

The work of women in Eluli and land economies in Timor-Leste

Teresa Cunha and Mina Bessa

Abstract

As elsewhere, many of the land-associated works in Timor-Leste are the responsibility of women, generating, among other things, fundamental socio-economies for the subsistence of bodies, food for the spirit and the celebration of life that existed, exists and will exist. Having as a theoretical framework a feminist hermeneutics of the epistemologies of the South in this work, we aim to set some theoretical and analytical bases for the co-construction of a post-abyssal feminist knowledge about women's works and economies of land in Timor-Leste. The methodological approach is qualitative based on ethnographic work in the place of Eluli located in the western part of the country in the mountains north of Maubara where the predominant language is Tokodede.

Keywords: Timor-Leste; land; feminist economies; epistemologies of the South

In Timor-Leste, the emplaced and vital relationship between people and the land is constitutive of both the Timorese sociability and their view of themselves and the world. As elsewhere, many of the land-associated works are the responsibility of women, generating, among other things, fundamental socio-economies for the subsistence of bodies, food for the spirit and the celebration of life that existed, exists and will exist (Cunha and Valle 2019; Gudynas 2019; Shiva 2017; Narciso and Henriques 2011; Friedberg 2011; Langton and Palmer 2006; Shiva and Mies 1997).

Having as a theoretical framework a feminist hermeneutics of the epistemologies of the South (Cunha and Sousa 2019), in this work, we aim to set some theoretical and analytical bases for the co-construction of a post-abyssal feminist knowledge about women's works and economies of land in Timor-Leste.¹

The context of analysis is Eluli, the lands of a family community that descends from *Rainha Dona Marta* (Queen Dona Marta).² Eluli is located in the western part of the country in the mountains north of Maubara where the predominant language is Tokodede.

Although Eluli has been governed by women for the past three generations and we can consider that a certain functional matriarchy is acknowledged in the family,



Figure 8.1: Map of Timor-Leste. Available at <http://timor-dili.blogspot.com/2015/03/geografia-de-timor-leste.html> accessed on 22-10-2020.

this does not mean that there has been a rupture with the customary patrilocal and patrilineal kinship structures of that region of Timor-Leste. We argue that, rather, it is a tactical adaptation to concrete circumstances that has marked, in a very traumatic way, the family and the community in the last seven decades. Several extreme events determined this special rise of women's power in Eluli. The first was the sudden and untimely death of Dona Marta's husband. In the absence of the man, head of the family, it was decided, according to the consultations with the ancestors of the house and after the appropriate rituals were performed, that she should be the one to assume the government of the land and be consecrated *liurai-feto*.³ The second was the war against the Indonesian occupation that took place between 1975-1999. In addition to the destruction of the territory, it was responsible for the flight and displacement of many people and the death of many others. In the post-war period, the return of surviving people, many of whom were widows and alien to the customary community, the reconstruction and the recovery of non-violent social relations also required exceptional measures. One of the granddaughters, the current matriarch, was married to a Portuguese man (already deceased) and, as a result, he was incorporated in the house of her male ancestors: the Noliku-Nobesi. Therefore, she never left her patrilineal lineage. These events created social and cultural conditions in which the

governance of Eluli by women, since the mid-twentieth century until today, became not only possible but accepted. However, the matriarchs of Eluli are aware and affirm their family belonging to the Noliku-Nobesi and secure rituals and rules in conformity to *lisan*.⁴ Thus, in customary terms, the three female daughters of the matriarch of Eluli already belong to the houses of their husbands (Silva 2017) and only her male son continues to be linked to the Noliku-Nobesi.⁵ However, she affirms that all of her daughters and her son will inherit that land equally (according to the constitutional rights in the country). Moreover, the family has agreed and decided that the next in line responsible for Eluli will be her second daughter. However, it is interesting to bear in mind that none of the female descendants of Dona Marta acquired the status of *liurai-feto* after her. This shows how these processes of authority and legitimacy are instilled with variations and complexities (see Chapters 6 and 7, this volume).

