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ID 1755 | PROJECTIONS: 100 KM2 OF CAATINGA BIOME

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1 INTRODUCTION

This communication will address the transdisciplinary research that I develop today, where I transit through architecture and visual arts, collective properties and other forms of communal ownership and management of the land. I conducted a series of interviews with activists, architects, artists, lawyers, indigenous people in different locations around the world, proposing to them a fiction: Assuming that a few hectares of land are available in their context for the development of occupation and livelihood projects, what would you imagine doing with such an area? This provocation seeks, through the imaginary, to know and debate forms of social organization of space distinct from private property, in order to be constituted as a collection of utopias.

We are facing a process of expulsion and a growing number of conflicts related to access to land, which makes the space increasingly restrictive and destructive of collective responsibilities, in the Brazilian and world context. Struggles and resistances trigger new regimes of sensibility and experiences of land repossession, and thus, the proposition of new forms of spatialization are necessary. What practices of land sharing can we imagine? What utopias can we construct to amplify the repertoire of the modes of occupation of the territory? These are the key issues. A construction of a map of utopias is an attempt to point out future social transformations.

In this context, the Thislandyourland artistic brazilian group, formed by me and Ines Linke in 2010, develops projects in the field of visual arts, with the theme around the use and access to land. Projections: 100 km² of Caatinga biome is a work in process, which investigates diverse imagery related to the Caatinga, an specific brazilian biome. Starting from a fiction that suggests that an area of 10km x 10km of Caatinga is made available and donated for the development of projects, several people or groups are invited to receive this fictional land donation and during interviews, idealize and expose their projects to this land extension. In this presentation I I will show some excerpts from interviews.

2 BRIEF WORDS ABOUT THE CAATINGA

Caatinga, in the language of the Tupi-Guarani Brazilian Indians, means "bare forest" or "white forest", due to the loss of leaves in the long drought seasons, thorny vegetation and numerous xerophilous and deciduous species with branches calcined by sunlight.

The Caatinga is a biome characteristic of areas of northeastern Brazil, where the semi-arid tropical climate predominates, with few rains and presenting varied landscapes due to the geomorphological and climatic factors. During most of the year the plants appear as if they were dead, the environment has intense heat and great luminosity. For decades, the Caatinga imaginary has developed in Brazil as an inhospitable, desolate and miserable environment, receiving titles such as terra-nua, terra-seca, terra-hostil, among others. Compared with the other Brazilian biomes such as the Atlantic Forests or Amazonian Forest, known worldwide, the Caatinga was culturally and politically devalued.

However, it is an environment of great biodiversity and an exclusive Brazilian ecosystem. Researchers have been revealing the richness and importance of the Caatinga. Besides, it presents various forms of human occupation, both rural and urban. In this way attention must be paid to the endless layers of the Caatinga's environment, as specific local contexts, ways of life and modes of occupation and production, rich and diversified landscapes, as well as the knowledge and development of alternative technologies that allow the permanence and inclusion of the populations on earth.

Currently, rural sector has been transformed by the continuous introduction of systems that integrate technologies and capital, geared to the external market, such as agribusiness. Thus, we could imagine, in a simplified way, that the imaginary about the region passes from barren desert to a region favorable to the financial and agribusiness market, as a symbol of earth's saviors and richness. We need to be aware of this, to create forms of resistance and to produce other imaginary, closer to the history and the inhabited space, and to understand other meanings of richness.

3 THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF LAND IN BRAZIL

Data from Incra (National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform), raised from the owners' self-declaration, point out that land concentration and unproductiveness increased in this early century in Brazil. Data from 2010 indicate that 130 thousand landowners concentrate 318 million hectares. More than 100 million hectares have passed, in less than a decade, to the control of landowners, who average more than 2,400 hectares. The data also shows that the register of unproductive areas grew more than the productive areas, which points to the expansion of areas that disregard the social function.

Many of these landowners speculate on the land, use political "protection", are outlaws and avoid compliance with the Constitution. This one determines that areas that do not fulfill their social function are destined for agrarian reform. The constitutional text of 1988 posited the inseparable union between property and its social function.

Art.186 The social function is fulfilled when rural property meets, simultaneously, according to criteria and degrees of exigency established by law, the following requirements:

- I-rational and adequate use;
- II-adequate use of available natural resources and preservation of the environment;
- III-compliance with the provisions governing labor relations;
- IV-exploitation that favors the well-being of owners and workers¹.

Rural property has an even more evident social function, given its importance as a mean of producing goods necessary for human survival and social prosperity. In this way, rural property will fulfill its social function by producing in a conscious and adequate way, aiming at protecting the environment and respecting existing relationships. The conception was born of the idea that, as part of a society, man must make efforts to contribute to the well-being of the community to the detriment of solely individual interests.

¹ http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/constituicao/constituicao.htm

Property is seen as an instrument to support the attainment of social ends, whose essence is its service to the community.

