



# YOUTH IN BRAZIL'S PERIPHERIES IN THE ERA OF CORONASHOCK



Dossier n° 33  
Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research  
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**COVER PHOTO**

The *Grito das Excluídas* ('Cry of the Excluded') mobilisation brings together post office workers on strike and educators who are occupying the streets in downtown Campinas (Brazil), 7 September 2020.

Guilherme Gandolfi / Fotos Públicas

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## *Introduction*

Across the world, youth have become important political actors, especially since the 1960s. Along with workers, women, and people of colour, youth have been main protagonists in the fight for national, anti-colonial, anti-imperialist liberation in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. They have also spearheaded uprisings against the establishment and their state institutions (such as the uprisings against prison systems and mental asylums – particularly youth detention centres). As they organised, they created movements and led struggles in the following decades for the right to education, health, and housing, as well as for the right to one's own body, the right to love, and to be able to be whoever one wishes to be.

In Brazil, the 1970s and 1980s were an impactful time period. In addition to the end of the military dictatorship in 1985 and the enactment of a new Constitution in 1988, in this time period leftist social organisations consolidated their foundation and structure and flourished, as was the case with the Landless Workers' Movement (MST), Workers' Party (PT), Base Ecclesial Communities (BECs), and Unified Workers' Central (CUT). This period of social effervescence followed industrialisation policies implemented in previous decades that sharpened social and economic contradictions. A new working class emerged and became the protagonist of social struggles, bringing demands for better working conditions together with the struggle against food shortages and price rises. These movements brought together new social actors in the struggle for rights: neighbourhood

associations, organisations of women ‘homemakers’, and healthcare movements all demanded rights side by side with factory workers.

As this qualitative shift in people’s organising and struggles took place, these organisations’ joint efforts also underwent a long process of systematisation. This provided the foundation for local experiences to shift to a nationwide scale and incorporate more theoretical vigour to people’s movements at the time. Left-wing people’s organisations realised how necessary it was to reflect on the political landscape and to systematise collective reflections. They used this accumulated knowledge as a basis for their work in the following decades, aiming to adapt grassroots work to the challenges of each time period.

To continue this legacy of study and systematisation with people’s organisations, one of our research goals at Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research (Brazil) is to understand the Brazilian youth who live in urban peripheries, how they live, what they aspire to, how they behave, and – more recently – to better understand their reality in the midst of CoronaShock<sup>1</sup>. To reflect on these issues, we have divided this dossier into three parts. The first section introduces an overview on what youth means, and has meant historically, as a category; the second section paints a picture of the youth who live in the periphery based on field research that we conducted in 2019; and the third section discusses the challenges that youth face in the midst of CoronaShock.



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<sup>1</sup> CoronaShock is a term that refers to how a virus struck the world with such gripping force; it refers to how the social order in the bourgeois state crumbled, while the social order in the socialist parts of the world appeared more resilient.



Faced with government neglect in favelas, collectives in Morro da Providência come together to install sinks with water and soap on the walls of the hillsides. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2020.

Douglas Dabby / Mídia Ninja

## *Part 1 | What Do We Mean By 'Youth'?*

The year 1985 was proclaimed 'Youth Year' by the United Nations (UN). The political use of this category emerged in the context of the external debt crisis in Latin America, when youth as a political category began to be debated. But what does 'youth' mean and why is there a debate about it? A first step to answering this question is to review youth as a category, understanding both that it is historically constructed – and varied across different political landscapes – and that youth are an actor in historical and social processes.

### *Linear Development*

The first treatise on youth was published by Stanley Hall in 1904, inspired by Darwinism and the theory of evolution. Evolutionism assumed a universal notion of history and progress and believed that all human societies were meant to have the same fate: the consolidation of 'civilised' society. According to this way of classifying the world, European societies had already reached the level of civilisation, and therefore represented the universal standard of civility. Meanwhile, indigenous communities in Latin America and Africa were seen as undeveloped, primitive, and savage.

The first treatise on youth followed this evolutionist logic that was applied to human societies and considered human development to be a linear, universal process in which youth was seen as a transitional and formative stage that takes place between the ages of 14 and 26.