Our methodology includes ethnographic notes, but it is, above all, a co-authorship based on a dialogue with the matriarch Avó Mina about the place, the land, her works and those of the women that inhabit Eluli and everything they represent for herself and her family.

We develop two main theses along this chapter. The first is that all the land-work is productive. It produces goods, services, memories, identities, affections, bonds, food, objects. In other words, it produces the abundances that are essential for the endless flow of life. We demonstrate that abundance can be thought of as the power to assess and state what kind of resources and wealth are available and valuable to a community. Ultimately, it is the possibility of exercising subjective and objective sovereignty to decide what kind of resources can never be reduced to commodities. It is also awareness about everything that the community-society-group already possesses to live and live well.

The second is that the socioeconomies with the greatest capacity to resist neoliberal capitalist hegemony are those that define for themselves what abundance is and practice another economy of desire. This other economy of desire that we discuss here points to sobriety as the opposite of neoliberal austerity. Sobriety is a choice in which life, in all its manifestations, is at the centre. In this sense, sobriety is an ecofeminist view of the world (Shiva and Mies 1997; Puleo 2013). Austerity, in contrast, is an imposition to safeguard the wealth of some at the expense of the life and misery of the majority. Sobriety is an alternative to the endless accumulation and extraction of contemporary capitalism because it is the opposite of greed. It is an economy of reciprocities in action and that is why it is the reverse of waste (Gibson et al. 2018). It is to amplify the functional utility of objects and tools; it is the opposite of disposable thinking; it is a rationality that aims at an organic preservation of whom and what takes care of life.

This text is structured in two sections. The first is dedicated to a theoretical reflection that allows us to clarify our feminist approach of the epistemologies

of the South (Cunha 2017; Cunha and Sousa 2019). The second is an ethnography carried out in dialogue with Avó Mina (Grandma Mina), the matriarch of Eluli, and co-author of this chapter.

Our writing strategy for this second section was based on the artisanal thinking of feminist ecologies of knowledge (Cunha 2017; Cunha and Sousa 2019.). We exercise an inversion of the narrative order that has been naturalised in the social sciences in which the analysis is authorial, and constitutes the main body of the text, and the excerpts from the interviews or ethnographic notes appear as evidence or underlines to reinforce the theoretical and analytical argument. In this logic, even without explicitly stating it, it is considered that on one side lies authorship, meaning the authority of knowledge producers and, on the other, mere information. In our chapter, we consider that the descriptions about Eluli and everything that involves the life that takes place in that territory (Gago 2019) is mediated by subjectivities that think, analyse, and narrate knowledge. In this way, we want to highlight the dialogical construction of this text in which each of the authors, Mina Bessa and I, began to weave our analysis of the same issue on our own terms. It is a record of what we both know about Eluli, the people that inhabit it and the senses they produce with their thinking and daily works with the land. Nonetheless, it is important to state that we are aware of the limits that writing always imposes on us. Our aim is to exercise our epistemological decentre and challenge the limits of canonical textual production and accept *staying with the trouble* (Haraway 2016). We do hope we accomplish the task.

Feminist hermeneutics of the epistemologies of the South

The epistemologies of the South (Santos 2018) are a theoretical field that seems to point to a certain geography of knowledge. For Boaventura de Sousa Santos, this South has the strength of a metaphor of the human sufferings experienced by the violence perpetrated by colonialism, capitalism and heteropatriarchy. However, this South is not solely circumscribed to the victimisation and tragedy that torment inflicts; above all, it represents the strength of knowledge and social practices imagined and created in the struggle against all oppression aiming at paradigmatic and liberating social transformation. The epistemological field is open to think about the diversity of the world in its abundance, without wasting any experience, especially that which has seeped through the exclusionary sieve of modern logocentric science. The challenge is launched: to recognise that there is a South, to go to the South and to learn from the South. In our view, this allows us to break the abyssal line created to separate valid (scientific) from irrelevant (non-scientific) knowledge; it means corrupting the abyssal line that creates a

