



## **Feminist analysis of social and solidarity economy practices: views from Latin America and India**

### **Working paper**

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### **1. Introduction**

Struggling for the construction of different – more inclusive and egalitarian - socio-economic relations is not new, but in present globalized capitalism, it may seem a utopia or out-dated. However, we can observe myriads of initiatives bubbling up in all parts of the world where people are organising themselves and reimagining social relations. They are struggling for their livelihood, for rights, for recognition as workers, for social protection, for healthier lives and environment, they are looking for a sense of achievement from their perspectives and do not seem to embrace the search for money, individual achievements or "modernity" as sole horizon. These myriads of initiatives are highly gendered and involve a majority of women.

Long ignored, Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) practices have been getting growing attention in the last decades from academics and policymakers alike (Laville and Cattani 2006). Public authorities increasingly recognize SSE, for instance, several Latin American countries have passed new laws or have created public institutions dedicated to the SSE. In India, though the term "solidarity economy" is not used, there is a long-standing tradition of grass-root organisations working either on everyday practical issues, in multiple sectors of the economy, or for social protection for informal workers, combining "struggle" and "development" (Kabeer et al. 2013, Chatterjee 2014), that are increasingly engaging in lobbying activities with public authorities. Along with a reflection on direct income initiatives, government schemes and the new politics of distribution (Ferguson 2015), this growing interest has manifested itself in publications, conferences, laws, and the creation of public institutions for SSE. UNRISD created a UN Inter-Agency Task Force on SSE in 2013. In face of the challenges of inequality and climate change, the UN has put forward SSE as a possible alternative model of production, financing and consumption (UNRISD 2014). This growing interest in social and solidarity economy by both academics and politicians, however, remains gender-blind, even though these practices are highly gendered and women play a major role in them (Verschuur, Guérin, Hillenkamp 2015). On the other hand, although feminist economics has clearly articulated the concepts of social reproduction and the care economy (Benería 1979, Esquivel 2014), these theorizations tend to pay little attention to forms of collective and solidarity-based care provision (Fournier *et al.* 2013). This research addresses these gaps in SSE analysis and policies from a feminist perspective.

Feminist scholars, economic anthropologists and heterodox economists have renewed the thinking on social and gender relations of production and reproduction. They have theorized on the organisation of social reproduction - all that is necessary for the reproduction of life, now and for the next generations – (Federici 2013, Benería 1979, Meillassoux 1975, 1991). They have shown that it largely relies on social institutions -families, communities- where "domestic forms" of social relations prevail. These coexist with capitalist social relations in which members of these institutions are also inserted – sometimes partially, or temporarily - (Rey 1975). Gender as an organizing principle, intersected with other categories like class, race, ethnicity, caste, age, explains how these "domestic" forms of social relations are reproduced. Global capitalism has not destroyed them but, on the contrary, it prospers thanks to the articulation of these different forms of social relations.

What kind of social relations are being developed in Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) initiatives? Are these collectives spaces where other forms of social relations are constructed, without depending on unequal sexual, racial and social divisions of work? Can we observe the emergence of social relations in neither capitalist, nor "domestic", nor State forms of organisation? Under what conditions could SSE constitute innovative forms or organizing *social reproduction* based on ideals of commons and with inclusive and equal social relations? How could these effervescent SSE initiatives be sustained and multiplied without them losing their autonomy and being submitted to capital and the State? How could inclusive, redistributive, protective social policies that include marginalized women's rights be put in place to support these initiatives? Analysing these SSE practices with a feminist perspective and reflecting on what is *possible* in the current context of crisis of the dominant neo-liberal model and increasing gender, class and race inequalities implies including these questions.

To explore these issues, we conducted a research, based on ethnographies and in-depth research of SSE practices in different contexts in India and Latin America. We investigated the practices, social reproduction relations and power relations in SSE. We examined whether and how the high level of participation of marginalized women in SSE initiatives leads to power negotiations, at the domestic, local, national and global level. We explored under what conditions marginalized women in SSE initiatives constitute themselves as subjects of rights, to transform the reproduction of gender and social inequalities. We also explored the contribution of SSE to the renewal of public action and policies, and how the inclusion of feminist agendas in the field of production and social reproduction is negotiated.

The research encompassed six case studies from the Global South, three in Latin America – in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil - and three in India – in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala-. In the six case studies "commoning" practices in different areas are emerging, such as the collectivization of several forms of reproductive work, the fight for the communing of lands and the preservation of natural resources, and the struggle against the hierarchical ordering of human beings and their work according to gender, class, racial, ethnic, caste, age categories. The SSE initiatives were approached as *processes* where power relations are at play, and which may either reinforce unequal gender, race and cast relations and capitalist accumulation or open spaces of reinvention of the economy and of doing politics.

This working paper presents each of the six cases studies and the global conclusions along four axes of analysis, collectively defined by the network of researchers: a) Work, social reproduction, social and gender relations; b) The usefulness of the concept of solidarity; c) Territory and the constitution of political subjects. d) Articulation with the State, support, autonomy or co-optation.

