible to collect rich and contextualized data, which are fundamental for the analysis of gender inequalities in the agricultural sector.

The duration of the interviews with 21 participants lasted between 50 and 70 minutes, with emphasis on interview 10, which reached the longest time, close to 75 minutes. The shortest duration was interview 1, with about 30 minutes. A considerable variation in times is observed, indicating that the interviews did not follow a rigid pattern of time.

4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

This chapter presents and interprets the data obtained throughout the research, seeking to understand the experiences, perceptions and strategies of the participants in the context of Brazilian agribusiness. From the collected responses, aspects such as the paths of insertion of women in rural activity, the challenges faced in the management of properties and the mechanisms of resistance and affirmation in an environment historically marked by patriarchal structures are explored. This section aims, therefore, to connect the empirical findings with the research objectives and with the theoretical references previously discussed, offering a critical and in-depth reading of the narratives and data collected,

focusing on the construction of meanings and the contribution to the debate on gender in rural areas.

The analysis of the data presented reveals that all the participants of the research (21 respondents) identify with the female gender and have a heterosexual orientation, representing 100% in both categories. This homogeneous profile may indicate a specific sample cut, which limits the diversity of perspectives regarding gender and sexuality. Although the data are consistent with the research focus on women in agribusiness, it is important to recognize that the absence of diversity can restrict the understanding of other experiences in the field, especially those lived by women with diverse sexual orientations or by people of different gender identities. This finding highlights the need to broaden the scope of future investigations to contemplate the plurality that exists in Brazilian rural areas.

The interpretation of the data referring to the color-race variable demonstrates a significant predominance of white women among the research participants, corresponding to approximately 70% of the total. In contrast, brown and black women each represent about 15% of the sample. This distribution reveals a significant racial inequality in the profile of the respondents, suggesting that black women (black and brown) still face greater barriers to access or permanence in leadership spaces in agribusiness. The underrepresentation of black women may be indicative of historical processes of exclusion and of a racial profile that crosses gender inequalities in the countryside, reinforcing the importance of intersectional analyses in discussions about equity and social justice in rural areas.

The analysis of the data related to the marital status of the participants reveals that the expressive majority of the women interviewed are married, representing approximately 80% of the sample. Single women account for about 20 percent, while the divorced group is significantly lower, at less than 5 percent. This profile suggests that, in the context of agribusiness, female management or performance in rural properties may often be associated with the traditional family configuration. The predominance of married women may indicate both the continuity of activities inherited through family nuclei and the importance of marital relations in the social and economic legitimation of the female presence in the countryside. At the same time, the low representation of divorced women may reflect additional social barriers faced by those who do not fit into traditional family models.

The exploration of the data obtained on the number of children of the participants indicates that most have two children, representing more than 40% of the sample. Next, about 28% of women have one child, while approximately 20% do not have children and a smaller

portion, around 10%, have three children. This distribution suggests that motherhood is significantly present in the trajectory of women working in agribusiness, but with a predominance of families with a reduced number of children. The data may also reflect a trend towards reconciliation between motherhood and professional life in the countryside, as well as possible transformations in family models and reproductive decisions of these women, especially in the face of the challenges of managing properties and dealing with the demands of rural work.

The analysis of the age distribution of the participants reveals a predominance of women between 40 and 70 years old, with a significant concentration between 50 and 65 years old. The data show a slight variation throughout the sample, but indicate that most of the women involved in the management of rural properties belong to a mature generation, with extensive life experience and, possibly, a long trajectory in the context of agribusiness. There is also a punctual presence of women in younger age groups, which may signal the beginning of a generational renewal in the countryside. These results reinforce the importance of considering age as a relevant factor in the analysis of management practices, family succession and resistance strategies adopted by women in rural areas.