world of beings of which dignity, history, identity, memory, culture and creative power are intrinsic attributes versus a world of ontologically flawed beings where animality, irrationality, repetition, and the incapacity to produce the world as their own are a common feature. It is on these grounds that the concept of the abyssal line is so important for what it reveals, this radically dichotomous way of thinking, along with the indignation it provokes which, in its turn, incites disobedience, divergence, and rupture. Starting from the assumption of incompleteness and imperfection of all knowledge, Boaventura affirms that the western and modern way of knowing the world is only one among many and ignoring or neglecting this cognitive abundance is a tragic waste of experiences (Santos 2002, 2018).

The feminist hermeneutics of the epistemologies of the South that we are proposing allows us to distinguish, with greater clarity, that the abyssal rationality inscribed in the modern logocentric rationality is also androcentric and anthropocentric. In other words, the abyssal separation is also reflected in sexism, understood as a system of disjunction and hierarchy based on the opposition between female and male, reduced to biosocial attributes created and fed by themselves. That is to say, the idea of the 'masculine' (of a certain masculinity or virility) as a measure of all things is central to the abyssal thinking. The proliferation of dichotomies, based on this subordinate opposition between those who represent themselves as women and those who represent themselves as men, has maintained the structurally sexist bias of modern Western thinking.⁶

Far from being blind or negligent in this regard, it is a rationality that takes care, in detail, to maintain the foundations of its power. In this sense, the work of many feminists has been showing how women's strategies are co-opted for the benefit of men (Waterhouse and Vifhuizen 2011). Consecutively, women were invented (Oyewùmí 2017) and as Silvia Federici (2010) warns, women were invented as 'housewives', responsible for the care and infrastructure of life which, in turn, are the necessary conditions for the accumulation of capital; an endless multitude of invisible women, overloaded with subordinate work, who are trying to convince themselves that this is their most natural function to which they cannot and should not aspire to escape. As stated by Amaia Orozco (2014), the promotion of a reactionary ethics of care is at the basis of the modern social contract that continues to maintain the obsession for the conquest of women's knowledge and bodies (Federici 2010; Cunha 2014) reorganising and appropriating their ways of life, their activities, in short, their knowledge and work.

We argue that feminist hermeneutics of epistemologies of the South offers a subversive thinking that questions and confronts any elements or traces of that colonial and cognitive empire that subjugates and discriminates women, their bodies and works (McClintok 1995). This has one main consequence which is that the epistemologies of the South have to address two things with equal radicalism:

on the one hand, the ontological, social and cognitive abyssality of sexism that creates women as beings on the side-line, flawed in creative humanity, inferior, empty, whose dignity is derivative and whose existence is subsidiary to the mode of virile domination; on the other hand, the realisation that this abyss is furthermore a colonial one. Women in metropolitan societies may be discriminated but they deal with it with regulative means—laws, conventions, institutions—to emancipate themselves. Otherwise, the women living in the colonial world—the old and new colonial worlds—are conceived as the others-of-others. Their tools for individual and collective emancipation imply a double movement against victimisation: the violence and appropriation of local and global patriarchies.

Although very briefly, it is still important to explore here the anthropocentrism of western modern abyssal thinking and how it is closely related to the idea of ‘man’ as the measure of all things. In other words, on one side of the line we have human beings, or rather, those beings to whom ontological plenitude is attributed and recognised, even if subsumed in the category of *anthropos* [man]; on the other, all the existences lacking intrinsic dignity and which are designated by nature. Polanyi ([1944] 2001) shows how the commodification of the land, read also as nature, and the capitalist fetishism that followed, implies making the multidimensional and non-market wealth that this entity represented and represents for human societies, critical for the capitalist rationale. The land, instead of being nature understood as a matrix on which the vital conditions of existence are based, is reduced to a landscape or tradable resource (Shiva 2017). This has meant, on the one hand, increasingly violent and larger scale extractive cycles (Svampa 2013) and, on the other hand, that it allows separating life from the economy, work from ways of life and imposes a certain sexual division of labour. As can be seen, androcentrism and anthropocentrism go hand in hand, constituting two sides of the articulation of the three oppressive and constitutive systems of Western modernity: capitalism, colonialism and heteropatriarchy.