## 2. Case studies in India

### *Tamil Nadu: social reproduction, collective mobilization and territory care taking*

The analysed case study in the Indian region of Tamil Nadu encompasses political struggles led by rural south-Indian Dalit (ex-untouchable) women to access basic rights and protect their livelihood. A collective of women from the bottom of the social hierarchy (rural Dalit women) has been able to confront – at least temporarily and locally – an extremely powerful network mingling dominant castes, political parties, state officials and business communities involved in the plundering of sand, with disastrous consequences on sand and water availability and quality. These mobilizations took place within the NGO Guide (Gandhian Unit for Integrated Development Education), located in Kancheepuram district in the Palar Valley (Tamil Nadu). Guide is committed to women's empowerment, combining the fight against violence against women of all types, physical, mental and sexual, the defence of women's rights in controlling local resources and participating in decision making, and the experimentation of organic farming as a substitute for sustainable development.

Initiated and led by a couple of researchers in the mid-1980s, the NGO operates as a federation of women's sangams (groups): apart the founders, the entire staff belongs to the local population. Scheduled castes and scheduled tribes (administrative terms for Dalits and ethnic minorities) are the main target – and will remain the main target – all along Guide's history. While over the last two decades many NGOs have specialized in the support and promotion of women Self Help Group (SHG), usually focused on saving and credit, Guide has a broader political vision of what should be women's rights and alternative development. This translates in constant efforts to listen to women's aspirations, requests and constraints and to co-produce, with women themselves, the objectives, the activities and the strategies of the organization.

Economic issues are at the core of Guide actions – women's control upon local resources and livelihood – but quickly transform into a political struggle around the defence of women to make a living on their own territory through small-scale farming. The tragic consequences of the so-called "green revolution" on local populations, and women in particular, are the starting point of their engagement. In Tamil Nadu (as elsewhere in India), the "green revolution" of the 1960s-70s has allowed a significant increase in agricultural production, while excluding women, landless, small- scale agriculture and dry lands (Mencher 1978).

The Palar Valley is typical from these evolutions while showing specificities. In the 1990's, the state government decided to industrialize the region (mostly through fiscal exemptions) slowly transformed into an urban corridor for Chennai. Many industries have settled and a new railway line has supported the urbanization process. This quickly translated into a boom of land prices. In the same period, because of the availability of sand and water resources, many brick kiln industries (which are major consumers of sand) previously located in Chennai suburb, shifted to the region. Sand plundering has boomed, with disastrous ecological consequences: destruction of flora and fauna, decreased fertility of the land, pollution of the water and decreased groundwater levels; risks of drying up of rivers and lakes and flood, due to the modification of the course of the river and its speed and the erosion of river banks. In addition to this, unbridled extractions sometime cause the destruction of water piping or electric pylons. In some places, women have no other choice than buying water, with of course dramatic consequences on their household budget. Guide members started questioning the organization on this issue, not because of a natural propensity to protect nature, but very simply because their daily survival was at threat. Limited in their physical mobility because of gender norms, married Dalit women, confined to agriculture labor, defended what was then their only source of livelihood.

Women's collective action was concentrated on one aspect of social reproduction, the right to earn a living and to access water on their own territory, with various motives: for some, it was a pragmatic reaction against the threat over their means of subsistence, whether land or water, while others were also defending the idea of natural resources as a common, their responsibility to protect and fight against industrialization. Care to elders and to people with mental distress, completely neglected by welfare policies, whether the government or NGOs, also became over time a matter of concern. By contrast, other aspects of social reproduction such as child care have never been part of their agenda, for three reasons: the internalization of their responsibilities as mothers; sharing practices within the extended family (among women); the availability of crèches, provided by the government few hours per day in most villages. At the same time, women's social reproductive labour, which is very time consuming, has always been a limit to women's engagement and seems to be increasing so. With the modernization of living standards, various forms of manual reproductive labour have now almost disappeared – for instance tasks such as fetching water, firewood collection, vegetable gardens-. But they have been replaced by many forms of "modern" – and time consuming – activities. Though mothers admit to some of the benefits of industrialization, which allows their young daughters to get urban wage jobs, they also widely talk about the risks of falling in a "love trap". Women's "empowerment" remains thus confined to restricted horizons, which must be compatible with the preservation of the reputation and the honour of family and kin.

Household budget management is another aspect. With the financialization of rural domestic economies in Tamil Nadu (Guérin et al. 2015), women have now a wide range of opportunities to borrow compared to their elders. Many women juggle with dozens of debts at the same time, sometimes more. The extension of choice is usually appreciated, but managing debt leads to new sources of tensions, anxieties, and sometimes sexual exploitation. Consumerism is another "modern" issue. Living standards have increased and urban norms have been adopted. This again implies new skills and new pressure. Last, and not least, access to government schemes, which are numerous and diversified (subsidized food, housing and energy, free television and many other consumer durable items, cattle schemes and so forth), certainly contribute to household's social reproduction, but here too women are at the forefront. "Now we are occupied", women told us repeatedly to explain why they do not mobilize collectively as they used to do in the past. At present, the mobilization of the young generation is indeed a challenge (and so is the succession of the founders).