### *Delinquency and Irresponsibility*

During World War I, other researchers linked the youth phase of human development to emotional instability, rebelliousness, aloofness, melancholy, aggressiveness, and other ideas that are still echoed today in the popular imagination. A dominant view pervaded in which youth became seen as a fragile and morally and emotionally incomplete group that posed a threat to the moral order; associated with the idea of deviation, they were seen as a danger to society and even to themselves. Since they are seen as a danger both to society and to themselves, youth – according to this line of thought – must be tamed. This notion leads to ideas of tutelage and care toward youth as an allegedly vulnerable group.

Particularly in times of crisis, authoritarian solutions have emerged as an option. In the 1920s – as the world witnessed the rise of fascism and Nazism – Hitler Youth, Falange (Spanish youth who supported Franco's dictatorship), and the Italian Balilla (Mussolini supporters) were vital forces operating within authoritarian governments.



## *Heroic and Defiant Youth*

In 1968 and throughout the 1970s, the uprisings that spread across the globe were connected to national liberation and independence struggles, especially in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa. Youth participation in these events was striking. In South Africa, youth were important actors in the radical struggle against the apartheid regime. Steve Biko, one of the most prominent leaders of anti-apartheid activism, was a co-founder of the South African Students' Organisation and the Black Consciousness Movement, which gained traction with the slogan 'Black Is Beautiful'. In 1976, twenty-three young students were killed in a massacre during the Soweto Uprising, including thirteen-year-old Hector Pieterse, for protesting against the apartheid police and the use of Afrikaans – the language of the colonisers – as the language of instruction in schools located in black areas.

In Guinea-Bissau, the national liberation struggle led by Amílcar Cabral left a strong mark on literacy and popular education projects among youth and adults; the ripple impact of this struggle spread beyond the country's borders to Brazil, where Cabral would influence the thought of Paulo Freire. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Senegal, youth also played a key role in revolutionary and national liberation processes in the 1970s and 1980s.

In Mexico City, the leftist youth who opposed the military regime were brutally repressed after a growing wave of protests against the military occupation of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). During the Tlatelolco Massacre, as it became known, hundreds were killed before the Olympics opening ceremony in 1968.



In the Soweto Massacre (South Africa) in 1976, twenty-three students were killed for protesting against apartheid policies and the adoption of Afrikaans as the language spoken schools in Black regions.

In Cuba, inspiration came from Julio Antonio Mella, who – even though he was murdered in 1929 at the age of twenty-six – left a great legacy and became an example for political struggle and organising, helping to organise the Cuban student movement and the resistance during his years of exile in Mexico.

It is worth highlighting the influence of youth who were socialised during World War II and who started to challenge their cultural heritage, both in terms of relations of production and customs. Baby boomers, who were born in the 1940s and 1950s, are seen as defiant and liberating; they are the generation that called for peace, free love, and communal living as a counterpoint to urban life ruled by capital and war. The conscientious objectors to the Vietnam War are a clear expression of the youth of that era; such events strengthened the view of youth as important political actors and agents of social change.

In France, the 1968 uprisings strongly criticised the state, relations of production, bureaucracy, and the power that people were subjected to in schools, factories, psychiatric institutions, and so on. While university and high school youth started the uprisings, they were followed by the greatest general strike to ever be staged in France, which included significant participation of working-class youth. The May 1968 uprisings pushed a critical agenda against the hegemonic ways of creating bonds and relationships of love and stood for individual freedom, which ultimately helped strengthen the feminist movement and would later be echoed in LGBTQIA+ movements and struggles for rights.

## *Youth, the Consumer Market, and Precarious Work*

In the capitalist world, growing post-war markets and consumption caused the luxury youth market to thrive through the 1970s and 1980s. In this time period, youth can be understood as a cultural construct of advanced capitalism and its expression through mass media and the cultural industry.

After the 1980s, the life cycle that was enabled by industry entered into crisis, and what was once thought to be a linear path for a person's formative years – from youth to entering into the labour force in adulthood to later culminating in the restfulness of one's elder years – shifted to a spiralling trajectory in which what had been seen as the transitory and unstable phase of youth became a permanent stage. This process took place under neoliberalism in the digital and information era – the era of precarious work.