The feminist heuristic energy compels us to invoke Mohanty’s (1991) ground-breaking questioning about the need to decolonise all feminist thinking that is not deeply humble, situated, concrete and producing real effects in people’s lives, especially those of the women. The feminist hermeneutics of the epistemologies of the South represents the continuous rescue of both the narratives of suffering and the struggles inscribed in it as well as the narratives of hope and possibility produced and constructed by the potentially infinite diversity of being a woman (Carty and Mohanty 2014).

This decolonising exercise implies the practice of a feminist ecology of knowledge that puts the diversity of knowledge in the world in dialogical tension and examines the value and meaning that each of them have in every context to solve

problems and promote dignity and respect. It involves a pluritopic hermeneutics, rooted in a geography of knowledge that considers the power relations that are established and occupies the epistemological and sociological space to subvert it democratically (Harding 1998). The African philosopher Kwasi Wiredu (2003, 54) stresses that the epistemological dialogue needs open-mindedness, full respect for difference and is not only intended to avoid misunderstandings between the parties. Dialogue needs a cognitive horizon in which other narratives and other unexpected results can be inscribed and take place in other terms than those of the western orthodoxy.

As argued in the introduction to this volume, in Timor-Leste, as in many other places of the world, the diversity of lifestyles and livelihoods is profoundly connected with an ecology of economic relations that exist together in articulation, or/and in tension, one with the other forming a complex and fascinating socioeconomic landscape that has to be understood in order to know how to face and overcome the contemporary challenges (McWilliam and Traube 2011; Palmer 2010, 2015; Silva 2016, 2017; Gibson et al. 2018) and imagine a future of justice for all. The following epistemological exercise is a contribution to the community of knowledge that aims to unveil and problematise the possibilities that exist within the social fabric and constitute micro-politics of another way of organising life, production, consumption and distribution of the welfare.

The economies of the land and the narratives that keep the experiences alive

One time, in my great-grandmother's day, they saw a turtledove that everyday flew by the huts and landed on the same *ai-dila* (papaya) branch. It was always the same turtledove, always at the same time. The feathers were shiny and her beak was always full of water. The drops could be seen falling on the ground. My great-grandmother then realized that the turtledove spoke with them saying that, right there, next to their huts, was a clean water spring. The turtledove came and went every day until one day, under the stones, the water reached the land in such abundance and was so crystalline that they knew that it was a blessed land where water was born sacred. It was Eluli, sacred water. The turtledove would be, forever and for the entire family, one that would never be touched, injured, imprisoned. Thus, Eluli was born, on the slopes of the mountains of Maubara.

At the peak of the mountain is Guguleu where the *Uma Lulik* (sacred house) is located and all the grandmothers and grandfathers of that region were born. From there, the grandmothers, their daughters and granddaughters continue to stare at Eluli and observe the turtledoves flying over the land and resting on the centuries-old coffee-shade trees spread around, offering immense shadows on the hillsides.

Logocentric knowledge is that which uses instrumental reason to formulate the verifiable explanations that identify, delimit and interpret a certain phenomenon or reality. In this way, knowledge is always a rational act based on concepts that allow extrapolation and, thus, the enunciation of general laws. What feminist epistemologies of the South teach us is that poly-rationality is the condition of possibility for cognitive justice. That is to say, telling the world in its own terms cannot be considered a derivative or metaphorical thought, but a knowledge that cannot be wasted. A post-abysal thinking, in the wake of the criticisms of post-colonial feminists, has to start from a self-imposed silencing to open mental space for other knowledge, without which we are reduced to the drastic impoverishment that presupposes the pretension of a self-sufficient modern-western thinking. It is assuming a reason, which does not conform with a sole way of knowing and considers emotions, memories and sentiments as an integral part of knowledge production and enunciation.

