



# UNCOVERING THE CRISIS:

## CARE WORK IN THE TIME OF CORONAVIRUS



Dossier n° 38

Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research

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**COVER PHOTO**

Ailén Possamay, *What they call love is unpaid labour*, Buenos Aires, 2019.



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Ailén Possamay, *The world has not stopped; we continue to sustain life*, 2019.

The pandemic has sharpened and transformed pre-existing inequalities, reconfiguring the processes that sustain and guarantee life. Networks of care work in working-class<sup>1</sup> neighbourhoods play an important role in this context, as do those who lead them, despite the scant social and economic recognition that they are awarded. Across the world, new forms of organisation are born to redefine and create processes to sustain human life.

Rooted in an understanding of the need to politicise the realities elucidated by the pandemic, Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research and the collective *Mapeos Feministas* ('Feminist Mapping') created *Uncovering the Crisis*, a podcast that explores the uneven impact of the pandemic on different bodies and spaces through a feminist lens. We set out to analyse the impact of the pandemic through the eyes of grassroots feminists at the margins of society who support and create networks, build grassroots infrastructures, and fight to make our dependence on each other and our surroundings visible. In this dossier, we systematised this work and researched the resistances that emerged from a broad range of experiences and realities. Today, these realities are faced with the deepening of exploitation, pillage, and violence as well as the collapse of the economy, health, and food security. We structured this research around three main areas: communities, houses/homes, and domestic and care work. In all of these areas, the commodification, privatisation, precarisation, and feminisation of care work manifest in different ways.

Our ideas, understanding, and drive to do this work come from a commitment to collaborative learning through listening and dialogue. This would not have been possible without all of the women fighting for the people and people's struggles who inspired us to share their experiences and realities.





## COMMUNITY CARE WORK IS ESSENTIAL WORK

### *A New Map of Labour, Neoliberalism, and Resistance*

During the international feminist strike in Argentina in 2017, women workers of the popular economy<sup>2</sup> spread the slogan ‘If our lives are worthless, produce without us’. Through this slogan, they revived and revised the feminist debate of the 1960s and 70s about invisible labour in our societies; activities that, though they are fundamental in the production and reproduction of life, are not always recognised or remunerated.<sup>3</sup>

But much has changed since the 1970s. Salaried work has become scarcer, and women and LGBTQ+ people have played a leading role in creating economic strategies of survival to provide for their families. Many of these strategies centre on the needs of working-class neighbourhoods and the reproduction of life within them, from caring for dependents (whether in infancy or in old age) to the entire framework that guarantees basic services for the subsistence and urbanisation of rural and urban peripheries such as food, clothing, housing, and even water.<sup>4</sup> Deolinda Carrizo of the Peasant Movement of Santiago del Estero (MOCASE) spoke about her own experience:

We had to go to work with our children in tow and put up with looks of indignation as we sifted through bags of garbage. We had to open the doors of our homes so that the

children in the neighbourhood could have a snack and we had to create *ollas populares* [community kitchens].<sup>5</sup>

These strategies, which are born from our own processes of organisation in our neighbourhoods, have the particularity of centring the construction of community infrastructure.

These experiences come into being as a response to neoliberal dispossession, which places a particularly heavy burden on women. It is women who step in to fill the void created by the state when social services and protections are cut. The community solidarity networks provide a platform to coordinate work-related demands, the right to a clean environment free of violence, and the right to health, education, housing, food, and arable land.

### *Centring Community*

Necessity wrenched women from the home, but the politicisation of their needs led them to recreate home in community. The community is the site from which economic, political, and care strategies develop. These popular and feminist economies produce food, pathways, paved streets, sewage systems, and houses. But, above all, they produce struggles, dreams, and emotional care networks for survival. In the words of Janet Mendieta of the Argentine Workers' Central Union (CTA):

It is us, the women, who organise and carry out care work, who support our families in a myriad of ways. Not only do



we provide them with food and cook and serve the food, but often we support ourselves and others; we try to find solutions to all of the problems.