The analysis of the data by federative unit shows that most of the survey participants are concentrated in the state of Maranhão (MA), which represents about 34% of the total sample. Next, the states of Minas Gerais (MG) and Bahia (BA) appear with similar shares, around 19% each. The other states — Acre (AC), Santa Catarina (SC), Mato Grosso (MT), São Paulo (SP) and Goiás (GO) — have more modest representations, ranging between 5% and 9%. This distribution indicates a strong presence of women from the Northeast and Southeast in the study, which may be related to greater visibility, organization, or institutional support for women's participation in agribusiness in these states. At the same time, the data suggest the need to expand the geographic reach of future research, in order to include more diverse realities and offer a more comprehensive view of female participation in the Brazilian field.

The analysis of the data on the types of companies in which the participants work reveals a marked predominance of the performance in family enterprises, which represent about 78% of the sample. In contrast, shares in owned, private or public companies appear in a very small form, each with a stake of less than 10%. This scenario reinforces the centrality of family farming in the profile of the women interviewed, indicating that their trajectories are strongly linked to contexts of succession or continuity of inherited rural businesses. The low

presence in private or public companies may reflect both the vocation of the public investigated and structural barriers to female insertion in more institutionalized or corporate sectors of agribusiness. These data reiterate the importance of policies to support women in rural areas, especially in strengthening management and autonomy within family businesses.

The analysis of the data regarding the educational background of the participants reveals a highly qualified profile. Most have an undergraduate degree (about 33%), followed by specialization and master's degrees, both with approximately 18%, which demonstrates a continuous investment in academic training. Technical education also appears significantly, representing about 14% of the interviewees. On the other hand, there is a low incidence of women with only elementary or secondary education, as well as a doctorate, each with less than 10% of representation. These data indicate that most of the women working in agribusiness surveyed have a high level of education, which may be related to the increase in the professionalization of rural management and the strengthening of female protagonism in the sector. This profile highlights the relevance of access to education as a strategic factor for the autonomy, qualification and insertion of women in leadership positions in the field.

The insertion of women in traditionally masculinized spaces, such as the rural sector, occurs in the midst of multiple layers of cultural, symbolic, and structural resistance. Before they can even assert their leadership, many of these women face obstacles ranging from denial of their authority to subtle forms of invisibility. Understanding these initial barriers is essential to contextualize the strategies of resistance and identity repositioning that emerge throughout their trajectories. Next, reports are presented that illustrate the mechanisms of exclusion and inequality that cross their experiences and delimit gender boundaries in the field.

4.1 BARRIERS TO ENTRY AND CONTEXTS OF INEQUALITY IN THE RURAL SECTOR

The interviewees' statements reveal a social field permeated by symbolic and structural barriers that shape the experience of women in the rural sector, both in access and permanence in leadership and management spaces. These barriers, sometimes subtle, operate through cultural codes that attribute to women a secondary social place and contest their legitimacy in the command of properties or in the conduct of agricultural business. As Joan Acker (1990) theorized, organizations and productive structures are gendered, that is, they produce and reproduce gender inequalities by naturalizing male standards as a normative model of competence and authority.

The perception of technical inferiority, combined with the denial of social recognition, is illustrated in the statement: "*When I bought the tractor, they didn't even show me the products, they thought I didn't understand*." This episode exposes what Pierre Bourdieu (1999) called **symbolic violence**, that is, forms of domination that operate invisibly and silently, keeping women on the margins of technical credibility in rural areas. The generalized distrust, especially at the beginning of the trajectory, is summarized by the interviewee when she states: "*At first I was a little insecure, so people sometimes didn't even want to talk to me much, they preferred to wait for my husband to arrive, and not today*." In this statement, the articulation between subjective insecurity and collective discredit is noted, where the absence of men reinforces the symbolic erasure of the female figure as a legitimate interlocutor.

These barriers are also manifested in an explicit and relational way, as evidenced in the statement: "*Buyer has already come down from the corral saying that he would not negotiate with me [...] After talking to my husband, he called me and started negotiating again*." This posture translates the functioning of the **symbolic gender hierarchies** described by Joan Scott (1995), in which power is structured based on cultural binarisms that associate the masculine with rationality and leadership, and the feminine with emotionality and decision-making incapacity. The very presence of women in traditionally masculinized spaces, such as the corral or commercial negotiations, is constantly challenged, which requires a redoubled effort to validate their authority.

