



## **April 24th - 24 hours of feminist solidarity against transnational companies**

### **The virus of capitalism**

These months of pandemic and need for social isolation reveals many things that have long been part of our feminist criticism of racist capitalism. The essential services for life, care work (paid or unpaid), food production and all the daily jobs, often invisible, labor that ensure that life goes on become more evident. All this work is done in different ways: mostly by underpaid women with often no labor rights, at the community level, with relationships of cooperation and solidarity (such as community kitchens in several countries), in peasant and agro-ecological production that is fundamental to feed the majority of the population. But in face of big business' greed, which puts the lives of the people at risk, we see that determining what is essential depends very much on the perspective. For capital (and therefore for transnational corporations), the essential is profit. Therefore, in places like Brazil, mining was declared an essential activity and there are already proven cases of **Vale** workers infected with the new coronavirus.

The capitalist reaction against social isolation makes even more evident a strange contradiction: our health and our lives do not matter but our jobs sustain the economy and the profits of entrepreneurs and their corporations. Many companies do not release their workers, do not guarantee the basic protective measures against the new coronavirus, or, even more cruelly, do not guarantee paid leave for sick workers. In this period of social isolation, many companies are charging the same targets and an overproduction of people who are working from home, disregarding the concrete changes in daily life that increase the need for domestic work and care, especially for women.

### **No more authoritarianism**

The far-right forces in power reinforce authoritarianism and violence, as in the Philippines. The threat of military operations against Venezuela is also an example of these policies of capitalist control, as are the imperialist economic blockades and sanctions, which pose more obstacles for countries to deal with during this pandemic. It is the historical United States' blockade that today prevents, for example, the Cuban people from having access to protective masks. The systemic violence of this economic model is also revealed in colonialist declarations against the peoples of the African continent. The new coronavirus crisis is laying bare the impacts of social and economic inequalities on people's lives, but this reality was already present in the world, promoting intensified attacks in recent years. These far-right attacks are articulated with the interests of large transnational corporations.

### **Who controls the world today?**

Transnational companies today amass more resources than many countries. They concentrate more and more wealth and power and, as part of their activities, they destroy nature, violate and expel people from the places where they have always lived. Large economic groups accumulate all the profit generated from the extraction of raw materials to the production and distribution of goods and services.

The transnational corporations are largely responsible for the increasingly intense dominance of capitalism over our territories and our lives. This corporate power is increasingly strong, and articulates different spheres of economic, political, cultural and legal power. Corporate power has many instruments to put States and their resources at the service of profits and not of people's lives, such as trade and "investments" treaties and "aid programs" that get States into debt and condition their policies.

### **We resist the commodification of health and march to put life at the heart of policies**

The privatization of public services is the result of austerity policies in many countries, and is responsible for the weakening of public health services - which are collapsing in this pandemic. The transnational pharmaceutical companies are an example of the market's logic fallacies: they do not care about public health but about ways to profit from patents, production and sale of medical drugs. Public investment in research and universal health services is the path to prevention and eradication of many diseases, therefore, it is fundamental to life in society. But this investment is attacked by the capital, which imposes cuts and privatizations. That is why these austerity policies do not guarantee life. On the contrary: they are death policies and that is why they are called "austericides".

### **We resist agribusiness and march for food sovereignty**

We can use the critical view we have been developing on the capitalist logic of accumulation by dispossession to reflect on the articulated causes of the different crises and the different viruses that provoke epidemics and pandemics like the current one. By seeking "the" origin, isolating one epidemic from the other, one virus from the other, more and more vaccines and drugs – all patented – are developed and will not serve for the next virus.

There are many studies that make the connection between the emergence of viruses that pass from animals to human beings and the industrial agrifood system. That is because this system articulates different processes that cause damage to biodiversity and to human beings. The deforestation in order to expand the agricultural frontier causes the displacement of human and animal populations; the production of transgenic grains to feed animals, accelerated animal growth by antibiotics and the application of a series of vaccines that change their immune system; the creation, on an industrial scale, of animals in a degrading situation and very tight spaces, which facilitate disease transmission.