Networks built by the transgender community to confront discrimination and stigmatisation are a part of this community work. Solidarity keeps them alive, as Luz Bejerano of the Transgender Movement of Argentina (*Movimiento Transexual Argentino*) explains:

A transgender comrade opened her outdoor restaurant in one of the ... most conservative towns where there is the most gender-based and *machista* violence. ... Despite the discrimination and everything else she had to put up with, she set herself up there in order to be able to help the transgender people and children and give them snacks and something to eat.

### *The Feminisation and Essential Nature of Community Work*

The inequalities that are engrained in the sexual division of labour are also reproduced by new spatial configurations of work that emerge as a result of – but also in resistance to – neoliberalism. By the sexual division of labour we mean the historic, social, and political process through which abilities, skills, value, and/or work have been assigned according to biological characteristics associated with a particular sex. This translates into a certain distribution of work

that is fundamental to social organisation according to biological characteristics.

In modern capitalist societies, this process is accompanied by the unequal value and recognition assigned to certain kinds of work over others, which has concrete consequences on the unequal distribution of power to some bodies over others. In this process, the areas of the production of commodities and the reproduction of life were divided into a hierarchy, placing the latter in a subordinate position. Women were 'officially' tasked with all of the aspects of reproduction. Men, on the other hand, were tasked with the 'outside world' of productive work, studies, politics, and law. Along the way, the understanding that work was divided between 'men in the workplace and women in the home' became common sense. This dynamic is an important site for understanding the subordination of women's social power in modern capitalist societies.

The community, as an extended domestic realm, is sustained through the work of women and LGBTQ+ people. Shirly Britchez of the Popular Movement for Dignity (*Movimiento Popular La Dignidad*) spoke to this point:

The overwhelming majority of us are women ... and the majority of us didn't have work; so-called housewives, this kind of work was never recognised because it is also a form of work, so, better said, we didn't have formal work. We had this opportunity to be able to further our political education and train ourselves. We started on the weekends because we didn't have a lot of time during the week since we were



'We move the world, we stop it', an intervention that took place during the 8M March based on a photograph taken of comrades from the Movement of Excluded Workers, La Plata, Argentina.  
Colectivo Wacha

busy with other tasks, like being vendors at street markets or doing domestic work and housework. We built upon our political education and training year after year. Now we are working in our neighbourhood, we have work, and we are all women.

In these communities, reproductive work is approached collectively. Through its politicisation, new meaning is given to these tasks as socially necessary work. However, this work is still unequally distributed and continues to be upheld mostly by women. As Janet Mendieta explained, 'It is mostly like this because we live in a patriarchal system and even more so because we live in a working-class neighbourhood. Work has always been carried out by women; we are always tasked with the responsibility of knowing how to cook and clean'. The activities, processes, and community networks are fundamental for sustaining life in dispossessed areas. Britchez elaborated on this point; '[Our work] is essential because we are the ones who live here in the neighbourhood, who know what is needed, who know what the problems are, who live next to our neighbours every day ... and we care for those who need it.'

Without these grassroots networks and infrastructures there is no life, no markets, no food in the house, no vaccines, masks, or social distancing. Silvia Campo of *Encuentro de Organizaciones* (meaning 'a wide network of social organisations') explained that 'If no one was doing this [work], we would be starting from zero; there would be no cleaning in the neighbourhood, everything would be turned upside down, many of the kids and neighbours would go without

dinner at night, or a glass of milk in the afternoon; there would be a meal less per day.’

This weaving together of work sparks a powerful transformation for those involved. The work that is necessary to organise the conditions for subsistence spurs the creation of strategies of resistance that question and transform the premises upon which this system is built. In these collective processes, something more than care work is produced: ‘these are spaces where we think deeply about the way that we live ... where people and the group in the neighbourhood question the system of domination, of oppression, of patriarchy; what we have is a wide, open space for the community’, Analia Jara of *La Enramada* (meaning ‘entwined branches’) explained.