Gender prejudice also prohibits access to institutional opportunities, as attested by the statement: "*It was clear that I did not get the job because I was a woman*." This type of exclusion is part of what Sardenberg (2009) conceptualizes as **injustices of recognition**, in which attributes such as sex, race or territorial origin are used as markers for symbolic disqualification, regardless of the woman's competence or education.

The same applies to family tensions, as the interviewee points out: "*The hardest part was the non-acceptance of my father*." Here, the field of gender disputes goes beyond the public space and is inscribed in the domestic environment, reproducing internalized patriarchal relations that disallow women even within the family and patrimonial succession.

In addition, the resistance of subordinates to female authority is a clear expression of the rejection of leadership exercised by women. The decision to fire an employee who did not accept orders, as reported in "*I had to send a cowboy away for not accepting orders from me*", reveals a direct clash with the limits imposed on women's performance in command positions. Such events not only reiterate structural machismo in rural areas, but also configure

the backdrop against which strategies of resistance and identity repositioning will be triggered. As Butler (1990) observes, gender identity is performative and continuously negotiated: in this scenario, daily confrontation is transformed into a survival tactic and a form of symbolic reconstruction of women's place in the countryside.

Finally, the reports of "*harassment in the field and a feeling of vulnerability for being a woman and living on the farm*" evoke the physical and emotional risks that many women face due to their gender condition. Vulnerability, here, is not limited to the symbolic dimension, but crosses the body and everyday experience, evidencing how much the rural space can still constitute a territory hostile to female autonomy. These experiences confirm the need to rethink power structures and social practices in the countryside, recognizing that the barriers to entry faced by women are not only technical or legal, but deeply cultural, affective, and structural.

4.2 FROM SILENCING TO AUTONOMY: STRATEGIES OF PERMANENCE AND IDENTITY REPOSITIONING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

Women's trajectories in the rural sector reveal a sophisticated set of strategies of resistance and identity repositioning, mobilized by women who face contexts of symbolic and structural exclusion. Such strategies are not restricted to explicit contestation, but are manifested on a daily basis, in gestures of affirmation, in identity displacements and in the creation of support networks, configuring a subtle but profoundly transformative field of political action (Scott, 1995; Hollander & Einwohner, 2004).

4.3 ASSERTION OF PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE AND AUTHORITY

One of the most recurrent strategies consists of the affirmation of competence as an instrument of legitimation of authority in traditionally masculinized spaces. The statement "*things improved after I stopped being victimized and started to position myself*" explains a change in posture that transcends the individual level and refers to the reconfiguration of gender norms in rural areas. By declaring "*I showed that I understood the subject in order to be respected*", the interviewee activates what Joan Acker (1990) conceptualizes as the struggle for legitimacy in organizational structures marked by masculine standards of rationality and command. The repositioning also materializes in the occupation of the negotiating space, previously delegated to her husband: "*when it was time to negotiate, I*

passed it on to my husband... then I also took over the negotiations", which suggests a progressive appropriation of decision-making spaces.

4.4 PERSISTENCE AND COPING WITH MACHISMO

Resistance often presents itself in the form of direct confrontation with institutionalized machismo, as in the episode narrated: "*the buyer has already come down from the corral saying that he would not negotiate with me [...] Then he called me and went back to negotiating.*" Female persistence in maintaining a position of leadership, even in the face of explicit rejection, configures a form of performative resistance, as theorized by Judith Butler (1990), by subverting normative gender expectations based on the repetition and resignification of acts.

4.5 SUPPORT NETWORKS AND STRATEGIC ALLIANCES

The creation of support networks emerges as another relevant tactic: "*I started looking for partnerships, I started making neighbors*" and "*support network with other women*". Such alliances, horizontal and interdependent, offer symbolic and operational support to the strategies of permanence, revealing that collective action, even informal, operates as a counterstructure to the mechanisms of exclusion.