In the 1990s, researchers began to look into the connection between youth and the inequalities of class, gender, and race. These studies challenged the idea that the category of youth is defined exclusively by age and proposed that social criteria be taken into account. In line with this way of thinking, in our research at the Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research (Brazil) we met a young emcee in his forties who, after a life of battling addiction and serving time in prison, told us that he feels young now that he is able to express himself artistically, organise politically, and dare both to dream and to live out his dream. Young working-class people from the peripheries are often deprived of their youth as they have to lead an 'adult life' from an early age,

entering the job market and many times forming a family at a younger age. Meanwhile, young people from privileged classes are allowed to put their adulthood on hold, extending their years of youth for a longer period.

### *Youth and the Struggle for Rights: Education and Culture*

Youth challenge the separation between politics and culture. National liberation struggles, as well as the movements of 1968, tie art and politics closely together. In Brazil, cultural movements from the periphery such as thriving rap and hip-hop scenes have emerged and burgeoned since the 1990s. One notable example of this is the *Racionais MCs*, a group who sings about life in the peripheries of São Paulo and was key to the political education of an entire generation in Brazil. *Baile Black* and Brazilian *'funk'* dances, especially in Rio de Janeiro, also became important spaces to meet and socialise.

In the 2000s, poetry reading sessions known as *saraus* and slam poetry sessions have solidified as self-organised cultural spaces at bars, overpasses, bridges, and public plazas, drawing in young people and encouraging gatherings and social encounters through art. Poems read at these events commonly address topics such as feminism, the fight against racism, and LGBT-phobia. Since the 2000s, there has also been a rise of university preparation courses for low-income students spurred by policies that aim to widen access to higher education; these spaces too have become popular meeting points for youth.



The biggest slam poetry championship in Latin America brings together poets who express their struggles, daily dramas, and themes such as love, homophobia, machismo, and violence. São Paulo, Brazil, 2018.  
Sergio Silva

## *Anti-Imperialist Youth and the Right to Health*

In the 2000s, youth – alongside workers and immigrants – played a role as key actors during protests and encampments against imperialism and large European trade blocs in what became known as the anti-globalisation movement in Europe and the United States. A decade later, students from Chile to Brazil have occupied high schools to combat government policies that seek to reorganise schools. In Brazil, large street demonstrations have been staged by the Free Fare Movement (*Movimento Passe Livre*) against hikes in public transit fares.

In the 2010s, we saw the rise of far-right heads of state: notably, Donald Trump in the United States, Narendra Modi in India, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. A considerable amount of their support comes from youth. In the case of Brazil, some youth are involved in spreading fake news and engaging in the hate speech that characterises Bolsonarism. All of these countries have recorded catastrophic infection and fatality rates during the COVID-19 pandemic as a consequence of their administration's choice to further neoliberal policies and promote death.

In 2020, CoronaShock is impacting above all the life, work, and livelihoods of those who live on the periphery of the world system, bringing attention to the importance of solidarity and the right to health and healthy food. Youth are at the forefront of both of these trends in Brazil. First, as delivery app workers – mainly black and young people from the peripheries who often resort to informal jobs in order to put food on the table – who make it possible for others to practise social

distancing. They have drawn attention for staging demonstrations for better working conditions through a form of protest known as *breques dos apps* ('breaking the apps'), which have been taking place in Brazil since July. Secondly, youth have played an important role in promoting solidarity campaigns; this includes handing out food and personal hygiene products to residents of urban peripheries and self-organising in different communities, as is the case with the creation of People's Health Agents (*Agentes Populares de Saúde*).



## *Part 2 | Brazil: Youth, Periphery, and Participation*

Recently, the Right has placed young people on the frontlines of conservative movements around the world; Brazil is no different. Today, 15 to 29-year-olds make up 25 per cent of the population in Brazil – the largest population of youth in the country’s history. It is no wonder that political and social organisations devote special attention to this demographic.

This generation is faced with different dilemmas. While their parents’ generation grew up in a period of industrial development, today’s youth in Brazil live under the hegemony of neoliberalism. While today’s youth have more access to education than their parents’ generation, their job prospects are more unstable. The predictable world of their parents has been replaced by a reality informed by the short-term; ideas of career building, job stability, and retirement plans are replaced by a sense of flexibility and immediacy based on an entrepreneurial ideology.