Women's demonstrations are quite common in India, but most often orchestrated from above (political parties, social movements, NGOs, media). In our context, women's collective actions were spontaneous, initiated and led by Dalit women themselves, with sometimes enormous risk taking. Some of them have been severely beaten; others have been in jail for few days, accused of disrupting public safety. Widely supported by the media (newspapers, television) thanks to Guide networks, women's demonstrations prompted mobilizations in other parts of the State. Solidarities of various forms, that emerged gradually over time, have been instrumental in the emergence of these struggles and their continuity over time. The solidarity between rural women and the founders of Guide, well introduced among various networks, media and the juridical system in particular, has been crucial in protecting women's actions. Solidarities between women from various villages has also been decisive, not only to get a critical mass of demonstrators, but furthermore to dissociate actions from micro-local politics and local caste interdependency. Despite the fact that the plundering of resources is orchestrated by upper castes, women deliberately chose not to openly oppose upper caste groups, both to avoid a backlash from upper castes and to maintain their access to resources at the village level, since dependency upon upper castes is still very much there.

Men (including Dalit men) and non-Dalit women remained at the margins of the struggles. Very few were officially involved, either for material reasons (an important number of Dalit men also make a living out of sand plundering by acting as manual workers for big contractors; as for non-Dalit women, they equally suffer from water scarcity for domestic purposes, but feel less concerned by land depletion since their livelihood is not at stake and are less used in acting collectively) or because of social norms (non-Dalit women rarely participate to demonstrations and are supposed to be confined at home). Ultimately, Dalit men and non-Dalit women remained both at the margins, but implicitly joined the cause by not interfering in Dalit' women's struggles.

Guide has obviously contributed to the emergence of women as "political subjects", defined here in opposition with the "submitted subject", with the idea that the individual begins to constitute a subject from the moment she resists power. Political subjects refer first to Guide members, especially among the older generations: their testimonies and life trajectories shed light on the gradual fabric of a common identity around the will to protect their livelihood and to struggle for accessing basic rights. Access to knowledge – a common thread all along Guide history, based on various tools of popular education – has obviously helped women to identify the origins of the problems and the possible alternatives. The role of debates, discussions, and deliberations – in the sense of Habermas – has also been crucial. Goals have constantly evolved throughout Guide history, not through a fixed and pre-determined agenda – in this regard, independence from donors was key and has always been strategically maintained –, but rather through a continuous process of discussion and consultation with local populations. Political subjectivities are also strongly embedded into emotions and affects. Framing objectives and repertoires of action also had an emotional component: indignation and outrage against sand plundering and the progressive loss of their livelihood, but also the joy and pride of imagining a new and better society and contributing to it. Emotions have a key role in forging and maintaining collective political identities.

With regards to the State, Guide women members have succeeded in some of their claims but failed in others. As many other women's movements throughout South India, a great part of Guide mobilizations has consisted in forcing the State to fulfil its basic functions. As observed among other NGOs elsewhere in Tamil Nadu, women have slowly "learnt the state" (Karunakaran 2017), by gaining experience with the tactics, strategies, and practical know-how and know-how-to-be that are needed to approach the administrations and officials. Given the great distance between the Indian state rural Dalit women, such a learning process is of particular importance.

It is quite another thing to fight against the nexus between private capital and the State, which is at the core of sand plundering. In this respect, Guide action has had somehow a backlash effect. Women's mobilizations, along with a large number of other organizations in various parts of India, have been successful in the adoption of a state regulation. Although this could be considered as a success, the way regulation has been implemented has rather strengthened further the problem it was supposed to eradicate. Insofar as state regulations lead to restrictions in accessing sand, and at a time where the demand for sand reaches record highs, a main effect has been to encourage illegal extraction through mafia-based networks combing private capital, state officials and political parties.

Their trajectory has produced a number of irreversible effects, individually and collectively, starting with the empowerment of Guide members, though partial and uncompleted, to political leaders, who are still very active and carry their own journey. This case study shows the complexity of realities – the nexus between the State and private capital proves to be particularly



challenging – but also the possibilities: when rooted in local realities, women’s struggles, including among the lowest echelons of the hierarchy, are not a utopia.

### ***SEWA- Kerala: domestic workers coming out to the public sphere***

Informal sector in India is diverse and has varied features. The workers in this sector are both paid employees and self-employed workers. Work and production relations in this sector can be very complex and succumb to various kinds of exploitative features and inter-locking of markets. Over the last 30 – 40 years, India has seen the development of a variety of movements and growth of organizations in these sectors. Such movement began to organize the artisanal women fish workers and the self-employed cum forest-based workers in the coastal areas of southern part in the Indian state of Kerala. The activities with the fish workers began in the early 1970s and later in the mid 1980s an organization named SEWA Kerala was formed.