4.6 IDENTITY REPOSITIONING AND STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE

The narratives also point to the mobilization of contextually adaptive identity strategies. Many interviewees report alternating between postures traditionally attributed to men and women, as shown in the statement: "*we, being women, have to stubble a little higher than men*". This strategic transition refers to the notion of *identity repositioning* developed by Petrieglieri (2011), according to which socially minority subjects adjust their public performances to avoid symbolic delegitimization. The conscious choice to leave "*the sweet side*" to adopt a firmer stance, or the decision to "*use the language of the environment to gain respect*", evidence the articulation between identity and survival in hostile contexts.

4.7 RESIGNIFICATION OF THE FEMALE ROLE IN AGRICULTURE

By claiming titles such as "*being called 'Dona' is a sign of respect*" or by stating that "*over time, people have understood that education is not synonymous with ignorance about the business*", the women interviewed reconfigure the symbol of femininity in the field,

attributing to it values of competence, management and leadership. This reveals a movement of resignification that subverts the place socially reserved for women, historically restricted to the private space or care activities, and reinvents it within the productive and institutional logic of agribusiness.

4.8 RESILIENCE AND RECONFIGURATION OF THE SOCIAL ROLE

Resilience is also linked to self-validation: "*I was getting stronger, because I knew how to do it*" and "*I always had to prepare myself more to validate my presence*". Such expressions reaffirm the importance of *subjective agency* in the face of oppressive structures. The statement "*if I don't take my place, someone else will*" synthesizes the imperative to act, at the risk of erasure, and is close to the Weberian idea of leadership as a responsibility incorporated in contexts that require it (Weber, 2004).

4.9 LEADERSHIP STYLE AS IDENTITY REPOSITIONING

The alternation between sensitivity and firmness, as in "*I learned to be firm without ceasing to be sensitive*", reinforces the idea that female leadership in the rural sector is not reduced to an adaptation to the dominant male style, but rather to its own identity construction, relational and situated. By stating that "*I often did not see myself as a leader, but I discovered that I was*", the interviewee translates into words the process described by Butler (1990) as performative in which identity is constituted from repeated practice.

The voices of the interviewees show that, more than passively resisting, rural women act as agents of transformation. They build strategies that combine coping, repositioning and resignification of roles, sustaining their presence in traditionally excluding spaces. These practices challenge the naturalization of gender inequalities and broaden the horizons of female leadership and legitimacy in the rural sector, thus transforming the symbolic and institutional dynamics that have historically shaped the countryside as a male territory.

The analytical set presented under the title *From Silencing to Autonomy* responds in a direct and substantial way to the research problem — what strategies of resistance and identity repositioning are adopted by women to ensure their permanence and leadership in the rural sector — by revealing a complex repertoire of identity actions and repositioning that challenge the exclusionary structures of agribusiness. By articulating practices of affirmation of authority, daily confrontation of machismo, construction of support networks and symbolic resignification of the female role, the text also fulfills the general objective of the research by

investigating these strategies in the light of the contexts of exclusion, inequality and stigmatization of gender. The statements of the interviewees, integrated with the theoretical analysis of authors such as Joan Scott (1995), Judith Butler (1990), Joan Acker (1990) and Petriglieri (2011), demonstrate that such strategies are not limited to the adaptation to hostile structures, but operate as forms of active reconfiguration of identity, leadership and power relations in the countryside. With this, the study highlights the ability of these women to remain in rural spaces not only as survivors, but as protagonists of processes of symbolic and institutional transformation.

4.10 PATHS TRACED BY THEM: WOMEN'S STRATEGIES FOR EQUITY IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

The trajectory of women in the rural sector reveals the articulation of a plural and sophisticated repertoire of strategies of resistance and identity repositioning. Faced with a historically masculinized environment, marked by symbolic hierarchies and structural barriers (Acker, 1990; Scott, 1995), the interviewees construct their own ways of asserting themselves, legitimizing and leading. This movement, deeply rooted in everyday life, destabilizes gender normativities through performative practices (Butler, 1990) and strategic interactions (Goffman, 1967).

