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DECARBONIZATION'S NEW FRONTIER: DISCOURSE, TERRITORIAL DISPUTE, AND THE “GREEN” LITHIUM RUSH IN THE JEQUITINHONHA VALLEY, MINAS GERAIS, BRAZIL

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This study critically examines the discursive construction of lithium extraction as “green mining” in the Jequitinhonha Valley, Minas Gerais, Brazil, within the framework of the “decarbonization consensus”. Through a qualitative case study and discourse analysis of official documents, corporate communications, and local resistance materials, the research interrogates the mechanisms that legitimize the region's “mineral vocation”. The analysis reveals a tripartite device of legitimation: (i) the production of a “mineral vocation” via spatial-resource isomorphism, converting geological potential into an immutable territorial essence; (ii) the instrumentalization and rigidification of regional identity, transforming it into a symbolic battlefield where hegemonic mining projects are framed as redemption from historical poverty; and (iii) the strategic capture of sustainability language through “environmentalization”, which semantically empties the “energy transition” signifier and systematically silences the material

violence inherent in extractivism. The findings demonstrate that “green mining” does not represent a paradigm shift but rather a discursive sophistication of extractivism, where climate urgency is mobilized to legitimize an ecologically predatory and socially exclusive model. This process accelerates territorial commodification, marginalizes alternative land uses and forms of knowledge, and triggers socio-environmental conflicts. Local communities, however, actively resist this narrative by reclaiming their identity and territory, as evidenced in counter-discourses such as “We are the Jequitinhonha Valley, not the Lithium Valley.” The study concludes that the so-called energy transition risks perpetuating, under a new lexicon, longstanding patterns of accumulation by dispossession, highlighting the need to decouple climate responses from unlimited commodification and to center socio-environmental justice in rural territorial dynamics.

Palavras-chave: energy transition; lithium mining; extractivism; discourse analysis; socio-environmental justice.