The Kerala movement of organizing women workers of SEWA Kerala sets its roots in the SEWA movement of Gujarat, and became a part of nationwide SEWA networks and unions. The Kerala state chapter of SEWA was founded in 1983 as a federation of member-based self-employed women organizations. The Kerala SEWA movement began as a response to the loss of traditional livelihoods due to deprivation of natural resources. The primary task of the movement was to restore economic security to these women. They did so by establishing worker cooperatives functioning in the service sector. Like elsewhere in India, in Kerala too SEWA has been involved in organizing informal sector women workers—specifically, bamboo workers—since the 1980s, an effort that continues in the present.

However, SEWA Kerala, located in the city of Thiruvananthapuram, and organizing workers in largely rural and coastal areas around the city, has had an interesting history in that it proved to be responsive to larger processes shaping women’s work in Kerala in the 1980s and 1990s. The steady loss of work that women faced due to the decline of traditional industries, and the steady inflow of incomes to families of Malayalee (original inhabitants of Kerala) migrants to the Gulf since the late 1970s, combined with the intensification of ageing in this post-demographic transition society (Zachariah, Rajan, Sarma, Navaneetham, Nair and Misra 1994), created a high demand situation for female domestic labor which, however, received relatively poor remuneration, and remained almost entirely unregulated. Today, 9 out of every 10 domestic workers are female (Kaur 2007).

Currently, SEWA Kerala organizes women informal sector workers, primarily the domestic workers, against social, political and cultural resistances for protecting their rights to work and engage in paid work or employment. The distinctive aspect of this kind of solidarity group is that it is a movement of collectivizing and organizing socially and economically disadvantaged women towards protecting their rights to be engaged in paid employment, where dominant patriarchal norms don’t allow women to move out of the households and undertake paid jobs. Given the prevalence of informal labour in India, social protection is a major issue. SEWA is one of the best-known examples in India where the women members formed an alternative trade union to seek social and economic justice for the informal workers and their families. Civil social organisations have put pressure on governments to recognize domestic workers’ rights, including a minimum wage, and these have yielded some results (Lyer 2009). Social security provisions like provident fund, healthcare, pension, etc., are out of the purview of this work as there is no well-defined employer- employee relationship. To get registered in the Kerala domestic workers’ welfare scheme, the workers had to be endorsed by their employers. But in many cases the employers were reluctant to acknowledge them as their workers.

The impressive performance of the state of Kerala in demographic and social indicators has carved out a separate niche for itself in the development discourse. A bulk of academic

literature discusses Kerala's high level of female literacy, customs of matrilineal inheritance, participation of people in political decision-making and social achievements regarding decentralized governance and commitment towards social welfare, high levels of life expectancy, low infant mortality and cohesive social structure promoting effective space for social and political debates. Since the 1970s, achievements in social development and reduction of poverty have led to the emergence of a 'Kerala-Model' of development. However, in contradiction, there are ample evidences that show lower social and economic status of women and declining participation of women in labour force. The prevalence of matrilineal kinship among sections of the population in Kerala with its distinct patterns of inheritance, marriage and post-marital residence seemed to indicate greater decision-making power for women vis- a-vis women in the patrilineal families of north India. However, Kabeer (1999) criticized those studies that used access to land (women's rights to land under specific kinship systems) as a measure of autonomy or empowerment through a simplistic relationship. It was seldom demonstrated how such access translated into actual control.

The decentralization process carried out in the State has incorporated a special plan component, Women Component Plan (WCP) and organized women into self-help groups under a state-wide program called "Kudumbashree". However, it's rather difficult to find any radical change in the society apart from personal economic aspirations of getting "better jobs". Kerala politics has always been dominated by male unionists fighting for welfare programs. With Kudumbashree, the state moved to a family- oriented policy where women are the (docile) agents of change. There is a relative marginality of females cantered in the expectation that they will upon marriage shift residence and affiliation to the family of their husband. The decision of a woman, unlike that of a man, to participate in the labour force is, in general, the outcome of the decision-making of the household to which she belongs.

At the outset, it is challenging to meaningfully interpret the terms 'solidarity economy' and 'feminism', given that these are terms not present in Malayalam (the local language of Kerala). The terms that are better understood locally are 'organizing' and 'women's concerns'. Organizing and collectivizing women is the first and most fundamental step. The collectives that emerge are then able to improve the terms of engagement of the women workers in the labour market. For the members of SEWA Kerala, the base of solidarity is equality and unity, which may be harnessed to create familial ties that engender actions of reciprocity between the women. This sense of being part of a family with some responsibility to one another is the foundation for group solidarity. SEWA's main effort is to strengthen women's position in the workplace, and not to challenge the capitalist mode of production relations. SEWA's contribution in making the informal women workers visible as political subjects is though well recognized but not completely unquestionable as the form of politics or their practices of [feminist] politics, at times are criticized as submissive by scholars and activists.