In this context, it became necessary for the popular Left to consider new channels to once again become closer to youth. What are the organisations, collectives, and instruments that have been winning the hearts and minds of youth in Brazil’s urban peripheries? This was the guiding question in the research conducted by Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research (Brazil) in collaboration with the Popular Youth Uprising (*Levante Popular da Juventude*) and the Workers’ Movement

for Rights (*Movimento de Trabalhadoras e Trabalhadores por Direitos* or MTD). In the next section, we will discuss the results of the research that we conducted in 2019 with youth in the peripheries of Brazilian cities including São Paulo (in the Southeast), Porto Alegre (in the South), and Fortaleza (in the North East)<sup>2</sup>. As we will discuss, our research shows how neoliberalism has penetrated the lives of youth, and how this poses new challenges for people's organisations.

### *Neoliberal Ideology and Entrepreneurship*

Gigs, freelance work, instability, and unpredictability mark the lives of youth in Brazil today. Their reality is different from the generation born from the 1950s through the 1970s, which – despite facing great social inequality – could take one of two possible, linear paths: the path of college education, mainly available to upper and upper middle class youth, or the path of taking on a job that did not require years of study and training, which was especially prevalent in the lives of youth who lived in the periphery. Each path had its own set of options to help build and consolidate an adult life, including buying a house, forming a family, having a job for life until retirement, etc.

Today, however, youth tend to feel lost amidst organisations forged in previous decades. Major left-wing organisations created in the 1980s are facing challenges to incorporating youth in their organisations. That doesn't mean that youth are not engaged in politics, that they are not taking part in collectives, or that they are not forging their own

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<sup>2</sup> To learn more about the methodology of our research, please refer to [Study on the Participation of Youth in the Peripheries of Brazil](#) ['Estudo sobre participação de juventude nas periferias brasileiras'], in Portuguese.

social networks. Our challenge is to understand where and how young people are taking part in politics, becoming collective actors, and sharing their experiences, distress, dreams, and solutions.

When we talked to young people about their future and the challenges of everyday life, a common theme that emerged was individualism and the ‘business-individual’ logic. In addition to looking for formal jobs and/or ‘gigs’ (short-term, temporary, or inconsistent work), they also resort to ‘entrepreneurship’ – the dream of being one’s own boss. This idea is presented as having a certain element of rebelliousness compared to other jobs that are available to them and promotes a liberal view of the labour market, in which it is only through hard work that one may find ‘success’.

This ideology of entrepreneurship comes alongside a lack of public policies. As neoliberal policies empty out the state, public policies and public facilities become distant realities for young people who no longer find in them solutions to their questions.

### *Labour, Education, and Violence*

Work and income are two of the main challenges that youth face, along with raising a family, which – of course – requires youth to have the means to support them. Brazil is characterised by a precarious labour market with high turnover rates. This is especially true for youth in Brazil, since it is more common for people to enter the labour market at an earlier age compared with most other South American countries. In this context, education as a ‘compulsory’ step to find quality work

no longer holds the same weight for youth; stories abound of friends, relatives, or neighbours who graduated from college and are unable to find jobs options compatible with their degree.

Our research also reinforces what statistics already show regarding the striking presence of violence in the lives of youth in the periphery, which often takes the form of police brutality, drug-related crime, and domestic violence. In a context in which crime is presented as an alternative for youth in the periphery, many young people have relatives or friends who have been or are currently in prison.

### *Culture, Collectivity, and Ways to Organise Youth*

In this context, culture becomes a way to mobilise youth, whether by creating or enjoying it. From those who want to form a band, become emcees, dance, or perform in plays to those who want to go out to Brazilian *'funk'* dance parties, concerts, or rap battles, young people are mobilising around culture. This is the case in large part because these spaces are able to channel a feeling of belonging to a group and offer a space of creation and socialising.

This may be the key to organising youth. Despite the growing influence of individualism, young people are seeking out collective spaces. As our research shows, many religious organisations and cultural groups have adopted this strategy to mobilise young people. Overall, the organisations in the peripheries that we analysed are building spaces of sociability that contribute to the development of youth as individuals; they do not challenge the individualistic mentality, but

rather forge a sense of collectivity based on the idea of enhancing the individual. In other words, these cultural collectives aim to support young people's individual development as they try to improve their personal selves in order to face the world. The youth see these collectives as a way to improve their lives, whether by creating a group of friends and/or by finding work, income, and education/professional training opportunities.



Youth mark points of reference in their neighborhood during collective mapping research. State of São Paulo, Brazil, 16 October 2019.