Among these strategies, **a firm position and assertive communication stand out**, evidenced in statements such as: "Things improved after I stopped being victimized and started to take a stand." and "Those who don't take a stand are positioned." Such expressions show a shift from the passive role traditionally attributed to women to an active and deliberate posture of confrontation, operating according to the logic of "impression management" (Goffman, 1967) and performative resistance (Butler, 1990).

Another recurring strategic axis is the **demonstration of technical and practical competence**, which appears in statements such as: "I started to show technical knowledge, to study more, and I gained respect." and "I went to Bahia, I was the only woman in the field among 150 men [...] I managed to impose myself, to show that I understood the subject." These statements illustrate the centrality of knowledge and rationality as criteria of legitimacy in rural spaces — a finding in line with Acker's (1990) argument about the masculinization of valued competencies in organizational environments.

The **symbolic reconfiguration of the female image** also presents itself as an adaptive response to the symbolic risks faced in everyday life: "We take the greatest care of

---

clothes. There will always be one or the other with an extra look." and "Even with what you will eat in the fields... so as not to generate any more thoughts." Such strategies point to what Petriglieri (2011) calls "identity camouflage" — a form of self management that seeks to minimize exposure to stigmas and vulnerabilities.

Active **participation in the routine of the farm and in the management of the business** emerges as a concrete form of resistance and consolidation of authority. Examples such as: "Today everyone already has the figure of Dona Tati, they already know who I am and what I solve." and "I transformed the farm into a company. I took over the administrative part." reflect a protagonism rooted in practice, close to the notion of situated agency proposed by Emirbayer and Mische (1998).

The **claim for symbolic recognition**, in turn, articulates past, trajectory and gender identity. By saying "I like to be called Dona Tatiana." or "I introduce myself, I tell a little of my story [...] to show that I have time of experience.", the interviewees exercise what Butler (1997) understands as performative power — the ability to name and reposition oneself socially through language.

Finally, the **creation of support networks and strategic alliances** reveals itself as an important collective and relational resource: "Support network with other women." and "I seek support from those who believe in my ability." The construction of these networks can be understood as a type of social capital of resistance (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004), fundamental to sustain trajectories in adverse contexts.

Thus, the analyzed statements demonstrate that women's strategies in the rural sector go beyond passive adaptation to existing structures. They constitute deliberate, creative, and relational actions that challenge norms, reconfigure spaces, and expand possibilities for equity and innovation in the field.

As a conclusion of the section *Paths traced by them*, it is possible to state that the feminine strategies identified in this study not only challenge the mechanisms of exclusion historically naturalized in rural areas, but also produce new forms of female presence, authority and leadership. By taking a firm stand, demonstrating competence, adapting their image, taking over management, claiming symbolic recognition and building support networks, these women articulate practices of resistance that resignify the role of gender in the countryside. Such actions configure agency movements that, although situated in adverse contexts, operate transformations in the symbolic and structural dynamics of power, as discussed by Acker (1990), Butler (1990; 1997), Goffman (1963) and Petriglieri (2011).

These paths not only ensure the permanence of women in the rural sector, but also open up possibilities for the construction of more inclusive and innovative models of leadership and management.

5 CONCLUSION

This research aimed to investigate the strategies of resistance and identity repositioning adopted by women to ensure their permanence and legitimization of leadership in the rural sector, considering the contexts of exclusion, inequality and gender stigmatization. The results indicate that, despite the structural and symbolic barriers faced, women develop a diverse set of daily practices — such as assertive positioning, identity camouflage, the resignification of the feminine and the construction of support networks — that allow them not only to resist, but also to reconfigure the dynamics of power in the countryside.

The statements of the interviewees show that such strategies are shaped by markedly masculinized contexts, in which feminine attributes are often devalued or made invisible. However, by performing new forms of authority and leadership, these women challenge dominant gender norms, as argued by Butler (1990), Acker (1990) and Goffman (1963). Their work also points to the emergence of their own styles of female leadership, guided by affectivity, horizontality and innovation, which expands the discussion on inclusion and social transformation in rural areas.