Eluli, the land, the water, the coffee plantations, the flights of the turtledoves and the other obligations were attributed to Marta. In Guguleu, at the *Uma Lulik*, all homage and respect were paid and Marta joined the grandmothers as *liurai-feto*. She became known as *Rainha Dona Marta*, as the *malai-mutin* (Portuguese) say. A solemn and respected woman, she was consulted in her Eluli land on the affairs of families spread across these mountains. Her authority and her knowledge to preserve harmony still rests in the memory of those who knew her and call her the Maubara's *liurai-feto*. At a certain point she decided that her youngest son should succeed her in the care of Eluli and later on it should be his eldest daughter who would take care of that place and take over the responsibilities of the family. For grandmother Marta, the *liurai-feto*, Eluli should be transmitted to her granddaughter and her son would only be the intermediary. The other daughters and sons were advised to spread out over the mountains occupying their lands she designated and there raise the children and their descendants.

The androcentrism of modern Western knowledge demonstrates that an authoritative masculinity and its coercive power is capable of imposing himself as the measure of all things. For this reason, the idea of patriarchy, in which the figure of the man-male-father predominates over all social relations, is at the basis of the idea of the existence of a planetary and totalitarian system that victimises and oppresses all women in the world in the same way. In this sense, what vary are some of the patterns and methods of victimisation of women. The second assumption is that women will never be completely free from patriarchal oppression because the system overdetermines their existences.

Postcolonial feminisms have been showing two very important things. The first is that there are several systems of inequality production and some of them should

be conceptualised as patriarchy in these terms. In other words, it is necessary to consider the colonial character, the imperial leather to use the words of Anne McClintock (1995), that certain concepts, such as patriarchy or gender, have been marking certain feminist narratives of emancipation.⁷ The second is that both oppression and liberation are strongly contextual and, therefore, they are always in dynamic articulation between grounds and options.

In this particular case, the exceptional conditions (death, war and marriage) in which these women lived and live opened a rupture in the orthodoxy of customs, providing them with a space of power and legitimacy that they took for themselves and their descendants and exercise despite what was and is established. It is also very interesting to realise that this authority acquired both by circumstances and by the arrival of the modern state with a constitution that enshrines substantive and formal equality between women and men, did not make them forget the origin of their lineage or the obligations to which they are linked through them. These multi-layered and complex realities are, in our view, critical to decolonising any feminist thinking that seeks to see itself as the measure for all women. Therefore, collaborative modes of feminist knowledge and reciprocal learning are needed.

With the war came the need to escape from destruction and persecution. Exile happened to many and with it the memories of Eluli, the sacred water, the *Uma Lulik* at the peak of Guguleu within the mountains of Maubara, were to be preserved with strength and resilience to somehow maintain our family united over continents, oceans and times. When peace and political independence arrived, we were able to begin the way back to Eluli. Eluli was patiently waiting for someone to arrive to comfort her from years of emptiness and with her recolour the gardens, the coffee plantations and her skies and clouds.

We decided that the family home should be built in the same place where grandmothers and grandfathers had always lived and that had disappeared in the midst of violence, fighting and military persecution. The robusta and arabica coffee plantations had to be cleaned and maintained. The older coffee trees deserved to rest and newer ones should be buried to carry out the renovation of the highland coffee grove. The land suitable for growing gardens had to be cleared and prepared for planting and sowing. The house needed to be built solidly.