Stella Parterniani / Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research

## *Part 3 | Brazilian Peripheries and the Pandemic: Inequality, Resistance, and Solidarity*

### *Inequalities of Territory, Race, and Class*

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated existing inequalities. Its victims are concentrated in the peripheries, whether in Brazil or in the global periphery, in the peripheries of Brazil's northern and north-eastern states, or in predominantly black neighbourhoods and regions that are more at risk, in part because they have less access to public and state services. Despite significant under-reporting, especially because of the low level of testing, data disclosed by Brazil's state health departments show that the virus is not an equal-opportunity killer. And even though COVID-19 landed by plane, brought to the country by white bodies who live in elite neighbourhoods, the predominantly white areas with better infrastructure have lower death rates than black neighbourhoods in the peripheries.

Another historically rooted factor that has shaped the uneven distribution of COVID-19 cases and fatalities in Brazil is unequal access to land. Data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) and the 2018 Continuous National Household Sample Survey (PNADC) shows that approximately 13 per cent of Brazilians – roughly 27 million people – live in households with at least one inadequate structure (such as not having a bathroom for exclusive

use or having walls built with non-durable materials), in over occupied-households, or are subjected to high rent prices. According to these surveys, 35.7 per cent of the Brazilian population – more than 74 million people – live in homes where there is no sewage treatment system. Housing inadequacies and poor sanitation disproportionately impact black people as compared to white people as well as informal workers and those with a low level of formal education.

Inequality in Brazil continues to affect the most fundamental right – the right to life. According to the Violence Atlas (2019) produced by the Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA), 75.5 per cent of homicide victims in the country in 2019 were black. The survey also showed that the fatality rate for black Brazilians has gone up by 33 per cent in the past decade (2007-2017), while the fatality rate for white Brazilians has risen by merely 3.3 per cent in the same period. These are just a few examples of structural racism in Brazilian society.

As this data shows, people and territories that already faced structurally unequal conditions – which, in Brazil, cannot be dissociated from race and class – are the most severely affected by the pandemic. This reality is further exemplified by the Health Intelligence and Operations Centre of the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro's (PUC-Rio) findings that black people without formal education are four times more likely to die from COVID-19 than white people with higher education. Among Brazil's urban peripheries, those in the northern region have the highest fatality rates, and more than 20 per cent of the region's population lives in areas where they have to spend up to four hours to travel to the nearest city where they can find appropriate healthcare for serious cases of COVID-19.



Though São Paulo, the country's largest and most populous city, has been the epicentre of the pandemic, the city's fatality rate was just slightly above the national average. However, the disproportionate distribution of fatality rates across the city exposes pre-existing inequalities: the most affected neighbourhoods are in the peripheries, where there is a much larger population that identifies as black or multiracial than the city-wide average. These are also areas where the number of hospital beds is much lower than the recommendation of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and where the wait time to see a doctor is the highest in the city.

We know that COVID-19 spreads quickly in crowded places and through travel – both conditions that are present in the peripheries. Many residents of the periphery are domestic workers who have had to continue commuting to their employers' houses on public transit; black nurse technicians who have to continue commuting to and from work, often without Personal Protective Equipment (PPE); delivery app workers who drive or ride across the city for very little money; and so on. These so-called essential workers in the periphery – who account for a large part of the employed workers in these areas – make it possible for wealthier parts of the city and country to quarantine.

Recent surveys show that delivery app workers who ride their motorcycle or rental bikes are usually young black men from the periphery. As researcher Maria Augusta Tavares points out, in times of crisis, these so-called entrepreneurs are 'trapped outside' and are among the most precarious workers; as a result, they are at a higher risk of getting infected and spreading the virus.



A protest of high school students against the 'school lunch mafia' was repressed by the Military Police; one student was arrested. São Paulo City (Brazil), 2016.  
Mídia Ninja

We must not forget that the lives of black youth from the periphery were already under threat long before the pandemic: black movements, scholars, and activists have tirelessly denounced the genocide against black youth from the periphery perpetrated by the Brazilian state. The state promotes even more death through evictions that continue to happen even during the pandemic, despite the recommendations of the United Nations. While 'stay at home' becomes a ubiquitous watchword, the Brazilian state neglects and even attacks housing rights, destroying homes and neglecting households and families in the periphery.

