
Brazil: Against Covid-19, Feminist Economics in the Countryside and the City

With the Covid-19 crisis, the initiatives of movements and collectives based on feminist economics have gained strength. Feminist economics leads us to reflect on the updated mechanisms of control, while continuing to affirm the capacity for resistance and reconstruction of bodies in movement.

The Covid-19 crisis is ‘the straw that broke the camel’s back’ for the gears of capital, which were already turning with great difficulty. What is essentially a health crisis has become a generalized crisis in Brazil. This is not surprising; we would not expect anything else from a society based on an economy that is constantly at war with life.

The neoliberal system seems to be incapable of handling the crisis, but it is trying to stay afloat through false solutions. These solutions are based on the expansion of the frontiers of exploitation, the precariousness of people’s work, and the exploitation and monetization of nature. By contrast, the initiatives of movements and collectives based on feminist economics have gained strength.

Feminist economics offers a critical analysis of the current ways in which the economy is organized—mainly in capitalist, patriarchal and colonialist terms—as well as the theories that support the policies to implement it. On the other hand, it highlights the body as territory, where nature and culture converge. The body resists time as defined by the market. It is necessary to recover the memory that marks bodies, individually and collectively, and to listen to their stories. It is necessary to learn to listen to the body again. Recovering the rhythms of life has to do with reconnecting with the processes of our body, without intervention from the capitalist market. Feminist economics leads us to reflect on updating control mechanisms, while continuing to affirm the capacity for resistance and reconstruction of bodies in movement.

The experience of the Barro do Turvo Women Farmers Agroecological Network (Rede Agroecológica de Mulheres Agricultoras da Barra do Turvo – RAMA), from Vale do Ribeira, São Paulo, Brazil, shows how organization based on principles of solidarity and respect for community logic is quite capable of dealing with this crisis. The women in this network are broadening access to healthy food, ensuring the maintenance of diverse ecosystems, and strengthened by these, they renegotiate the domestic division of labor and fight against gender violence.

Many women in RAMA come from territories where conservation units have been assigned over their communities, whether they be *quilombolas* or family farming communities (1). They have preserved biodiversity and guaranteed food sovereignty in their communities, based on their ways of life. This has come at the cost of great struggle, and despite constant threats they receive from government agencies—which are trying to install a policy of conservation without people. The *Conexão Mata Atlântica* project (Atlantic Forest Connection) is an example of this kind of policy. It started in 2019, and seeks to increase carbon stocks in communities and extend conservation units—in other words, to expand control and invasion onto community territories, and intensify processes of monetization of nature.

In the video, “[The Feminist Economy: Learning with Women Farmers](#)” (available in four languages), we interviewed Nilce de Pontes, farmer and leader of the National Joint Committee of Quilombola Rural Black Communities (*Coordenação Nacional de Articulação das Comunidades Negras Rurais Quilombolas*, CONAQ) (2). She correlates traditional ways of life with food sovereignty, a key pillar in an economy organized to support life. “As a *quilombola* person, I believe that food security and food sovereignty largely come from our way of life, from how we relate to the earth—and from how we envision territorial security and food health as the same project. For us—as *quilombola* women and as black women—this is a complex relationship. It is based on our experience, on how we interact, and on how we produce healthy and sufficient food that ensures food sovereignty.”

Valuing subsistence agriculture—performed by women in agroecological gardens that value diversity—is more important than ever. As the price of natural foods on the market increases, these women continue to guarantee sustenance for their families and communities through healthy foods; and they do so autonomously (3). In addition to guaranteeing food for their communities, the women’s work also supplies food for multiple families in the metropolitan area of São Paulo, via groups that promote responsible consumption.

This rural-urban alliance allows people in cities to deal with the pandemic in a different way. Consumers in the groups have access to a wide variety of agroecological foods for the same price that they paid before the health crisis. The collective commitment to maintaining a fair price enables workers to take care of their health and immune systems, through consumption of more natural agroecological foods. The movements and collectives have also acquired agroecological products from the women to donate to the people who are currently most vulnerable. These solidarity-based initiatives are especially important, as they deliver quality food to those who never would be able to access them on the capitalist market. Today, most people in cities use the little money they have to buy basic food basket products, which do not include natural foods, and are made up of nutritionally poor, industrial agricultural products. The increase in food prices in Brazil means that many families are not even able to buy conventionally-produced natural products, which contain pesticides.

For some time now, these initiatives have been bearing fruit in terms of greater autonomy and well-being. The Covid-19 pandemic was like a test for the women to prove their strength and ability to withstand such a deep crisis. It is no coincidence that this period—in which the capitalist economy is going through a major crisis—is turning out to be a time of consolidation and even expansion of the economy oriented toward sustainability of human life (4).

In her article, “Life in war: Coronavirus and the ecological and social crisis,” (5) feminist Yayo Herrero points to the need to see this crisis as an opportunity to imagine the future: “We need to build horizons of desire that are coherent with the material conditions that enable them. If we do not do it well, firmly planted in equality and rights, others will do it—riding on the horse of exploitation, inequality, racism and the misogynist retreat.”

Avoiding the pitfalls of the market and false solutions, these women are showing us a possible horizon—in terms of the organization of collective life. It is possible, as it truly seems capable of facing the greatest challenges that lie ahead: overcoming inequality, oppression and the ecological crisis.

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(1) *Quilombola* communities are those made up of descendants of enslaved black peoples who,

during the process of resistance against slavery in Brazil, occupied communal territories known today as *quilombos*.

(2) Link to the [video in Spanish here](#). [More information here](#), or [translated to English here](#).

(3) See the article “[Alimentación en tiempos de coronavirus](#),” by Glaucia Marques, in the column *Sempreviva de Brasil de Fato*

(4) According to feminist economist, Cristina Carrasco, sustainability of life is “A concept that allows us to account for the deep relationship between the economic and the social; it sees the economy from a different perspective, considering the close interrelations among various dimensions of dependency, and ultimately, makes the living conditions of people—women and men—a priority.”

[Article available here](#).

(5) This text was originally published with the title “En guerra con la vida,” for the magazine, *Contexto y Acción*, and was recently translated into Portuguese for the SOF publication, “Economia feminista e ecológica: resistências e retomadas de corpos e territórios,” [available online here](#).

Original article in Spanish [available here](#).