Thus, the concept of social function, like that of property, has undergone evolutions. At first, it was only considered the economic character of the property, that is, the economic productivity of it. The economic side remained, but other attributes were added to characterize the sociability of the function of the good.

It is important to distinguish the meanings of productive and unproductive in the context of the social function. It's usual to hear people talking about the Amazon Forest or the Caatinga, referring to them as "useless land", and claiming the necessity to transform it into "productive" land. Extensive areas are deforested for the purpose of planting soybeans and corn and raising cattle in the Amazon. These practices promote landscape transformations, not only in space, but also in the ways of its use and life of the population. The territory is redrawn by economic forces, which stimulate deforestation and the purchase of cheap and "useless" forest. Likewise in the context of the Caatinga.

The geographer Rogério Haesbaert points out that the hegemonic territorial paradigm "sees space as mere extension or surface to be transposed and substrate to be explored." Adopting an absolute vision, the company and the State homogenize and unify the space, making it equal and decontextualized. Land-territory is an "instrument of domination, a merely functional resource, within an economy based on the agro-extractive-export model", and the Capital speculation. This would be the concept of productivity in the hegemonic context.

Haesbaert points us to another paradigm -the counter-hegemonic -in which what matters is the inhabited, lived, diversified space of social relations. Unlike the homogenizing view, it sees the space densified by the multiple social and cultural relations that make the bond society -land. Therefore, from this point of view, productive land is not opposed to "useless land" because its function is not to enslave workers, to serve individual interests and to promote the expulsion of people from the land, but rather to generate livelihoods, labor, occupation of land and social emancipation.

4 PROJECTIONS: 100 KM2 OF CAATINGA

While traveling through Bahia in 2012, the group Thislandyourland crossed an área with the Caatinga biome, in the highlands of the southwest region, where the agropolo of potato plantation is located in an area of 70 km by 140km. A flat expanse of land with sparse rectangular volumes of eucalyptus plantations, pipes for conducting water for irrigation and some sparse cows composed the plastic landscape. On the way, only one truck carrying potato sacks for processing. In the fields, no one, not even a village. Just the signs of what is needed for production: water, flat relief, road and truck for product disposal. These elements give us the information of the type of production that has been developing in the territory; they inform us a kind of new geography without the society living within it, or rather, eliminating the historical time of the inhabited space.

Faced with this imminent disappearance of a biome and a culture, the Caatinga, the Thislandyourland group initiated a project in 2016, Projections: 100 km² of Caatinga. It is a work in process, which investigates diverse imagery related to the earth, starting from a fiction. It is suggested that an area of 10km x 10km of Caatinga is made available and donated for the development of projects. Several people or groups are invited to receive this fictional land donation, such as businessmen, representatives of the public power, third sector, class entities, politicians, activists, artists and researchers, and with them are made meetings and interviews, where they have the opportunity to idealize and expose their projects to this land extension.

What are the projections made by the most representative economic and political sectors of the country? Which perspectives point to the future? How do people think land is political?

5 SOME PROJECTIONS

Here are some excerpts transcribed from two interviews given by Brazilian environmentalists Paulo Petersen¹ and Fabio Feldmann².

ThisLandyourland: Paulo Petersen, you receive this land of 100km² in the Caatinga region. What would you do? What is the nature of your project, production, preservation or both?

Paulo Petersen: Both. We have the great challenge of reconciling the two things: developing economically and conserving nature. This path of conciliation has been very difficult because politics normally see things very far apart. Policies for economic development are very environmentally degrading and preservation policies are very socially exclusionary because they end up penalizing exactly those who have retained a certain region. The perspective of preservation does not see the human being interacting with the ecosystem. A population, which for generations has been in an area and has commitment, knowledge of the biodiversity and the resources of a place, is penalized. Therefore, conciliation is necessary and possible.

ThisLandyourland: How would you implement a project?

Paulo Petersen: The first thing to know is if there is a local population. Assuming they exist, there is already a way of occupation, and do not need settlements. Very often this population has a regime of collective use of the land. This type of community-based land use exists even in Bahia, where there are pasture communities. Indigenous, quilombola and peasant people have many difficulties. A series of conflicts exists exactly because the Brazilian state has difficulty in recognizing. Legally there is even a national policy of traditional peoples and communities that has a lot of difficulty in implementing it because the land issue is poorly resolved, although the Brazilian Constitution foresees this type of mechanism. Recognition by the state is still very limited.

For example there is a case also typical of babaçu coconut breakers. How do the women make the appropriation of land? They have an area that is of common exploit use of babaçu and the access comes from generations. Then they used to come in to remove the babaçu, but the owners of the land began to block the access of these women. It started to create conflict, but they are not invading the earth. These populations are then very vulnerable, but they exist in Brazil. So our land regime is very much hidden. Not legally, there is a forecast but it is not regulated. The Constitution of 1988 predicted this type of situation but because of the political game in the congress, dominated by a ruralist group, this was not regulated.

