

Agroecology: feminine noun

Women, nowadays and historically, are protagonists of conflicts in rural areas, and they help building a biodiverse present and future, with climate justice and food sovereignty.

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Rachel Carson, Vandana Shiva, Ana Primavesi... these are a few of the most recognised names when we talk about ecofeminism, agroecology e new relations with Earth. **However, these three women were not - and are not - the only ones to fight for climate justice in rural areas.** There are thousands of female peasants, scientists, farmers, quilombolas, coastal residents, indigenous and activists who are not mentioned in history books, but who have build and continue to build the agroecological fight.

One of the firsts to gain visibility was the ecologist **Rachel Carson**, who dared to **stand up to the logic of pesticide production and dissemination**, thus becoming a pioneer on the subject. Born in the state of Pennsylvania, in the United States, her most famous book, “Silent Spring”, is a nod to the silence from the birds at the most flowery season of the year, once the birds were being killed by contamination from the pesticides, which were produced and applied without the correct damage measurement. First published serially in the New Yorker Magazine in 1962, the book was a game changer, unlocking pleas and protests in the country and around the world against the indiscriminate use of pesticides.

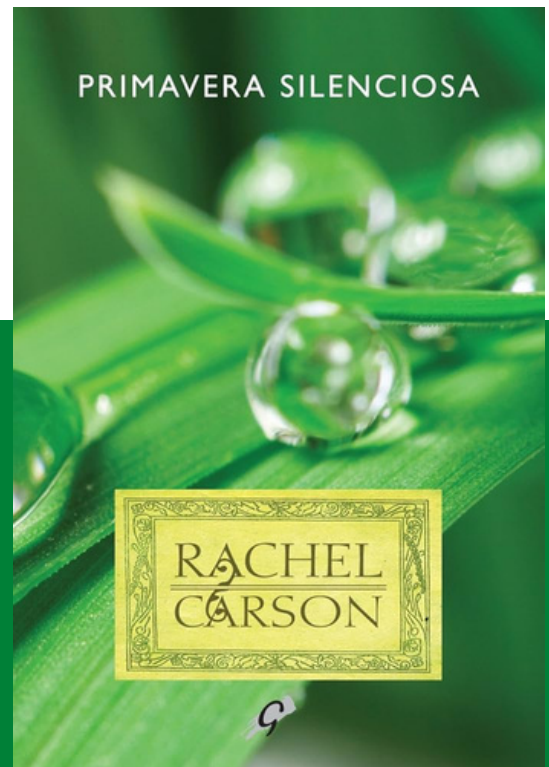
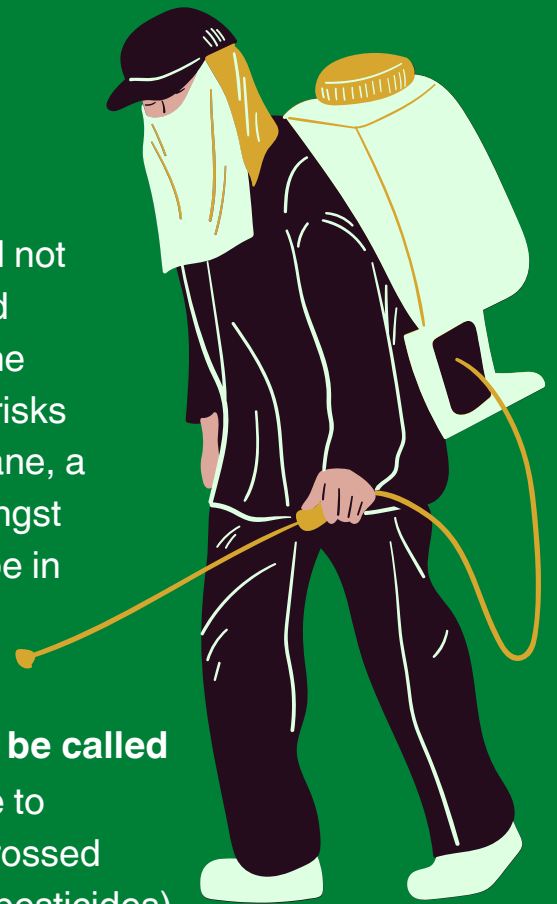


Photo credit: Erich Hartmann/Magnum Photos



Following a non-traditional path, Carson didn't have academic affiliations and used to write in a simple language, directing herself to the general public, and not to researchers. That way, she became the most read scientific popularizer in the United States between the 1950's and 1960's. When she decided to report the risks of the DDT pesticide (dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane, a low cost pesticide that quickly became popular amongst rural workers), she wrote to a friend that "i wouldn't be in peace if i kept my mouth shut".