### *Recognition and Remuneration*

These popular feminist economies do not always receive the recognition they deserve, even though we know that their work is essential for the community and that they are always on call. They are often not given their due despite being key pillars in the community. For many years, they have been fighting for social and economic recognition for this work. Janet Mendieta expanded on this point:

First, they should recognise that we are essential workers, and then that we should be recognised with wages for our work because we work much more than we should have to. We do a lot of work promoting gender equality and health; we work as cooks in canteens and in eateries; and none of

this is recognised or made visible. If it isn't made visible, it certainly won't be recognised or remunerated.

These women give new meaning to the slogan 'what they call love is unpaid work', which appeared on murals across Argentina during the international feminist strikes. As María Benitez of *Federación de Organizaciones de Base* ('Federation of Grassroots Organisations') said, 'What we give is unpaid work; no one values our work as women, but to me it is very important, even though they say that we don't do anything. That isn't true.'

### *Redefining Community Care Work*

The pandemic has shown us more than ever that inequality and precariousness are the reality for the majority of society. Working-class neighbourhoods that abided by 'community isolation' rather than individual isolation sought to overcome material inequalities and guarantee access to rights through this collective construction of strategies and networks. For example, women and LGBTQ+ people on the frontlines are running community kitchens. Even so, this has not been enough since needs have dramatically increased as a result of the pandemic. Hunger is one of the main issues being addressed in this context. As Luz Bejerano explained:

We had 200 transgender comrades registered [with the community kitchen] before ... all of a sudden, since the pandemic, there are more than 500 comrades in the region who started to call us because they are in need of food since

they lost their source of income. The municipality isn't providing them with food assistance and other support, which the lockdown has exposed.

They get the materials, prepare and distribute food, and manage the difficulties of abiding by the lockdown measures. Lucero Ayala of the Popular Movement for Dignity explains how they saw themselves as being obligated to diversify their tasks and create their own protocols, putting the phrase 'we take care of each other' into action: 'In the neighbourhood, I am a community health advocate. I clean the streets and I also support the community kitchens by helping comrades assemble packed meals, [explaining] how we have to adhere to protocols, giving information'.

Hundreds of health advocates carry out house visits to detect the virus, attend to the elderly who are living alone during the lockdown, and carry out campaigns in the neighbourhood about how people can take care of themselves, and they communicate the responses with hospitals and health centres. Silvia Campo explained that:

We are also looking for information about where there are cases of COVID and in nearby areas ... [and] the care that must be taken to avoid getting the virus. We have also been disseminating information about which days health clinics attend to the public, which days they distribute milk, which days they vaccinate children, where people have to go to if they are experiencing symptoms, that they can call in order to seek or receive medical attention, and where they can get information.



Ailén Possamay, *Domestic disobedience / What they call love is unpaid labour*, Concepción, Chile, 2019.



It is also these women who put a stop to the eviction of neighbours who cannot meet rent payments in the face of scarce employment and new challenges to carrying out already-existing subsistence economies. Britchez recounts these efforts in more details:

Since we're here in the neighbourhood, our neighbours told us that they were facing eviction because of the rent payments. We know well that we don't have work; they were not able to pay rent and the landlords demanded rent or they would be evicted and have to find another place to live. So, we organised around this issue among ourselves and the community... to be able to go to the house and talk to the landlords and tell them that they can't evict families during the pandemic.

Hundreds of advocates for women's rights and members of feminist networks accompanied women and LGBTQ+ people who were facing violence in the context of the lockdown; they recreated meetings and spaces of trust in many ways. Lourdes Durán of the Feminist Assembly of Soldati (*Asamblea Feminista de Soldati*) explained that 'The feminist network was organising how to intervene in cases of gender-based violence, creating a common protocol throughout the neighbourhood to protect women who are the victims of gender-based violence. In these situations, a comprehensive approach is necessary'.

All of these networks, work, and organisational processes have proven to be even more essential than ever today in confronting the crisis deepened by the pandemic. Supported by community

practices that they have developed over time to organise social goods, the guardians of the community in these community networks of support show that – now more than ever – sustaining life requires interdependence and solidarity. But it also brings attention to that community care work, which is not always visible and almost never remunerated, and in which women and LGBTQ+ people play a leading role.