SEWA Kerala sees itself as a 'feminist' space because it allows women to exercise a role that is not strictly reproductive or familial. Shared interests of women involved may result in a 'voluntary community', which many be transferred to greater and more radical political ends. There are all possibilities of creating a compromised space but consequently the space might transform, evolve and expand towards 'women's exercise of agency to activate their rights and resist community strictures and control'. The issue of care responsibilities has not come prominently in the agendas of SEWA Kerala. Childcare is still a very private issue though all of the members during our series of discussions, admitted that the issue of child care is one of the most important factors that determines a woman member's availability to accept employment.

Class was already identified as an important political category in Kerala. However, it was not that easy to reiterate the importance of gender. The mainstream trade unions always resisted the

functioning of SEWA that was categorized as an agency of domestic workers that works in an apolitical fashion. SEWA-Kerala places their strategy of professional training for the domestic workers in the context of integrating their work with trade unionism. This was more to get acceptance as workers for demanding workers' rights. SEWA organizers and workers consistently rated 'politics' as an outright hostile space. This reveals the story of the hegemonic mainstream political culture of the state and the marginal oppositional civil society that remains mutually exclusive. The decentralization movement of the state promised to effectively address the issues of gender justice and inclusion of Dalits and Adivasis in governance and development process. Unfortunately, many of those issues remain unaddressed.

SEWA has no doubt addressed women's bargaining powers within families, though the family continues to be their major source of social and emotional security. This no doubt imposes limits to the efforts by SEWA to politicize women against pervasive anti-women practices. It is expected that developing of collective forms of social security would effectively reduce personal dependence of women on families and would challenge the dominant mode of power relations.

### ***Udupi's fisherwomen: between mothering and market***

This case study focused on the fresh fish sellers' association in Udupi district looking at the political struggles of fisherwomen for access to their livelihood of selling fish and struggles for social protection and state welfare. The Udupi fresh fish sellers' association – called the *Udupi Hasi Meenu Marathagarara Sangha* was founded in 2010 as a response to newly emerging large fish shops in Udupi and neighboring district of Kundapura. In 2010 when a fish shop was set up in Kundapura, fearing the loss of women's employment and in a bid to support an occupation that has traditionally been that of women in the region, Udupi's fisherwomen joined together and founded the Association. The Association made an appeal to the then Home Minister, requesting him to refuse licenses to any new fresh fish outlets in Udupi District as it would affect the livelihoods of over 10,000 fisher women directly selling fish and about 30,000 women indirectly associated with the sales of fresh fish. In response to their protest, the Minister promised the Association that he would ensure that no new outlets for sale of fresh fish would be permitted.

Market forces are quite strong in the region and upper-class men with access to capital are vying to sell fish. Women fish sellers are increasingly under pressure from small fresh fish shops as well as mobile male sellers that provide competition, and fear that the establishment of larger shops will mean an end to their work. The battle to keep fresh fish shops from opening in the region is an on-going one. Despite the agreement to prevent fish shops, in 2015 the Gram Panchayaths began issuing permissions to shops, resulting in renewed protests by the Association, and issuance of new orders by the District Commissioner's office. With these frequent protests fisher women continue to apply pressure on the local administration to ensure the protection of their occupation. Apart from resisting fish shops, the Association negotiates with the State to set up markets for women to sell their fish in different parts of Udupi district. It also actively manages the use of these market places, allocating space in the markets to sellers and carrying out yearly rotation of spaces allotted. The Association also engages in other issues concerning the welfare of fisherwomen such as access to low cost medical insurance, resolution of intra marital disputes, addressal of domestic violence, access to state welfare benefits such as scholarships to children, low interest credit for housing, education, fish selling, etc.

The majority of the fisherwomen in the Association belong to the fisherman's caste in the region – the Mogaveeras and are the lowest of the four castes – shudras, in the caste hierarchy. These women consistently speak of their work as – Jati Kasubu, meaning caste occupation. Prior to the establishment of markets in Udupi, women bartered fish for rice under what was known as the 'kyeka' system. Under this system each fisherman's household was linked to a group of upper