To her, the **pesticides used in rural areas should be called "biocides"**, due to their extended collateral damage to animals and human beings. She also reported the crossed contamination (direct or indirect physical transfer of pesticides) from airplane application of pesticides, as well as the long term effects of the indiscriminate dissemination of new products.

For being a woman, she was discredited in many different ways. Linda Lear wrote, in the introduction of "Silent Spring", that the multimillionaire chemical industry wouldn't allow

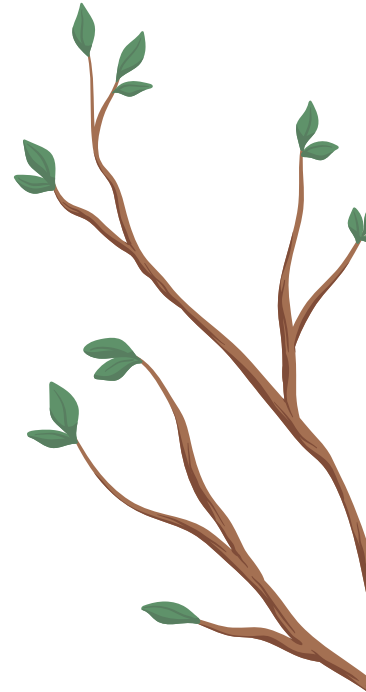
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that an old editor for the government, a scientist without a PHD and no institutional affiliation, known only for her lyrical books about the sea, would mine the public trust in their products or question its integrity. [...] She was a 'birds and bunnies lover', a woman who owned cats, and therefore, obviously suspicious. She was a romantic 'old maid', that was simply nervous because of genetics.

”



Still according to Lear, in the introduction of “Silent Spring”, Rachel Carson passed away an year and a half after the publication of her most famous work, victim of breast cancer. The subject of the research raised federal investigations in the United States, culminating in laws in every sphere to protect the integrity of nature and its farmers. Internally, the DDT was banned in the US six years after Carson’s death. However, the exportation of the same pesticide continued - another dicotomy regarding the complexity of fostering the capital over the detriment of nature and humanity.



The Not Green Revolution of Vandana Shiva

Rachel Carson’s activism belongs in the opposition to the Green Revolution, a movement that also gained strenght acrossed the globe, with the indian [Vandana Shiva](#).



Photo credit: Frank Schwichtenberg



Shiva has a Masters degree in Philosophy and a PhD in Physics. She was born in Dehra Dun, a city in north India, near the Himalayas. As a teen, in the 1970s, she took part in the so called Chipko movement, which united women for the protection of himalayan forests against deforestation. In 1982, she founded the **Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology (RFSTE)**, an independent investigation institute that tackles the most significant ecology issues of our times, and two years later, Navdanya ('nine seeds'), the movement which defends biodiversity and small farmers.

Among so many titles and international awards, Shiva questions, for decades, the impact of the Green Revolution. Imported from the United States, its premise was to industrialize the countryside and increase its productivity, and, by doing so, end world hunger through genetically modified seeds, monocultures, and a heavy use of pesticides.

In the decade of 1980, **the Green Revolution forged what we know today in Brazil as the Agrobusiness**. And it has been working really well to undermine biodiversity in nature, produce commodities and strengthen social inequalities, land concentration, and land conflicts.

Another thing that was boosted (and financed) at the time was the monoculture: the farming of a single agricultural product, usually made in latifundiums. The result is harvested, literally, nowadays, where 4.3% of brazilian territory is occupied only by soy crops. This amounts to 36 millions acres, or the same as the size of the Democratic Republic of Congo, and bigger than countries like Italy, Vietnam, and Malaysia. Half of this is on the Cerrado biome.