State policies of racial segregation, racism, and necropolitics are not new in our country. We must insist on studying social relations in Brazil with a precise understanding of racial dynamics. This includes an assessment of one of the main indicators of Brazilian inequality: access to land, whether to grow food on or just to live; whether in rural or urban areas. Structural racism is also manifested in the way that different bodies unevenly occupy our cities to live, work, and travel. Once again, the pandemic and its fatalities expose these inequalities. Some bodies are not able to stay at home; others are not safe either inside or outside of their homes. The lives of black youth in the periphery are constantly threatened: if they leave their homes, they are threatened by the virus; if they stay at home, they are threatened by the state.

## *Income and Work Among the Poor*

Universities and research collectives have taken on a significant role in the production of knowledge on pandemic-related inequality. A survey conducted by the Solidarity Research Network Bulletin (*Boletim da Rede Pesquisa Solidária*) with more than 70 community leaders in 6 metropolitan areas around the country between 5 and 11 May 2020 showed that hunger is the number one problem facing the residents of peripheries as a result of the pandemic. The same survey points to unemployment, lower wages, and lack of income as the second most pressing problems facing the residents of peripheries as a result of the pandemic. Community leaders underscored the impact of the pandemic on informal and self-employed workers who lost their source of income with no compensation or expected date to resume their work. This is what has happened to daily-wage domestic workers, caretakers, and maintenance and construction workers, for example.

Because we are living through the worsening of an already-existing crisis, social indicators from previous years were already quite low. After Brazil's former president Michel Temer implemented labour reform in 2017, for the first time in the country's history, informal workers outnumbered formal workers. In 2020, employment figures reached even more catastrophic levels. According to a survey published by the Centre for Labour Economics and Trade Unionism (CESIT), 4.9 million additional jobs were lost in the first quarter of 2020, reaching a total of 70.9 million people out of work. For the first time in the country's history, more than 50 per cent of Brazil's economically active population (that is, all people who are of working age) are unemployed (Teixeira and Borsari, 2020). That means that

nearly 71 million Brazilians of working age, or around one third of the country's population, are not working (formally or informally), or are not looking for work.

While the overall employment rate plunges as the government fails to produce policies to improve the lives of the Brazilian people, one sector of informal workers has been growing during CoronaShock, drawing attention from the media and the general population: delivery app workers. These workers are beginning to solidify as a sector of the workforce and are staging strikes to demand decent working conditions. According to a survey by Professor Marco Aurélio Santana (2020) with the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), in 2019 there were approximately 5.5 million delivery app workers in the country, accounting for roughly one fourth of Brazil's self-employed workers. In March 2020, job applications to work with the delivery app *iFood* nearly doubled, with 175,000 people applying that month alone.

According to a report by the Network of Studies and Monitoring of the Labour Reform, delivery app workers are working longer hours and making less money during the pandemic. The survey interviewed 252 workers from 26 states, 52 per cent of whom are working 7 days a week, and 25.4 of whom percent are working 6 days a week. Among respondents, 89.7 per cent said that their income reduced or remained the same during the pandemic while only 10.3 per cent said their income increased in the period. Nearly half (48.7 percent) received up to R\$520 a week before the pandemic, but after the quarantine began, that number went up to 72.8 per cent (Abílio *et al.*, 2020).



Second *breque dos Apps* ('breaking the apps') protest: delivery app workers go on strike. São Paulo, Brazil, 25 July 2020.

Roberto Parizotti / Fotos Públicas

This brings us to the question: what is happening to youth during the pandemic? According to the PNADC, unemployment among 18 to 24-year-olds has increased in the first quarter of 2020, hitting a 34.1 per cent record high in the northeast of Brazil. In the same period, the national average was 27.1 per cent, an increase from 23.8 per cent in the first quarter of 2019. Most unemployed youth are women (14.5 per cent, while men make up 10.4 per cent), self-identify as black or multiracial (15.2 per cent and 14 per cent, respectively, while 9.8 per cent self-identify as white), and did not graduate from high school (20.4 per cent, compared to 6.3 per cent who hold a higher education degree).