caste households, and fisherwomen in these households exchanged fish for rice with the assigned households. Reciprocity was built into these relations with fisherwomen and men employed by *kyeka* households during the monsoons as agricultural labour. The market symbolizes freedom from caste bonds for these women, who were able to get better prices for their fish and reworked their caste relationships to continue maintaining loyal customers, many of whom they earlier served within the *kyeka* system. While the market brought about significant disruptions, it also enabled continuities as their earlier role of matrilineal breadwinners was reconfigured to the new patrilineal capitalist system in which women continue to remain principle breadwinners albeit losing their rights to inherit property. The reduced power of women in their families in this new system was balanced by the increasing value of fish and the improved earnings of women in the market system, that allowed them to see real improvement in their lives, in terms of income and access to basic education. While the increasing value of fish resulted in the class mobility of the majority of fishermen who went on to become ‘business men’ owning boats, ice making and fish processing industries, fisherwomen continued as sellers, primarily because fisherwomen’s income continued to be directed towards social reproduction, while male income was directed towards productive activities- through reinvestments in business. With men becoming capital rich, the retail sales of fish became an attractive venue for investment, thus resulting in fish shops mushrooming in other more urban parts of the coast. As Udupi began urbanizing, this threat began to spread to the region and fisherwomen’s struggle to prevent shops from taking over their work, is paradoxically a struggle against other fishermen in the region. Fisherwomen have been able to ward off men from taking over their work, through delicate political manoeuvring – co-opting a few powerful fishermen into their cause, asserting their roles as poor mothers. Thus in this new democratic context the reworking of caste occupation into an arena of empowerment of poor women has worked to gain the support of fishermen, as well as political representatives mandated to ensure gender equality and poverty alleviation. What is significant in this case study is that the productive work of fisherwomen is thus discursively constructed as reproductive work – as livelihoods - in which women continue to sell fish to put food on the table – both for the community they serve as well as their own families.

Much of the reproductive work that fisherwomen are unable to manage, due to their absence at home, is often managed by other women such as neighbours and relatives, or close kin such as mothers, mothers in laws, sisters and daughters. Reproductive work is not problematized by fisherwomen themselves and is ‘managed’ by other women, thus reproducing gender relations in the process. Gender is thus reproduced in both the material domains of the market in forging the image of working mothers, as well as in the domestic realms of care and reproductive work. Social relations of gender are also reproduced as the marginal role of men within families is reproduced within new capitalist relations, in which women continue to remain principle breadwinners, relying on other women’s domestic and care work, while men take on new entrepreneurial roles, enabling new forms of accumulation. As such, there is an overlap between productive and reproductive activities, in which the reproduction of the community hinges on fisherwomen selling ‘fresh’ fish, that is healthier for the larger community. The perception of women’s productive and reproductive work as community service, and an essentially gendered one, means that women are left to their own vices to juggle productive and reproductive work. Women bear the consequences of this over work, exhaustion, lack of sleep and fatigue, developing health problems early on.

Despite the many hardships of their work, fisherwomen speak of their work as something they look forward to. While the capitalist market provides no protection from risk or losses, the market still provides women with support from other women. Linked to each other through kinship and communal ties, women selling in Udupi’s market make close friendships and relationships that seem to provide respite from the ravages of capital. Even if they compete with9

each other to sell fish, often trying to empty their baskets before their friends, there is a sense of security in the relationships they make here. In all of the interviews, women spoke of being ‘free’ as sellers, ‘free’ to come to the market at the time they wished to come, ‘free’ to leave at the time they wanted to, ‘free’ to take a day off, without asking anyone for their approval. This freedom is not only from the hierarchies or caste, but from other forms of power, control and dependency. While wage work often provides similar or sometimes higher earnings, women prefer selling fish to other types of work. On the one hand one can view this work as autonomous in terms of the absence of vertical relations of power, while on the other hand their work is embedded in other relations of dependence. For instance while the dominant majority of fisherwomen are small sellers, they rely on the political networks of a few big sellers. The big sellers in turn rely on small sellers, as they provide strength to their struggles for protecting their work. The large disparities of incomes between big and small sellers is a source of tensions within the association, with the larger objective of redistribution clashing with the accumulative practices of big sellers. Associative practices are thus also often a compromise between women, with certain dominant objectives outweighing others. Women sellers in the fish market are thus dependent on each other for the work they carry out as well as their struggles for protecting their market.

Due to their ability to earn, women are also often financially exploited by their spouses, often investing in their entrepreneurial activities and frequently incurring and paying for the losses. In indirect ways women’s work and earnings enable male entrepreneurialism, resulting in women’s livelihoods sustaining capitalist accumulation. Within the patriarchal context, as property and the gains of business income inhere in male members, women and women’s work enables accumulation without the right to a claim in such accumulation. As male earnings are redirected back into the business, women’s breadwinning activities is absorbed in the domestic sphere of social reproduction, in hidden ways sustaining capitalist enterprise.

Fisherwomen political stance is limited to the work they do, and does not extend to the personal realm, they construct themselves as political subjects, deserving of state protection and benevolence, as mothers and reproducers of community and culture. This self-construction as carrying on an acceptable caste occupation, enables them to position themselves politically as lower caste women, and at the same time, as poor and thus entitled to a special status, unlike other workers. Their allusion of work- as reproductive work, essential to the health of the community is stressed, as women argue their right to sell ‘fresh fish’ at low prices and not refrigerated fish at high cost, in a market where prices can be negotiated as against fixed price shops. In this political stance they adopt an anti-capitalist approach, rejecting capital intensive establishments as costly and harmful for the health of the local community, that deserves to eat ‘fresh fish’ at low prices, something only they can supply. The demand for low cost fresh fish in Udupi has thus enabled women to continue selling. This allows a rethinking of the notions of altruism that inhere in SSE (Hillenkamp, Wanderley, 2015), as something that can enable women to garner political support for their work. In the context of Udupi, altruism serves as a strategic device, to mobilize political support. In viewing one form of work as work and another as ‘care’ as ‘motherly responsibilities’, women are forced to use these very same discourses to protect their work which reinforces gender hierarchies, while at the same time enabling their economic independence.