Photo credit: Mirko Fabian/Unsplash



Shiva takes a step further and calls it the mind monoculture, a term that is also the title of one of her most famous books, first published in Brazil in 2003. To the activist, the monoculture starts as a way of thinking, and then it infects Earth. **It's about not seeing the biodiversity**, and by doing so, establishing systems of power and dominance based on exterminating cultural, ecological, and social diversities.

The activist makes a point with the way we produce our food. It's hard to diverge from something that hasn't been genetically modified, and therefore, uniformed.

Data from Embrapa shows that to each 100 acre of soy planted today on the planet, 80 of them are from genetically modified seeds.



Regarding corn, it's 30 for each 100.



On national territory,

92%

of all the soy
is transgenic

90%

of all the corn
is transgenic

47%

of all the cotton
is transgenic

By analyzing local agricultural census, a study from Oxfam alerts that only 1% of the farms or rural establishments in Latin America holds more than half (or 51.19%) of all the region's agricultural surface. The gender inequality is also clear on this data. **Men are running 87.32% of these establishments**, which represents 94.5% of brazilian countryside areas.



As it turns out, the Green Revolution didn't come close to fulfill its promise: **even with high levels of primary agricultural production, [33 million people starve in Brazil.](#)**

Who are the women that are raising other ecological paradigms, from the countryside to the table?

In Brazil, one of the main voices in propagating agroecology was **Ana Primavesi**, an austrian born brazilian whose main contribution was write about the importance of the soil to understand the language of nature.

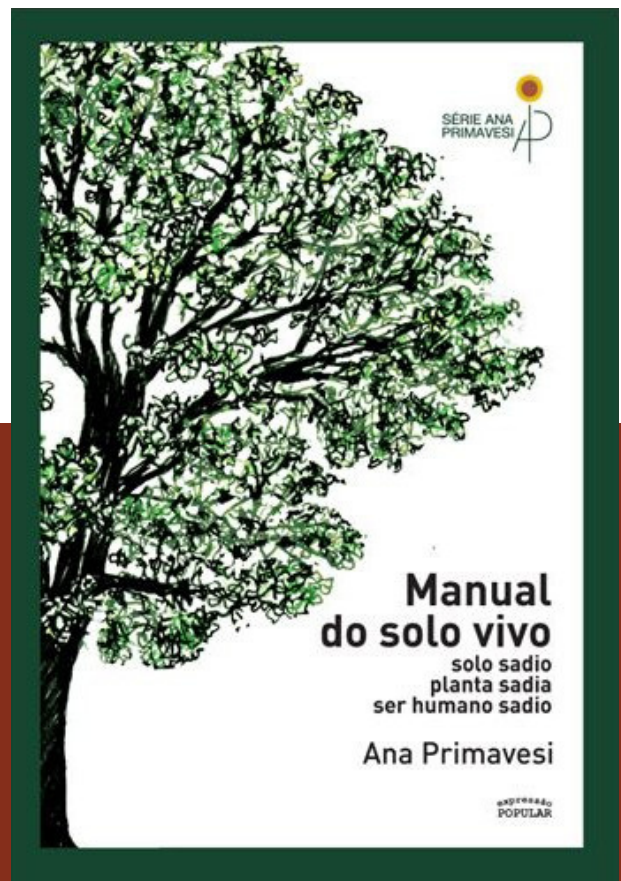
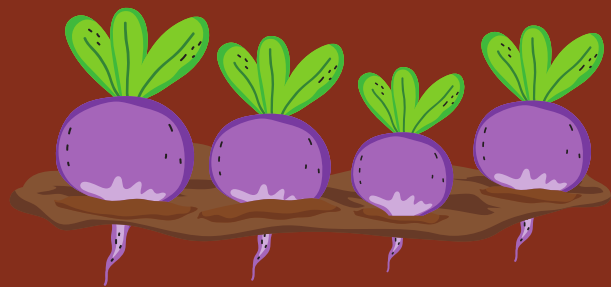


Photo credit: Luiz Prado Luz



In the book “**Manual of the living soil: healthy soil, healthy plant, healthy human being**”, Primavesi presents her main theory: that the soil’s health restores the plants’ health, and that only with truly healthy plants, the human being can ingest the necessary nutrients from the produced food. Otherwise, the food lacks vitamins - and people get sick.