As Silvia Ribeiro says<sup>1</sup>, "these are several factors that come together. The animals that leave their natural habitats, be they bats or other animals, can even be many types of mosquitoes that are bred and become resistant through the use of pesticides. The entire system of toxic and chemical industrial agribusiness also creates other viruses that produce diseases. There are a number of disease vectors that arrive in densely populated cities, especially in peripheral areas, where people who have been driven out of their places of life and do not have adequate housing and hygiene conditions live. This creates a vicious circle of virus circulation"<sup>2</sup>.

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1 <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/256569-no-le-echen-la-culpa-al-murcielago>

2 Spanish original: *son varios factores que se conjugan. Los animales que salen de sus hábitats naturales, sean murciélagos u otro tipo de animales, incluso pueden ser muchos tipos de mosquitos que se crean y se hacen*

The effects of agribusiness on peasant life are known among our social movements, which mobilize so much resistance and struggle around the world. In Africa, the expansion of agribusiness for palm oil production is the main driving force behind the encroachment of territories. Asian companies like **Wilmar**, **Olam** and **Sime Darby** are some of those who promote the expulsion of entire communities from their places of life.

To face this logic of production of diseases and poverty, it is necessary to strengthen peasant food production, based on agro-ecology, putting an end to the control of large corporations (such as **Walmart** and **Carrefour**) over food distribution. In the middle of the new coronavirus crisis, the cities' challenges to have access to unpoisoned foods are multiplying, while supermarket chains present themselves as the most hygienic and safe places to do shopping avoiding disease transmission.

**We resist the acaparamento<sup>3</sup> and contamination of territories, we march for the right to water**  
Most of the populations in the peripheries, the black and poor majority, are the ones who face the most adverse conditions and consequences of this pandemic. The reason for this is not just age or pre-existing diseases. It's the lack of water and scrapped or privatized supply systems, the lack of space, food and care; it's not being able to stop working because one works during the day to eat at night, it's the lack of labor rights... all this precariousness of life, chained and generalized, reveals the racism and patriarchy that are a fundamental part of this conflict of capital against life. There is a lack of water in the countryside because of contamination by mining companies like **Vale**, **Anglo American** or **Belo Sun**, and also because of the appropriation of sources and springs by transnational companies like **Nestlé** and **Coca-Cola**.

This situation calls on us to strengthen anti-capitalist and anti-racist feminism. It also makes us question all forms of control - those that already exist and those that corporations and authoritarian states are trying to extend at this time of pandemic, such as the surveillance and harassment of the Palestinian people, operated by the violent State of Israel in partnership with arms and surveillance companies like **Elbit Systems**.

**We resist surveillance, we march for free and secure technologies**

We need to broaden our critical discussion about the power of technology and internet companies that enrich from the data we produce in our daily lives. We produce this data without even realizing it: it happens when we are connected via mobile and social networks like **Facebook**, or their **Instagram** and **Whatsapp** platforms. It happens in cities full of sensors in surveillance cameras, in rural areas, in territories mapped by the same agribusiness companies, which digitalize their forms of control in the so-called "4.0 agriculture". **Bayer-Monsanto** is still a precursor to this ongoing attack on peasant production.

The data itself has become capital. Mass surveillance, where corporations and States come together, is part of this systemic logic of increasing profits. Our way of life seems, then, to be a product, a commodity, which can be sold and accessed without restrictions. **Facebook** and **Bayer-Monsanto**, which at first operate in different sectors, have in common the lack of transparency of their digital technologies: we don't fully know what data they collect, how they use it, for whom they sell it. But we do know that's how they make money and extend their control. In this sense, farmers do not know if the drones that fly over their territories are, for example, spying and collecting information

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*resistentes por el uso de agrotóxicos. Todo el sistema de la agricultura industrial tóxica y química también crea otros virus que producen enfermedades. Hay una cantidad de vectores de enfermedades que llegan a sistemas de hacinamiento en las ciudades, sobre todo en las zonas marginales, de gente que ha sido desplazada y no tiene condiciones de vivienda y de higiene adecuadas. Se crea un círculo vicioso de la circulación entre los virus"*

3 Acaparamento is a form of monopoly and private control of territories.

that the communities might not want to provide about the territory, their way of working and their relationship with nature.