## THE HOME AS A SITE OF STRUGGLE

### *Every Home Is Political*

Throughout history, feminism has had the task of politicising that which is already normalised and has organised to change the configuration of the home and the relations within it. Since the 1970s, the slogan ‘the personal is political’ has served as a key phrase among feminists to question everything that purports to be hidden in the so-called private sphere.

Furthermore, the household has always been an economic unit: within it, there is production and exchange. Who produces and who exchanges the product of this work has changed throughout history alongside the changing ideas of the public and private sphere until arriving at the construction of the current classification of the typical household.<sup>6</sup> As Paula Aguilar of the National Scientific and Technical Research Council of Argentina (CONICET) put it:

What is expected is that the ideal family household is made up of a provider – the man – and a housewife who is willing to raise the children and take care of the chores. In the notion of the home, there is a utopia of social life. However, the limits of the household run up against many criticisms, resistances, challenges, and tensions. Is this the only possible way of organising the sustenance of life?

Despite this stereotypical image, which we see replicated in advertisements, the household is designed as a world of its own by public policy and in all arenas. Aguilar explains that:

The home has historically been configured as a symbolic and material nucleus of modern domesticity. It is not the same as the family. The qualities and method of organisation that the home has adopted go beyond kinship bonds. A home can be made up of one or various families and this too can vary according to social class, region, and customs.

The responsibility of care and domestic work varies tremendously in each kind of home. In the vast majority of cases, the lockdown has reinforced the familial responsibility of care and of bonds in general. The minimal contact with others required by the lockdown has limited every form of organising care that exceeds the physical limits of the home and has forced the prioritisation of some relationships over others.

The pandemic puts our interdependence in the spotlight and redefines who becomes part of our homes: what we refer to as family is created in many ways. In one of many examples of this reality, when Pamela Cutipa, a sex worker, was not able to go to work during the first weeks of the lockdown, she was evicted from her home. It was Margarita, a domestic worker, who offered her a place to live.

Economic dependence and housing insecurity are realities and constrictions that continually reappear in the stories of thousands of women and LGBTQ+ people. In these cases, a safe home is built

beyond the walls of their house; networks are weaved together that sustain, accompany, and transform. However, lockdown measures limit the possibilities of finding support outside of the home when these homes are unsafe spaces. This is why *Casa Anfibia* ('Amphibious House'), a social organisation that is dedicated to the construction of feminist housing and spaces, food, and support, did not waver when faced with how to address a case of violence that occurred during the pandemic. One of its members, Ileana Fusco, explained their approach in more detail:

There is no possibility of thinking of an exit from gender-based violence if we don't think about housing, about a home, about how this household came into being, about who is giving me the possibility of having this house. In this moment, it was us comrades who organised ourselves and, with what we had – which was technical skills – and with other comrades in the same neighbourhood, we decided to build a house.

### *The Sexual Division of Labour*

Both within and outside of one's own home, essential care work falls disproportionately onto the bodies of women and LGBTQ+ people. As Silvia Federici points out in *Patriarchy of the Wage* (2018), domestic work is much more than cleaning the home. It is to physically, emotionally, and sexually serve those who earn a wage.

This is clear in the case of Rita, one of the 1.4 million domestic workers employed in private homes in Argentina<sup>7</sup>. Rita is seventy years old and has been a home healthcare worker for the elderly for the last forty years. Her work has been considered essential since the beginning of the pandemic. She didn't go home for the first two months of the pandemic out of fear that she would give COVID-19 to her family. Although she worked her whole life, just like her husband, Rita was always the one responsible for organising and carrying out domestic tasks:

Before the pandemic, my life was very different. ... I went in [to work] on Wednesday afternoon and stayed until Monday afternoon and then I went back [the following] Wednesday. When I went home on Monday, I started again because, since my husband worked, the house was a mess; he couldn't do much because he went into work at 4 AM and left at 8 PM.