In her manual, she explains the bases of agroecology: understanding the signs given by nature (such as “plagues” and weed, which are indicators of the soil’s health, revealing deficiencies or excesses of minerals) and the importance of biodiversity. Restoring the soil’s health, therefore, is understanding how nature works, correctly balancing nutrients and dedicating an holistic eye to the signs, watching the environment as a whole and going beyond universal solutions.



Through her career, **Primavesi also dedicated herself to propagate precepts of tropical agriculture**, which differs from the agriculture practiced on european soil. Due to colonization and the importation of technologies, there isn’t a correct comprehension that each ecosystem has its own way of operation. In Brasil, therefore, unlike european countries, the soil needs to stay covered all the time due to the high temperatures.



Following the agroecological teachings of Primavesi, there are many movements that use gender framing regarding biodiversity. The [Rural Women Movement](#) (MMC) is one of these examples of struggle, courage and resistance in rural areas. It was founded in 1980, a decade in which the country lived a redemocratization and intense land conflicts, which gave birth to other important entities, like the Landless Workers Movement. Oficialized in 2004, the MMC has added women voices to a national level and established a peasant, popular, agroecological, and feminist project.



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Since the beginning of MMC, there was also the defense for the creole seeds (varieties that weren't genetically modified and which are preserved and passed down for generations). The women who preserve this traditional knowledge are known as the Seed Guardians and their job is essential to ensure the biodiversity. The MMC launched, in 2020, a national campaign entitled "[Seeds of Resistance](#)" to spread the practices of the creole cultivation and to boost the Guardians' work.



Since the women's rural work is still seen, many times, as an extension of house care, it is easily underestimated. However, a [study published by the Interamerican Institute of Cooperation for Agriculture \(IICA\)](#) shows that women who join clubs, co-ops or movements have elevated self esteem, contributing for the empowering and the practices which aim for their emancipation and protagonism.

Another example is the **Daisies' March**, which has its seventh edition scheduled to august 2023, in Brasília. The event is the biggest rural women movement of Latin America, on which the peasants march to defend their territory, forests and water. To know more, check out the article [Women in Agriculture](#), published in 2022 by EmpoderaClima.



Photo credit: Téo Miranda





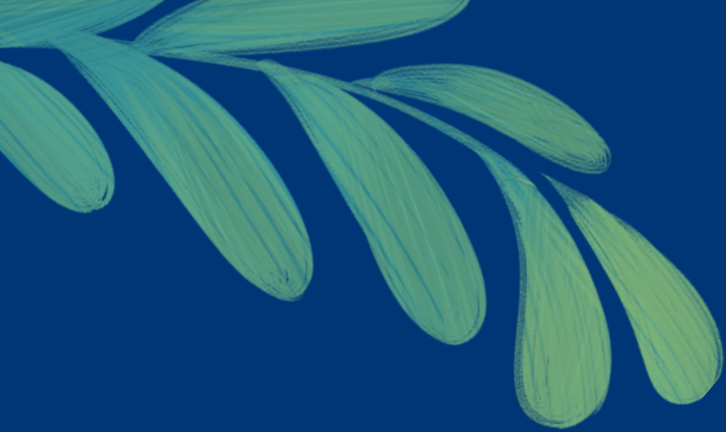
Gender equity + respect towards biodiversity = climate justice

Despite having distinct trajectories, Rachel Carson, Vandana Shiva, and Ana Primavesi converge into one **holistic view of the environment**. If each plant has its own function inside an ecosystem, when we see ourselves as nature, we also understand that the same behaviour must be adopted by human beings. To them, biodiversity embraces the idea of respect towards differences, of thriving in diverse environments, with cooperation.

It's not for nothing that women are, almost always, on the frontline of the agroecological fight. At the same time that they are the most affected by climate change, they also fight for a new relationship with nature, based on the Well Being, ecofeminism and the comprehension that **the Earth emancipation is also the emancipation of their bodies and gender bonds**.

Therefore, there is no climate justice in food production without feminism, without gender equity and without justice. This practice comprehends what it is to hear and respect the ancestral wisdoms for a true relationship with the nature inside and outside of us all.





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