Criticism of this capitalist logic (of digitization and surveillance) cannot be detached from the permanent resistance to land grabbing (*acaparamento*). Everything that is virtual has a material basis. These companies depend on energy and concrete territories to store and process so much data and, also for this reason, they drive extractivism.

It's no small thing that 80% of the data collected, stored and analyzed around the world is owned by five major companies: **Microsoft, Apple, Alphabet (Google), Amazon** and **Facebook** - which, in turn, invest significantly in other platform companies. These platform companies are presented as applications, and do not recognize as their employees the millions of people who work for them (the fashion word is "collaborator"), do not take any risk, do not guarantee any rights or salary base. Now, during the pandemic, they do not even facilitate the provision of personal protective equipment.

More and more we hear about "uberization", and in many places the work of millions of people is already mediated only by applications. Workers and consumers sign up for an application that organizes the supply and demand of a particular service. Far from the visibility of well-known transportation and delivery companies like **Uber, Deliveroo** and **Rappi**, there are also care application-platforms, which deepen the already known dynamics of precarious domestic and care work, deeply racialized all over the world. **Care.com** (which has **Alphabet/Google** as one of its main investors) is present in more than 20 countries, most of them in the global north, and claims to have 14.6 million registered caregivers. **Zolvers** operates in Chile, Mexico, Colombia and Argentina, with 120,000 people who provide cleaning, cooking and storage services. **Sitly**, of Dutch origin, is a great platform for babysitters, and says it has more than 1 million registered workers in Brazil. In South Africa, we find **SweepSouth**, and in India, **bookmybai**, which follow the same logic.

The work becomes even more precarious with this dynamic of digitalization, which also creates new forms of invisible work. In order for "artificial intelligence" to work, there are millions of people doing so-called digital microwork: transcriptions, translations, content moderation, image identification, monitoring of algorithms, among many other tasks done under very precarious conditions around the world, in countries such as India, the United States, Indonesia, Nigeria, Brazil, Mozambique, South Africa, Kenya, among others. There we also see an update of colonialism, which persists in the relationship between companies and the peoples of the world.

### **We resist free trade, we march for the integration of peoples**

The 24th of April recalls the deaths of more than a thousand women who worked for transnational corporations in the clothing industry. This sector is exemplary of how the transnationals organize themselves: in global production chains, with subcontracting, outsourcing and displacements by different countries, with strategies that change in each place. The objective is only one: to reduce labor costs in order to increase company profits. The interweaving of the international, social, sexual and racist division of labor is part of a cruel strategy: it socialises risks and concentrates wealth.

We know that work can only cost less if the people who work have no guaranteed rights, face long working hours and receive low wages. This is the reality of a large proportion of women, of the black and immigrant population, even in northern countries.

Companies impose precarious working conditions directly on their workers, but they also influence changes and deregulations in labor law through the Trade and Investment Treaties. Once again, States are at the service of companies and not people's rights.

The actions of companies, with their "free market" discourse, reinforce the inequalities of social relations - colonialism, patriarchy and racism, which feed back into capitalism. The work without rights and the super extensive days are realities in the make-up, home work and sewing workshops scattered throughout the countries of the South. Transnational companies violate rights and are even responsible for the deaths of their workers, as was the case in Bangladesh on April 24, 2013. Furthermore, it is recurrent that companies refuse to make reparations to populations affected by systematic violations, maintaining a dynamic of impunity, as we see in the actions of mining company **Vale**. To reduce the negative effects on their image, they organize "corporate social responsibility" actions. In these actions, a fragmented and depoliticized incorporation of discourses identified as feminist is even noticeable. This trivializes the feminism agenda, removing its radicality, and makes the organized movement invisible.

### **We resist the mercantilization of feminism, we march until we are all free**

The attempt to clean up their image with "social responsibility" actions is not a new practice among transnational companies. In the 1980s and 1990s, the expression "green washing" became known, when nature-destroying companies incorporated sustainability in their speeches - and only in speech, with soft solutions, always focused on accumulation and profit. What we call "lilac makeup" is not something that happens only in the relationship with women: it is a strategy that follows strong in different social sectors. But with the growth of feminism in various parts of the world, many companies have incorporated the discourses of individual empowerment and diversity into their slogans. It is a lilac makeup that tries to hide the violence and exploitation of capitalist accumulation.

