

**IT IS NOT DEFAMATION, IT IS NOT REVENGE. IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN
HARASSMENT:
OPEN LETTER TO THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL STUDIES (CES) OF THE UNIVERSITY
OF COIMBRA/EN**

We are an International Collective of Women from different backgrounds, now in different places and positions, who are or have been associated to the Centre for Social Studies (*Centro de Estudos Sociais - CES*) of the University of Coimbra, exercising functions within the research teams coordinated by Boaventura de Sousa Santos. Our experiences concern the period between 2000 and 2019.

We are women from different areas, with different individual profiles, who share an experience of trauma due to a pattern of abuse in the working relationship with Boaventura de Sousa Santos or people in authority legitimized by him.

Our stories are different, and so are the ways we deal with our pain. We find ourselves in different stages of healing. Some of us have already worked through the trauma, others are doing so, and others are beginning to accept that the violence we have experienced has a name. We have all, in the last few days, stirred up deep layers of pain that have been silenced for many years.

Abuse is not always easy to recognize. As we shared our experiences of violence with others, we found a recurring normalization of bad practices or the idea of their inevitability in hierarchical relationships between men and women. In this case, between a man at the highest level of his academic career and women at different levels of precariousness and vulnerability.

We have different histories and different needs. We have individual voices that have been silenced. Some of us need a lot of time to process what we have experienced. We share the urgency of breaking our silence and legitimizing the voices of those who have dared to publicly denounce a pattern of violence that results from patriarchal academic validation processes; the deep conviction that

it is necessary to build another reality, inside and outside of universities and research centers, and that the CES can set an example, but cannot move forward without acknowledging the past of abuse, without ensuring that the truth is addressed head on, and without giving strong guarantees of non-repetition.

We are currently organizing as a collective of victims. We recognize the need for a safe space that can welcome people who have experienced the violations and other forms of violence that are being reported, support a collective healing process, and discuss strategies that meet the needs of women in their differences. We make ourselves available to other women who, like us, have been affected by these systematic abuses and who need to be welcomed and listened to without judgment.

We want our stories, with the narratives of violence we have suffered, to be heard. The abuses we have suffered, beyond the trauma, have had serious impacts on the development of our careers. We have been dealing with the emotional and material damage of this working relationship on our own for years.

With our lived experience and the wealth of evidence we are gathering, we want to offer proof so that there can be a serious investigation that leads to proper accountability. We have gathered testimonies and evidence that corroborate the practices described in the article "*The walls spoke when no one else could,*" clear examples of intellectual extractivism (appropriation of the intellectual work of research assistants, without due recognition of authorship and remuneration); sexual harassment, with retaliation and moral harassment as a result of the refusal of sexual advances; and the reproduction and maintenance of a toxic environment in work teams, by Boaventura de Sousa Santos.

We also have compelling evidence revealing a pattern of gender discrimination that is emotionally draining and acts as an ongoing barrier to career progress and professional development for female researchers. The overburdening of women with administrative, project management, and emotional management tasks; the deviation from agreed-upon research work in order to meet excessive and draining additional demands. Their contributions and work are frequently undervalued, as well as the difficulties they face in

attaining greater autonomy or building independent partnerships with fellow researchers. These recurring practices constitute the broad panorama of abuses suffered by these women and must also be investigated.

Our organization as a collective shows that these are not isolated cases and that this is not about “revenge”. We understand that there is a systematic pattern of abuse that has disproportionately affected women over the years. It is necessary that the investigation of these cases be safe and that victims be guaranteed confidentiality and a listening and welcoming space where they can testify without fear of retaliation. For this reason, we consider it imperative that the Commission of Inquiry be completely impartial and independent from the *CES*, that mechanisms be created to receive other complaints and evidence, and that absolute guarantees of confidentiality be given to women who wish to report or add evidence to this process.

We ask: If more women want to come forward and tell their stories of abuse, how will the ongoing investigation proceed? What is the process for offering testimonies and other evidence in the case under investigation? What safeguards are in place for women to feel safe telling their stories?

To begin a process of change, we must change the way these cases are handled and put the defense, protection, and care of victims at the center. If we can survive these harms, let it serve as a catalyst for change and let no other woman go through what we went through.

If you have also been affected by the abusive practices of Boaventura de Sousa Santos and need a safe space to share your story, you can count on us. Write to us at: querocontarminhahistoriaem23@gmail.com.

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