Deliberation underlies the strong cohesion amongst the members of the Association, with caste and kin relations enabling solidarities. Issues that affect fisherwomen are discussed in monthly meetings with fisherwomen in the office of the Association. Also, there is a more informal exchange of information, discussion and deliberation that takes place on a daily basis at the market. This sort of informal deliberation is possible due to the kinship ties that many of the women in the Udupi central market have with each other. Often related through marriage and

kinship, the informal space of deliberation extends beyond the market to their homes and neighbourhoods. Collectives such as these form examples of the empirical coupling of these claims as fisherwomen in the region are traditionally caste based but are now also including women from other castes (non-fishing castes – such as Scheduled Caste groups). Solidarities forged between women – both those within the fishing caste and from Scheduled Castes - thus serve them various purposes both in and outside the market. Within the market it allows women to support each other in their everyday activities of managing the fish market, regulating customers and ensuring equitable access to resources. Outside the market solidarities between women enable support between families during times of need and crisis. The market is thus not spatially restricted to the place of selling but is embedded within broader social structures and relations that ensure women’s ability to attract and keep customers and negotiate with political representatives and state institutions.

The formal space of deliberation – the monthly meetings serve to diffuse tensions between big sellers and small sellers by addressing issues that have not been otherwise amicably managed within the market. While these meetings are often attended by men from the fishing community- who act as interested supporters – women dominate this space of discussion and deliberation, actively participating in decision making. Monthly meetings have also served to heighten the political consciousness amongst women who discuss problems that the association faces from groups outside it, as well as the internal problems of representation within the association. Monthly meetings are often discussed in detail in the everyday exchanges amongst women, often serving to keep the power of representatives in check.

Every year marine fishing is banned by the Government of India for about 45 to 61 days, during the monsoons, which also happens to be the breeding season for marine fish. This is mainly done to conserve the population of the marine fish during the breeding season and to protect the poor fishermen from the risk of injury or death, as the seas are rough and dangerous during the monsoons. As the fishing community is economically affected during the ban period, several progressive state governments such as Tamil Nadu and Kerala have recognized this loss of livelihood and made available some financial support to fishermen in the form of compensation. The state of Karnataka in which Udupi is located does not provide this compensation either to men or women. For almost two months every year, fisherwomen who are small sellers and depend on their daily incomes to buy food and manage household budgets, face financial crisis, often having to indebt themselves to feed their families. Much like the rest of the informal economy which accounts for 88% of employment generated in India, fisherwomen lack social protection from the state in times of sickness, injury, disability or old age. As fisherwomen are made responsible for their siblings, their children and later their aged spouses, this means that their lives of service to their families and community are often

This case study thus provides a critical analysis of SSE practices as being in constant tensions with the dominant mode of production and profit seeking. In this context the fisherwomen’s organization is on the one hand protecting the market from capital rich actors and on the other hand having to rely on big sellers – who practice capital rich, accumulative practices, for their political networks. Paradoxically, this SSE is also beneficial to the dominant economy, as fisherwomen provide for the social reproduction of families and communities thus allowing certain economic actors – big sellers and fishermen, to engage more fully in accumulative and profit seeking activities. Solidarities in the context of this case study thus also includes unintended solidarities that go against the grain of SSEs – and the alternative values of equality, democracy and redistribution that they espouse. The location of women in SSEs (with the exception of the very few big sellers) thus points to the broader inequalities between the domains of production and social reproduction. In this case, productive work takes on a socially

reproductive character when taken on by women – pointing to the manner in which capitalism and patriarchy reinforce each other. Capitalism thus has a lot to gain from SSEs, while the inverse is not true. The lack of state support or social protection for women in these organisations, threatens to destabilize them and make them fragile and unsustainable in the longer run. The state private nexus is a long standing threat as the state has a lot to gain in terms of taxes by letting fish shops take over. Furthermore, the privatization of state institutions has resulting in fishing corporations themselves beginning to enter the domain of retail fish sales in other parts of the coast. With a temporary agreement and no permanent legal resolution of the issue, the fisherwomen's SSE remains vulnerable.

### 3. Latin American Case Studies

#### *Brazil. Agroecology and Feminism in Vale do Ribeira: building solidarity, caring for the territory*

This case study has been conducted as an action-research based on a partnership between SOF (*Sempreviva Organização Feminista*), a feminist NGO based in São Paulo, and the French Institute of Research for Development (IRD). The focus has been on a network of women farmers of the region of Vale do Ribeira (State of São Paulo) supported by the SOF and involved in a project aimed at promoting agro-ecology from a feminist perspective. Agro-ecology intends to develop knowledge, techniques and relations of production and consumption that redefine the relationship between men, women and nature in a socially and ecologically sustainable way. It advocates an effort to develop agro-ecological knowledge and production held by women, the monetary and non-monetary valorisation of this production, and the political recognition of female farmers. For this, it relies on solidarity - that is to say voluntary interdependencies - at different levels (local groups, territorial networks, regional and national movements) and in different spheres (socio-economic and political).