Even in cases where biological family steps in, other challenges present themselves, as was the case for Mariana Rojas, a health worker. Mariana decided to increase the hours she was working because that is what the pandemic called for, even though she went months without seeing her children except through a window on her way home as a result. When she made this decision, she said, '[my ex-husband] told me "yes, that's no problem. I will not go to work."' But, despite this agreement, she recalled the challenges that arose during this time:



'Dignity is not evicted', an intervention that took place during the March of the Unhoused, 15 January 2017, Mar del Plata, Argentina.  
Colectivo Wacha

My ex-husband had no problem; everything was all set, but when it came time to deal with the [kids'] school, schedules, and everything else, he didn't know how. He was always committed only to his work and to being with the kids in their free time... From one moment to the next he found himself asking: what do I do with the schedules? Homework? Why do they call me the mom of the school? At a certain point we couldn't do it because everything was falling apart. My mom had to step in: [now] she is in charge of everything that has to do with schoolwork, scheduling, medical responsibilities, homework, meetings...

For Mariana and her family, the change in roles led them to question and talk about what had become normalised: 'the bonds between family must have been different', she said, not "I'll take care of this and you take care of that". The division of responsibilities is solidified over time; it doesn't change from one day to the next. A neighbour, an aunt, a grandmother; this is who generally comes to the rescue.

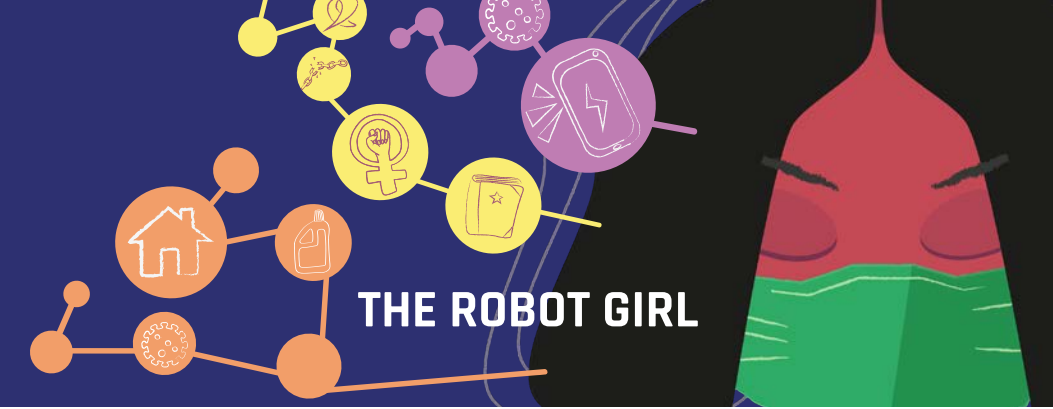
When feminists ask each other about the connections that sustain life, at the same time we ask ourselves, which lives? As Marta Dillon, a lesbian, journalist, and feminist activist described:

To me, family has to do with bonds of care and how our actions impact each other. It's not something set in stone; it's something that is always in motion. It's not love that makes a family – it's love and mutual care, sharing responsibilities among each other. It's creating a community of



affection and shared responsibility. ... Parenting and caring are tasks that can be taken on in many different ways. We need to be able to think about caring for people in a more collective way.

The daily challenge is to build social and emotional relationships that sustain others' lives that are not organised around the needs of a labour market or the profits of the few. This challenge is embodied in the slogan that says that we want to change everything 'in the streets, in the plazas, and in the sheets'.



### *That Which Is Not Named Is Not Seen*

Little recognition is given to how this social reproduction has undergirded the accumulation of capital in the invisibilised and feminised spaces where women perform housework and care work.<sup>8</sup> Considered to be a shortfall, a problem, or an expense, both men and states have avoided addressing this kind of work. It is not accidental or natural that house and care work are characterised by violence and inequality across the globe. Rather, they are social constructs that stem from a paradigm that is defined by a false notion of self-sufficiency and that denies vulnerability and interdependence as innate conditions of life in all of its variations.<sup>9</sup> This is the ‘hidden side’ that sustains the entire socioeconomic system.<sup>10</sup>

The fact that the work and workers who are the most indispensable for enabling society to function are the least recognised provokes indignation: as Evelyn Cano of the Workers’ Collective of Nordelta, Argentina (*Colectivo de Trabajadoras de Nordelta, Argentina*) pointed out, ‘all of these chores – having clean clothes, preparing food, raising kids – are necessary to live, and the pandemic has shown this.’ Behind the ‘robot girl’, as Quintana and Roco (2019) put it, there are women and LGBTQ+ people with their own lives, emotions, and projects.