From a theoretical point of view, the findings contribute to reinforce the importance of understanding resistance not only as a reaction, but as a performative and strategic action, in line with Petrieglieri's (2011) analyses of protected identities and Scott's (1995) perspective on the centrality of language and discourse in disputes for recognition. From a practical point of view, the survey reveals concrete ways to strengthen female leadership in agribusiness, especially through valuing their experiences, encouraging collaborative networks, and formulating public policies that recognize and address gender inequalities in the field.

In short, the paths traced by these women show that equity in the rural sector is possible, as long as there is recognition of their strategies, the expansion of their spaces of action and the confrontation of the structures that still support the "glass ceiling" in the dynamics of Brazilian agribusiness.

REFERENCES

Ankrah, D. A., Freeman, C. Y., & Afful, A. (2020). Gendered access to productive resources – Evidence from smallholder farmers in Awutu Senya West District of Ghana. Scientific African, 10, e00604. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sciaf.2020.e00604

Beuchelt, T. (2016). Gender, social equity and innovations in smallholder farming systems: Pitfalls and pathways. In Springer eBooks (p. 181). Springer Nature. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-25718-1_11

Croppenstedt, A., Goldstein, M., & Rosas, N. (2013). Gender and agriculture: Inefficiencies, segregation, and low productivity traps. The World Bank Research Observer, 28(1), 79–109. https://doi.org/10.1093/wbro/lks024

Dreby, J., Jung, G., & Sullivan, R. (2016). At the nexus of work and family: Family farms in upstate New York. Journal of Rural Studies, 49, 151–161. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2016.12.001

Gupta, S., Vemireddy, V., & Pingali, P. (2019). Nutritional outcomes of empowerment and market integration for women in rural India. Food Security, 11(6), 1243–1256. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12571-019-00978-z

Ifeanyi-Obi, C. C., & Henri-Ukoha, A. (2022). Strengthening climate change adaptive capacity of rural women crop farmers through reduced social exclusion in Nigeria. European Journal of Agriculture and Food Sciences, 4(1), 54. https://doi.org/10.24018/ejfood.2022.4.1.436

Kutsmus, N., & Kovalchuk, O. (2020). Gender challenges for rural development policy. Rural Development 2019, 1, 419. https://doi.org/10.15544/rd.2019.030

Mishra, S., Dubey, R., Arya, P., & Ti, D. (2020). Study of the farm activities done by rural women and impact of drudgery on women and children. International Journal of Current Microbiology and Applied Sciences, 9(10), 1289–1298. https://doi.org/10.20546/ijcmas.2020.910.155

Padmaja, R., Pramanik, S., Pingali, P., Bantilan, C., & Kavitha, K. (2019). Understanding nutritional outcomes through gendered analysis of time-use patterns in semi-arid India. Global Food Security, 23, 49–63. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2019.04.001

Parks, M. H., Christie, M. E., & Bagares, I. (2014). Gender and conservation agriculture: Constraints and opportunities in the Philippines. GeoJournal, 80(1), 61–77. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-014-9523-4

Raney, T., Anríquez, G., Croppenstedt, A., Gerosa, S., Lowder, S. K., Matuschke, I., & Skoet, J. (2011). The role of women in agriculture. RePEc: Research Papers in Economics. https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.289018

Sethi, R. M. (1992). Women in agriculture. https://www.cabdirect.org/abstracts/19941802129.html

Sinha, D. C., & S. (2020). Improving food security through sustainable agricultural practices and strengthening local biodiversity management - A case study of indigenous practices from India. Zenodo (CERN European Organization for Nuclear Research). https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3935730

Wekesah, F., Mutua, E., & Izugbara, C. (2019). Gender and conservation agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa: A systematic review. International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability, 17(1), 78–92. https://doi.org/10.1080/14735903.2019.1567245