We called on men to do their jobs: clearing the coffee plantations and the land, building the house's walls and placing the roof. The women picked, chose, roasted and pillared the coffee cherry, and went to the bazaars to sell the oversupply. It is also the women who plant the gardens, weed, harvest, and make granaries to store corn and beans. They harvest fruits, yams and cassava and prepare food for everyone. They care for chickens and pigs. They dig pits for the hens to lay their eggs away from heat and theft; they collect the eggs and know how to store them in the coolest places in the house. They gather fruits, vegetables and everything they can to give to their pigs by feeding them just as they do

with their offspring. We organised the house so that we can sleep, eat, live and talk, and do everything else we need.

One of the most recurrent themes in feminist debates is the sexual division of labour as a source and the reason for the inequality of power between women and men. In many cases this is confirmed and all the statistics on the subject usually demonstrate the overload of women doubled by the tasks at work and at home. An assumption is made from there, with good evidence supporting it: this reality results in their subordination, delay in their professional careers, wage discrimination and less decision-making power. Being true in many societies, we need, however, not to colonise the world through the universalisation of this claim. By clearly identifying the jobs of men and the jobs of women in Eluli, we see things that contradict the notion that the sexual division of labour is always a mode of patriarchal oppression. There are three ideas that we want to underline here. The first has to do with the clear adequacy of the work of women and men to their bodies. Women feel protected because they do not have to do things that involve greater physical efforts for which they do not feel prepared. However, when we look closely, we notice that this division of labour is based on the principle of complementarity. This is the second idea: men clear the land with fire, remove the stones and cut the bush, so that later women can plant the gardens. Doing one without the other does not make sense. And the third is that it is up to women to decide on things as important as: what to eat; how food can be preserved; how animals are fed; what to store to stock for times of greatest scarcity and what to sell in order to be able to buy what is missing; what destination is given to the spaces of the house, among other things.

If we manage to silence our Western feminist assumptions what we can see is a system of balanced work and power which, in Eluli's case, gives women greater authority and freedom.

We throw away things that we can no longer reuse. There are few such things because, if there is any packaging coming from a supermarket, when it is empty, it serves as a cover or as a small container to organise and store whatever is necessary. The life of things is prolonged, new functions are assigned to them, everything is used and reused.

The anthropocentric character of modern-Western rationality has long been identified and is heavily criticised. This radical anthropocentrism of capitalism explains, on the one hand, the intensity of the extraction of everything it can transform into commodities that result in capital gains in favour of profit and the accumulation of a few who control the means of production. On the other hand, capitalism sees the possibility of accumulation as potentially infinite. In this way, nature and all

beings, human and non-human, are considered as potentially unlimited, or at least, subjected to endless exploitation.

The commodification of all spheres of life is one of its most brutal manifestations leading to the privatisation of essential goods and the radical separation between humanity and nature. The criticisms carried out by ecofeminists, post-developmentalists, solidarity economies and popular economies, among others, clearly show the limits and the dangers of this extractive and destructive anthropocentrism. We also know that the burden of anthropocentrism, of which the extractive capitalist economy is an utmost expression, is not equally distributed around the world. Environmental conflicts, but also the scarcity of water and the abuse of poisons unequally condemn the populations of the world to lives without security, without dignity and respect. What underlines the knowledge and practices of these Eluli women are two things. On the one hand, the idea that in communities like them, seen as traditional, permaculture and the integrated and holistic view of life that is nowadays conceptualised as a circular economy are known and have been practiced since ageless times. It is neither an ideological option nor a surrender to scientific knowledge. It is ancestral knowledge, proven, tested and assumed as the one that best protects life in all its forms. On the other hand, it shows how women's work, far from being merely reproductive, is what produces, in a real and permanent way, the material and immaterial basis of life. This also is not survival, as development theorists insist on characterising. This is life lived with sobriety because it is based on another economy of desire.