House and care work have always been devalued, privatised, and informalised.<sup>11</sup> Even when this work is paid, it maintains these characteristics, which become further exacerbated through unequal regulations and laws as well as the violation of fundamental rights. The scant social, cultural, economic, political, and institutional recognition of this work exacerbates social inequality in this sector. According to the International Labour Organisation (2016), 80% of domestic and care workers across the world are women – the majority in Asia, Africa and Latin America – and almost 90% work in the informal economy with no social protections. This inequality has largely come to define this work, as Evelyn Cano explains:

The preconceived notion that the relationship between domestic work and women is natural results in 97% of this sector being women; this should speak for itself. We don't have union rights and 75% of us work under the table with no legal protection in the case of an emergency, work accident, or whatever else that might happen to us.

As a result, she said, as a domestic worker during the pandemic, 'I contracted coronavirus cleaning someone else's house ... our situation got worse and this happens because we are working in completely informal conditions. During the pandemic they do whatever they want with us'.

Legal gaps, omissions, and ambiguities are part and parcel of this societal blindness, which allows – by action or omission – for a multitude of vulnerabilities and abuses of fundamental rights. As

Pilar Gil Pascual of Undomesticated Workers (*Trabajadoras No Domesticadas*) explains:

Domestic workers ... don't know where to start our work or where it ends ... because it's not written in the law as it should be. There are many things that are 'forgotten' ... [like] regulating the night shift. [This work] is much less regulated than other kinds of work, and there is no monitoring system. We continually depend on the good will of those who hire us.

### *House and Care Work from an Intersectional Perspective*

Domestic work and care work expose the brutality of the racism that pervades throughout our societies.<sup>12</sup> Poor women and LGBTQ+ people of colour bear the brunt of this perverse reality. In the current systemic crisis, we see how capital is managing, once again, to reinforce its sites of domination and exploitation. Patriarchal violence, fascism, and racism are being rebranded as the mechanisms and technologies that they employ adapt to shifting circumstances. Multiple forms of oppression are the currency and product of a historic debt that has been exacerbated by the pandemic, isolating, objectifying, discriminating, and abusing life, bodies, and fundamental rights.

Different manifestations of violence intersect and overlap, searing themselves onto the bodies of these workers. Mercedes of the

Workers' Collective of Nordelta, Argentina spoke of her own experience with this violence:

Nothing else mattered to me; it didn't matter if they fired me ... I couldn't put up with the humiliation and discrimination any longer that I was subjected to when we go and carry out what they call 'essential' work during the pandemic.

For many women workers, this degradation is further exacerbated by the historical impact of colonialism. This domination weighs on each person and subject in a variety of ways, which are even more pronounced when it comes to women migrants who are subjected to racialised and violent circuits of modern-day slavery. As Rafaela Pimentel Lara of Domestic Territory – Madrid explained, 'Migrant women carry this racism like a weight ... black women, indigenous women ... the way this work is carried out is reminiscent of slavery. When it comes to migrants, their work is not recognised.' Mercedes expanded on this point, calling our attention to the connection between the regulation of labour and social rights and migrants' exposure to violence at the hands of their employers:

I worked with immigrant comrades who are provided lodging by their employers and the discrimination that they are subjected to is twice as bad as what we face. They don't let them rest, they take advantage of their situation because they are on their own ... They have asked me a thousand times for girls and when they ask you, they say, 'if they are from Paraguay or Peru that's better' and to myself I say '... of course, because if they are migrants, you'll be able to exploit them even more.'