There are many situations of groups of populations who manage the territory in a common way. This is a very interesting way, but it is very little explored from the point of view of possibilities, including economic ones. Politicians and ruralist groups say that there is a pocket of poverty but it is not a pocket of poverty because they work in this system, but because they are abandoned. If they had schools, electrification, access to cultural goods, roads, etc., you would have another pattern without detracting from the nature of that kind of economy. The problem is not associated with the type of economy that leads to poverty. This is an interpretation that is always done: the peasant is poor and then he/she must be an entrepreneur. They are not poor because they are peasants, but because they are abandoned.

It then, at first, needs public and social policies, and investments in infrastructure, to create productive chains of resources of the biodiversity partner. To explore, in a sustainable way, the potential that biodiversity itself has in medicinal plants, in fruits and in agriculture, handicrafts, ecotourism. There is a set of possibilities of valuing the amenities of nature, of what it generates, and which at the same time heats up the economy, on the basis of it, conserving nature.

ThisLandyourland: Fabio Feldmann, if you receive this land of 100km² in the Caatinga region, what would you do?

¹ Petersen is the coordinator of AS-PTA, non-profit Civil Law Association for Family Agriculture and Agroecology, that since 1983 has been working to strengthen family farming and promote sustainable rural development in Brazil. AS-PTA participated in the constitution and works in various civil society networks aimed at promoting sustainable rural development.

² Feldmann was the articulator of the "parliamentary green front" and responsible for the creation of the chapter dedicated to the environment of the Federal Constitution. Elected federal deputy for three terms; candidate to the government of the state of São Paulo by the Green Party (PV) in the 2010 elections. Acts as a consultant on issues related to the environment and sustainability.

Fabio Feldmann: First, a campaign to try to put the Caatinga in the constitutional text, with the purpose of drawing attention, therefore, although this does not guarantee anything, would be an important step. The Brazilian Constitution of 1988 has an article dedicated especially to the environment, article 225 which considers, in its fourth paragraph, some biomes as national patrimony, such as the Atlantic Forest, Pantanal and Amazon Rainforest. What is the idea of equity? Something that has to be preserved. One of the important issues is to put the Caatinga in the constitutional text, even if this is not a guarantee of conservation. The 1988 Constitution will turn 28 years in October and the only biome that has its own legislation is the Atlantic Forest, because there was too much pressure from the society at that moment.

And second, perhaps a Caatinga legislation, to valorize these remnants of area, their species of plants, their history in the context of the country, the cultural issues of the Brazilian semi-arid.

I have the impression that there is a shortage of Conservation Units in the Caatinga. Every biome has a number of Conservation Units. For example, the Amazon may be the most valued area today. The

Atlantic Forest has some protected areas, but the Caatinga, as far as I know, would need to be certified as an important area in order to create parks and reserves for sustainable development. Also, find out what would be the best ways to protect these areas. And eventually even classify them as a Biosphere Reserve, which would have an international status.

Thislandyourland: Since you are talking about conservation, in the case of developing a project for the 100km² Caatinga, would you propose something around preservation, production or both?

Fabio Feldmann: There are several categories of Conservation Unit: there are those of integral protection, which do not allow human presence. There are those that are too restrictive and those that are less restrictive. Then I thought of RDS (Sustainable Development Reserve), because eventually you have activities that happen in the Caatinga biome, which you could even admit to remain as economic activities.

If I were to do this, first I would consult the map of the Ministry of the Environment and check what are the most important areas in the Caatinga from a biodiversity point of view and see which conservation sites already exist.

Thislandyourland: Do you think it is interesting a system that puts together preservation and production? Would that be an interesting prospect for the country?

Fabio Feldmann: The choice of the category depends very much on the peculiarity. In São Paulo we have a case that is the Juréia Ecological Station. The coast of São Paulo is a mosaic (the concept of mosaic), and has an area that is relatively intact, which goes from the coast to the mountains. So, since this area is the only left over, we have opted for integral preservation. But there are other areas where it is perfectly possible to coexist with traditional populations, or even with economic activities that are within the concepts of sustainability, which could be ecotourism, agroecology -depending on what exists in the area.

Thislandyourland: What would you do with a land with the dimensions of 10km x 10km in the semi-arid already thinking about a future perspective?

Fábio Feldmann: I would propose to design a sustainable development project, since it is a large area. In Brazil we have always worked with a very large territorial scale, so sometimes we think 100km² is not much, but it's really big. I would think about creating a sustainable development project where I would have all the elements of complexity, with some totally protected areas -assuming they are very important and have a rich biodiversity -and would think about economic activities that would generate jobs and income for the population that is there. If I were to win this land, I would try to make a project that could be a reference for Brazil and for the world of sustainable development.

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