These patterns are reflected among youth across Latin America. In May, the regional director of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) for Latin America and the Caribbean, Vinicius Pinheiro, looked at the situation faced by 15 to 24-year-old workers in the report 'Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020: Technology and the future of jobs'. The report points out that 9.4 million young people are unemployed in Latin America and the Caribbean, in addition to 23 million youth who are not studying, working, or in training (also known as 'NEET', or youth 'not in employment, education or training'). Furthermore, informal employment is the only option for 30 million youth (one fifth of the youth population in the region).

The crisis has also aggravated inequality between men and women. Young women face the most critical situation: 28.9 per cent are NEETs, compared to 14.6 per cent of young men. PNADC data show that seven million women left the job market in the second half of May – two million more than the number men who left the job market

in this period. Women also constitute the majority of people on the frontlines of the fight against COVID-19. According to the Brazilian Federal Board of Nursing (*Conselho Federal de Enfermagem*), teams of nursing staff are predominantly made up of women, who account for 84.6 per cent of all nurses, nursing assistants, and nurse technicians in Brazil. Women are also even more overburdened with domestic work during the quarantine. IBGE data from 2019 shows that, before the pandemic, women dedicated on average 18.5 hours per week to house and care work, while men spent 10.3 hours a week on the same tasks. This gap has undoubtedly widened during the pandemic.

Domestic and gender-based violence is also on the rise during quarantine, especially in the peripheries of big cities. When women and children – as well as the LGBTQIA+ community – are forced to live with their abusers, staying at home makes them more vulnerable and puts their lives at risk.

### *Youth and Solidarity in the Peripheries during CoronaShock*

As the state and governments have failed to provide preventative action against COVID-19 and care for its victims in accordance with the needs of each locality and region, a word began to echo among the Brazilian people: *solidarity*. CoronaShock has caused many youth groups, artists, collectives, social organisations, neighbourhood associations, friends, families, and even individuals to start solidarity campaigns and actions and strengthen those that already existed. These efforts propel youth as political actors and as protagonists in



creating new ways to overcome the challenges posed by the virus and the Brazilian state – especially when it comes to maintaining income, accessing food, and promoting health and well-being.

Solidarity has been vital in the collection and distribution of food, hand sanitiser, and personal hygiene products. However, there two kinds of solidarity actions that have emerged: ‘Solidarity, Inc.’ (*solidariedade S.A.*) and popular solidarity. The former is centred on the donations of big companies and corporations, which Kelli Mafort from the national board of the Landless Workers’ Movement coined ‘Solidarity Inc.’ (2020).

‘Solidarity Inc.’ works like charity – it is vertical, based on a relationship between those who have and choose to give and those in need who can only receive. People who receive donations are seen as nothing but recipients of donators’ benevolence, a way of understanding and establishing a relationship with others that is similar to what Paulo Freire called ‘the banking model of education’. We also know that, when it comes to big corporations, donations can benefit the companies and their profit margins in the near future.

In stark contrast, popular solidarity is promoted by the periphery and for the periphery. It is based on an organic relationship, similar to what Paulo Freire called popular education, in which solidarity itself is seen as a relationship in which everyone involved participates and has something to share and receive, building and growing a people’s organisation based on a common project.

Several urban and rural organisations are part of popular solidarity campaigns. They collect and hand out supplies, incorporate youth, and promote the relationship between agroecological food – a fruit borne by agrarian reform – and the empty pans in households in the periphery. This process promotes encounters between people from the city and people from the countryside; it also strengthens a network to fight against the government and struggle both for popular agrarian reform and for urban reform. Inspired by these practices and led by young people who reject the indifference that capitalism attempts to impose upon youth, we at the Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research call upon youth to continue to dare to dream of and build a future beyond the misery of the present and what is deemed to be possible and to resist the discourse spread by the virus and the vermin who insist on steering humanity and the planet towards destruction.





Solidarity action with families in vulnerable situations in the peripheries of Curitiba and Araucária organised by the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) and Sindipetro-PR/SC, the oil workers' union of Santa Catarina, Paraná, Brazil, 1 August 2020.

Giorgia Prates / Brasil de Fato

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During the sixth iteration of *Marmita Solidária* ('Solidarity Prepared Meals') in Rio de Janeiro, 300 meals were prepared with food produced by family farms in settlements organised by the MST. In addition to solidarity, the meals carry political messages with them, such as the *Fora Bolsonaro* ('Out, Bolsonaro') campaign. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 24 August 2020.

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