We are four women who take care of flowers and fruit trees in Eluli and I decide with the others what can be sold in the mountain bazaars in Maubara or what we can take to sell in Dili. I have that authority. The people who live there, in the mountains, also ask me for advice and often my intervention to resolve their disputes or anxieties. I am called *Avó Mina* and I assume this role naturally since I know the value given to older people and their experiences in our community. The example of *liurai-feto* Dona Marta, my grandmother, accompanies me in my role, which, during my exile, first in Indonesia and then in Portugal, I never thought I would inherit and fulfil. But it was not enough to return to Eluli, it was necessary to assume Eluli completely and that means to belong to the land which is much more than to possess the land.

In Kelly Silva's words and analysis, this relationship of belonging to the land and not of possession of the land forces us to think, with another depth, of the relationship between subject and object.⁸ As Kelly says, and it is also our argument, along with those of many feminist authors already mentioned in this chapter, one of the main conditions for the commodification of the land was its disenchantment, it was to remove from the land its own agency as a creator of meanings. This relationship of

reciprocity with the land, the impossibility of separating, much less ontologically, the land and the beings that inhabit her and are inhabited by her, the practices and experiences of these women in Eluli suggest that, certainly, what characterised economic relations before Western European modernism commodified them to such an extent that only what can be bought and sold is valuable, is beyond life itself.⁹

I know my responsibilities towards my grandmothers and grandfathers who, on top of the mountain, in Guguleu, continue to be present in many ways. I know that I have to prepare my second daughter to continue to be Eluli's and govern her on her behalf and that of her sisters and brother. I am also preparing my granddaughters and grandson who will succeed me. Life is renewed in each generation, but each one is as outside as it is inside the previous one. This is what I teach the youngest, how to take care of the house, the garden or the coffee plantations; knowing how to harvest, choosing the fruit, where the hens lay their eggs, how to know if they are proper to eat, how to roast coffee, how to ground it; where the graves of grandparents are and what must be done to honour them; knowing the way of the bazaar; knowing how to respect neighbours and families in the community and when and how it is necessary to be present. It is like a school to give meaning to the world where we live and want to live. I am the principal educator of our daughters and granddaughters and grandson and provide all necessary lessons and experiences to them. It is a school without walls and without schedules, but made up of many useful knowledge that can be learned by experiencing everything with the joy of playing or, simply, because we are together and feel that we belong there.

It is known that in Timor-Leste societies are mostly patrilineal and patrilocal. It appears that power and authority within the family and community are patriarchal. Many studies and data prove this (Niner 2017; Silva and Sousa 2011). However, in the case of Eluli, it seems to be more complex and divergent than that normalisation of patriarchal relations.¹⁰ The authority and power seem to be transitive and often, in the last generations, they are expressly feminine. Women were chosen and are given the legitimacy of the power to decide, to teach, to pass on the land and all the connections that it entails and allows. This reality questions in a very clear way that tradition is always being invented and reinvented and how generalisations, even when contextualised, can be inadequate. On the other hand, this situation opens space for other narratives of emancipation of women, endogenous, with strong local meanings and in terms in which they are perceived as a reinforcement of the power and autonomy of women without having to dispense with their view of the world and what makes them feel they belong and have a place in their society.

Final notes

The feminist hermeneutics of epistemologies of the South is an exercise of profound reorganisation of the cognitive agencies with which we have to deal in producing post-abyssal knowledge. Moreover, it is an approach to humbly deal with perplexity in the face of divergent memories, discrepant narratives and stories told otherwise. It is to think beyond the colonial that still binds most of us to Western modernity. It is a constant effort to highlight the ignorance generated by the colonial-capitalist-heteropatriarchal imagination. Visible, invisible, partially exposed and/or still covered by shadows, women and their works narrated by their words teach us several things that we enunciate here very briefly.