These women workers are on the frontlines of care work and the ‘weakest link’ in a chain of vulnerability, violence, and abuse. In the global economy, precarity and violence are not only ignored, but actively encouraged in order to retain economic hierarchies.

Labour, social, and economic violence are realities all too familiar for migrant workers in different sectors of the economy. Delia, a feminist immigrant and member of *Ni Una Migrante Menos* (‘Not One Migrant [Woman] Less’), talked about this reality:

The exploitation that people are experiencing is going to get much worse. If we don’t have work now, we certainly won’t later. Then of course we will end up accepting whatever we can get: the wages they offer, the conditions they impose on us. We will end up accepting it because we need to bring money back to our families. And those of us who are migrants need some way to try to get this money to send to our families so that they can survive. ... Surely many of those who came back [to Argentina] after migrating to other countries ... are going to migrate again. But they will migrate in worse conditions than before.

They will migrate in worse conditions because the conditions of life became increasingly precarious as workers’ rights were rolled back as a result of suffering local economies during the pandemic. For this reason, workers with the least protections are the ones who are employed. Despite this, workers continue confronting and stymying the perverse logic of the advance of capital, whose role in deepening crises is abundantly clear.



Ailén Possamay, *Untitled*, González Catán (Buenos Aires Province, Argentina), 2019.

Migration is a strategy of survival, but it is also a multidimensional and non-linear path that presents itself to those who decide to escape sexual, economic, institutional, and familial violence. Domestic work is often the only choice for those who take this path and who seek the opportunity to achieve economic autonomy, to obtain a legally recognised work status, and to reclaim their self-esteem and agency. In collective workspaces, they find sisterhood, friendship, and *acuerpamiento*, the collective energy to resist.<sup>13</sup> In these spaces, they are able to reach beyond sacrifice and obligation and find learning, enjoyment, and collectivity.

Despite the multiple processes of exploitation that these workers are exposed to, thousands of comrades have creatively built power and emancipatory resistance. As workers cleaning private houses in Buenos Aires say, 'Patriarchy should tremble. [We are not] domestic or domesticated; not subjugated or devoted. [We are] undomestic.' To this, the comrades from Domestic Territory add: 'We make the world spin and we will change this world [because] to change housework and care would be to revolutionise everything at its roots.' Domestic and care workers not only yell 'enough is enough'; they move, organise, and shake things up.





## GENERATIONS OF SHAKING UP THE HORNET'S NEST

Decades of neoliberalism seem to always burden the same bodies. The crisis of wage-based society did not alter the unequal distribution of work, nor did it recognise it as an integral element of all lives – despite how feminisms have long politicised this discussion.

We stand on the shoulders of comrades who have long been shaking the hornet's nest to shed light on the fundamental role of domestic work, housework, and care work in sustaining and reproducing our societies. The struggles of those who came before us are reference points for those of us who seek to revive these discussions today, from the fight to recognise domestic work and the creation of the International Wages for Housework Campaign (IWFHC) in the 1970s to Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers in India fighting for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and remuneration and nurses in South Africa fighting for testing kits, PPE, and better healthcare management.<sup>14</sup> These are the struggles that Thomas Sankara championed in Burkina Faso, where he created a day of solidarity in which men had to carry out domestic care work as a way to push an agenda beyond the walls of the personal and politicise the dynamics and work that go on within the home as well as the violence and inequality that sustain it. These are the struggles that are written into the constitutions of Venezuela and Ecuador, to name just two examples, which recognise housework as a part of economic activity.

The pandemic uncovered a reality that has long been brewing in which inequalities, injustices, and asymmetries are violently embedded in the order of society. The oppression of bodies and life that are exposed to unending workdays, whether paid or unpaid, within or outside of the home, became even worse. The lockdown, general isolation, and the restriction of movement has had catastrophic consequences for those who rely on piecing together work day to day; for those whose labour rights go unrecognised; and for those affected by a lack of housing or by housing or land insecurity. The premise of the lockdown as a global response to the health crisis further cemented the familial logic that has reinforced patterns of violence, oppression, and exploitation.