This strategy is evident in advertisements and products from many companies that have women as their main target audience, such as Dove soap lines, Pantene shampoo or Always menstrual pads. It is noteworthy that these brands, which have made advertisements based on empowerment, are the same transnational brands (**Unilever** and **Procter&Gamble**) that, in other "sub brands" focused on male consumers, continue to make advertisements with messages of women submission (such as the Axe deodorant). Not to mention the exploitation of female workers in these companies, who are certainly not at all "empowered" in their precarious jobs.

We have been denouncing the cosmetics and pharmaceutical companies that profit from women's discomfort about their bodies for some time. Together, biomedical, transnational corporations, machismo (?) and medical power sell illusions of well-being and happiness while invading women's bodies and denying their autonomy. The discourse of empowerment does not prevent companies from selling their usual products. In fact, it is a new element in the marketing of those old products.

In addition to the advertisements, we see large companies (such as **Unilever** itself) financing local projects that mobilize women in communities with little access to health, encouraging entrepreneurship and awareness of personal hygiene practices - using products manufactured by the company itself, thus expanding the market. In the same sense, companies, with their Institutes (such as **Avon**, **Coca-Cola** and **C&A**), present themselves as promoters of awareness and women's rights, either directly, or by financing research and local initiatives of women's groups.

Even when these corporate strategies address issues such as confronting violence or encouraging women's empowerment, the approach is limited to individual behavior: they encourage the idea that women can do whatever they want (as long as they keep intact the structures of capitalism in general and the profits of these companies in particular). These same enterprises enrich themselves



by exploiting women's labor without rights (outsourcing and self-employment or home-based work), controlling territories and water, creating new needs and impositions on women's bodies and beauty (even when new patterns "open up" to different identities and diversity).

All this depoliticizes the build up of feminism, turns feminism into a discourse detached from real changes, restricts feminism to behavior. Not for nothing, this happens at a time of growing negation of politics as a collective practice, of criminalisation of social struggles, disqualification and persecution of union movements. Therefore, it denies the very character of feminism as a social movement, and the focus on individual changes and behavior and in consequence the empties its political sense of social transformation.

All these strategies appear in the sustainability reports of companies linked to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The United Nations (UN) not only legitimizes but has also built instruments for companies to act in this way. It is not by chance that these companies also finance the UN, which has gone through a process called corporate capture by social movements.

### **We march to transform society!**

That is why we need to keep our suspicion and our eyes open about the actions of transnational companies, not to fall into their traps and be ready, organized, to denounce their actions and prevent their crimes against life. For all these reasons, it is also urgent to make visible the alternatives that we are already building: in the neighborhoods, in the schools, in the fields, in the streets and in the networks. In the construction of solidarity economy, agroecology, food sovereignty, popular communication and the organized movement itself, made up of women who sustain the economy and who, precisely for this reason, need to radically transform it. Our feminist alternatives are a way to present, through concrete practices, the possibilities of transformation. Our alternatives to change the world and women's lives in the same movement.

### **The economy cannot be separated from politics, health, and life.**

In these moments of crisis, the feminist economy contribute to guide us: to put the sustainability of life at the center of our practices of resistance and our proposals for transformation. We face the new coronavirus pandemic and the authoritarianism of many governments, and we have set ourselves the challenge of mobilizing while maintaining the necessary social distance as protective measure.

In practice, this means: strengthening solidarity initiatives that rebuild and strengthen community ties and self-management of life together; making visible, denouncing and protecting women who live in situations of violence; strengthening and supporting the mobilizations of women workers for rights and better working conditions; connecting the demand for public policies to combat the pandemic and the fight for urgent transformations in our societies. This includes the demand for public and universal health systems, mass disincarceration, the right to housing in decent conditions with basic sanitation, the reorganization of the priorities of public resources and essential works, the end of the power of agribusiness companies and supermarkets over our food, with land reform and food sovereignty. In this agenda, internationalism is fundamental. That is why we demand the right to self-determination of the peoples, an end to economic blockades and sanctions against countries like Cuba, and we repudiate the threats and military operations of the United States against Venezuela.

In the 24 hours of Feminist Solidarity against the power of transnational corporations, on April 24th, we will connect globally with our denouncements, with our alternatives, with our force of self-organized women and march until we are all free.