Eluli's socioeconomics cannot be reduced to the absence of choices, poverty, ignorance, primitive, backward, obscure, ancestral ways or, in the words of contemporary financial hegemony, as an obstacle to development. It consists of secular practices and struggles for other ways of life, for other paradigms of government of the house, but also with functional adaptations to the monetised world of capitalism or the rules of patrilineality and the powers of men. In these practices, other imaginaries of justice, respectability and authority exist and are recreated. If wealth is more than the accumulation of things and goods, it can be said that they enrich lives and communities by giving them meaning and valuing their skills and knowledge as well as their identities in motion. They are not complete responses and are not thought as such. But they are narratives of dignity and the struggle against vulnerability, violence and its reduction to a secondary or worthless existence.

In Eluli it is easy to understand that women's work is productive. First, all women work, and always have worked. Their works produce countless things, both material and immaterial, at different scales and spheres where they live and perform. Second, questioning and being able to define what abundance is leads us to another economy of desire where there is a sovereignty of its own to define what is important for life to flourish and be lived with respect and joy. In this other economy of desire, in which sobriety is central, what has more value are the fruits of the land but also feelings of belonging and protection, ancestral spirits, goddesses and gods, attention, care, trust, technologies, the knowledge and the wisdom that people throughout the ages and generations have been gathering, keeping and teaching. If the terms of abundance are determined and stated by whom they concern, the constituent power passes from the hands of those who permanently exploit what is scarce and what is abundant to the hands of those who decide on their own lives. This is a paradigmatic shift. Sobriety, as we propose, highlights, on the one hand, the ecology of temporalities in which the past, the present and the future intersect and, on the other hand, the maximisation of justice that such divergent experiences can generate.

Within this collaborative work, we articulated a feminist hermeneutics of the epistemologies of the South with an ethnography about Eluli narrated by Mina Bessa, co-author of this text, about that space-time which is in the mountains of Maubara in Timor-Leste. From this dialogue between different knowledge, we learned several things that we explained in the reflective excerpts. We assume the heterodoxy of the text because we are aware that writing together is, in itself, a form of affirmation and rebellion necessary for the production of post-colonial feminist knowledge.

Notes

- ¹ Santos (2018) argues that the scientific-philosophical apparatus that emerged from the Euro-centric tradition is sustained by the creation of abyssal lines. The abyssal lines are those that create a world of humans and sub-humans and non-humans separated abyssally. Santos adds that the abyssal lines separate people and their worlds through a colonial model that guarantees ontological, social and epistemological inequalities and hierarchies. A post-abyssal thinking is the continuing exercise to radically criticise and overcome this abyssal rationality.
- ² As we explain further in the text, Eluli means sacred water.
- ³ *Liurai-feto* is an expression in the Tetum language that is commonly translated as queen (*rainha* in the Portuguese language). However, the word refers to a position of authority and exceptional recognition in a given community. The expression can be better understood by looking at each literal meaning of its components. *Liu*: form of comparative superiority; *Rai*: earth, ground, world, and *Feto*: female person. See, Costa, *Dicionário de Tétum-Português*.
- ⁴ *Lisan* is a Tetum word that means ceremonies, customary rituals, norms and practices. See, Costa, *Dicionário de Tétum-Português*.
- ⁵ On this subject of the circulation of fertility and the flow of life in Timor-Leste through marriage and the circulation of women through different houses, it is important to read Silva, "Women, Gender and Power among Indigenous Peoples of Portuguese Timor".
- ⁶ In this chapter we use the word women to refer to all human beings that present themselves as female-women in spite of their biological sex or ascribed sexual identity.
- ⁷ McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*.
- ⁸ These reflections by Kelly Silva occurred when we discussed this chapter. We thank Kelly for her words, generosity and contributions.
- ⁹ Here and above, we decided to consider the land as a subject. It is why we are using 'her' instead of 'it'.
- ¹⁰ As the works of Lisa Palmer show, this is occurring across the country where more ambilineal norms and practices remain or emerge in place and shape the daily lives of Timorese people much more than some mainstream views want to acknowledge. We thank Lisa Palmer for the sharing of this knowledge that brought more accuracy to our discussion.

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