In difficult times, networks that sustain life are strengthened, resistance adapts to the changing reality, and solidarity is put into play. Conflicts become audible; community traumas become visible; and other forms of kinship are created around politics and land rather than bloodline. Faced with this isolating system, many women and LGBTQ+ people become involved in different spaces and give new meaning to sites of struggle: a park where they bring the person who they are caring for, a community kitchen, a street corner in the neighbourhood, a bus stop, the corner store, and the doorways of school become trenches for building collectively.

As a part of this process, what we call home is politicised; its borders become diffusive and mobile. The hegemonic image of a 'happy home' is revealed as a central space for the perpetuation of patriarchal violence. The unjust sexual division of labour within the home is replicated outside of it. In order to change this, we must revisit its

foundations, strengthen emotional care networks, and retrace the command of the patriarchal family. Questioning what we call the home and the roles within it is part and parcel of challenging these processes and dynamics as well as widening the limits of the home. We must widen the limits of the home and recreate other kinds of responsibilities and relationships.

Throughout this dossier, we have identified certain common themes: the feminisation and the increase in care work to sustain that which is neglected by others – in homes, in neighbourhoods, and at the workplace – on the one hand and, on the other hand, daily resistance that gives new meaning to conditions and situations born from collective intelligence. Routines, silence, and cruelty are confronted with laughter, hugs, and even dance and song. In the interstices of the forms of resistance, other possible worlds are recreated and shaped. The feminist and collective diagnosis of the scope of this crisis offers tools to build the new life that we desire.





Mara Valdés, *There are no women stronger than those who support each other*, Buenos Aires Province, 2020.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Translator's note: *barrio popular* is translated in this text as 'working-class neighbourhood'. The term *popular* implies 'popular' or 'of the people', but because this literal translation does not carry the same fluidity, here we chose to use the term 'working-class', the closest commonly used substitute in this context. In other instances, we used the terms 'grassroots' (such as 'grassroots feminist' to mean *feminista popular*), 'popular', or 'people's'.

<sup>2</sup> Translator's note: The term 'popular economy' refers to strategies of economic subsistence that poor workers who are excluded from the formal labour market develop to guarantee the reproduction of their lives, such as working as street vendors, collecting recycling and trash, urban farming, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Federici and Austen, *Wages for Housework*; James and Dalla Costa, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*; Larguía and Doumolin, *Towards a Science of Women's Liberation*; Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*.

<sup>4</sup> Gago, *La potencia feminista*.

<sup>5</sup> Excerpt from a speech from Deolinda Carrizo of the MOCASE during the launch of the Secretariat of Women and Diversities of the Union of Workers of the Popular Economy (UTEP), 8 March 2020. Translator's note: *Olla popular* often refers to a single pot used to provide food for the people, sometimes in the corner of a park or plaza.

<sup>6</sup> Fraser, 'Contradictions of Capital and Care'.

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (Buenos Aires), *Condiciones de empleo, trabajo y salud de Trabajadoras Domésticas de Casas Particulares*, April 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Roco, *Trabajadoras no Domesticadas*.

<sup>9</sup> Navarro Trujillo and Gutiérrez, “Claves para pensar la interdependencia desde la Ecología y los Feminismos”; Gonzalez Reyes, Gascó, and Herrero, *La vida en el Centro*.

<sup>10</sup> Carrasco, ed. *Con voz propia*.

<sup>11</sup> Carrasco, Borderias, and Torns, eds. *El trabajo de cuidados*.

<sup>12</sup> Moscoso, ‘Guayaquil, the “Colonial” Virus’; Parello Rubio, *Mujer, inmigrante y trabajadora*; Colectivo IOÉ, *Mujer, inmigración y trabajo*.

<sup>13</sup> Acuerpamiento is a term used to refer to the collective political act of bodies, or cuerpos, in order to provide the political energy to resist and defeat multiple oppressions

<sup>14</sup> Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, *CoronaShock and Patriarchy*; Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, *Health Is a Political Choice*.





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