Feminist agro-ecology is based on an understanding of economy centred on the reproduction of all resources necessary for life. This vision seeks to go beyond the linear logic of capitalist production and accumulation and the critical questions associated with it, particularly that of articulation of different social relations, forms of domestic social relations or capitalist social relations of production. The feminist agro-ecology project of SOF in Vale do Ribeira resignifies and transforms certain dimensions of social reproduction. The intervention dates back to 2015, when it won a public tender process for Technical Assistance and Rural Extension (ATER) dedicated to promote the agro-ecological production of women farmers. SOF is part of the Brazilian feminist movement, in the sense that it contributes to the organization of civil society and the construction of feminist political agenda, maintaining links with left-wing social organizations. It typically aims at maintaining the two faces – the movement-activist one and the technical-professional one - of what Sonia Alvarez (1999, 2009) called the "political hybridity" of feminist NGOs in Latin America.

In Vale do Ribeira, research-action focused on Barra do Turvo, a rural municipality of around 8000 inhabitants, hosting seven of the groups supported by SOF – each one gathering around 6 to 15 women – as well as an important agro-ecological producers' association, the Cooperafloresta, founded in 1996 and gathering around 100 families. Vale do Ribeira is home to 7,037 family agriculture establishments, as well as to 24 Guarani indigenous and 66 *quilombola*<sup>14</sup> communities, big farming estates (*fazendas*) and very large properties with little or no agricultural productivity (*latifundio*). It is both the largest continuous stretch of Atlantic Forest in Brazil (1,7 million hectares) and the region with the highest poverty rates in the richest state in the country (State of São Paulo). Explored from the 16<sup>th</sup> century by Portuguese colonists<sup>12</sup>



searching for precious minerals, the region has gone through several economic cycles (minerals, rice) that were based on the exploitation of black slave labour, before falling into recession around the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Vale do Ribeira became both a target of large "development" projects (roads, dam, mining) and home to three natural parks. The creation of the parks resulted from the confluence of a nascent preservationist movement (aiming at protecting nature by prohibiting human settlements) and the military dictatorships (1964-1985), interested in having an instrument of control of this territory where rural guerrillas were sheltering.

During the "re-democratization" period of the 1980s and later in the 1990s, new poor populations arrived to Vale do Ribeira, most often peasants from other regions of the country who had emigrated to the outskirts of the big cities (São Paulo, Curitiba) in the 1960s or 1970s and were now expelled by the economic crisis. They bought land in the informal market, often located in the Park area and form new neighbourhoods. During that period too, State's control over the Park, which had been relatively loose until then, intensified, leading to frequent interventions (seizures, expulsions) against the new populations considered as "invaders". Moreover, the process of democratization culminated in 1988 with the approval of the so-called "citizen" constitution. Among other things, it recognized the category of "traditional community", allowing some of the black and indigenous communities previously established in Vale do Ribeira to claim their recognition as such, opening access to collective ownership of land (not impeding restrictions of use imposed by the Park).

In the face of growing environmental and land conflicts and pressure of newly recognized traditional communities and of the other poor neighbourhoods, negotiations with the Park opened up in the 2000s. In 2008, the Park was reorganized into a "Mosaic" of conservation units (*Mosaico de Unidades de Conservação do Jacupiranga*, the *Mosaico* in the following), allowing for differentiated uses of resources and creating new channels of dialogue with the rural neighborhoods. Since 2016, land and environmental conflicts have escalated again with the approval of legislative bills enabling the privatization of the management of natural parks in the State of São Paulo and fostering financial mechanisms, such as the Ecosystems and Diversity Economy Project (*Economia dos Ecossistemas e da Diversidade – Projeto TEEB*).

Overall, concentration of land is high and still growing (Bim 2012) and the region is marked by conflicts resulting from imprecision of property deeds, frequent overlapping with natural conservation areas and activities of illegal extraction of wood and heart of palm. This has resulted in resistance of all poor rural neighbourhoods against their common adversaries. On the other hand, political and economic differentiation between newly recognized *quilombolas* communities and the remaining "family farming" districts generates tensions. Throughout the process of recognition, *Quilombos* have organized and created their own association (which is a condition of legal recognition), while family farming districts do not necessarily have one or, when there is one, it is not always representative or legitimate.

Some family farming neighbourhoods are partly established in the *Mosaico* conservation areas (theoretically uninhabitable) and/or on land claimed by big landowners and face threats of dislodging. *Quilombos* benefit from affirmative action policies, including access to the food acquisition program (PAA, which buys products from family farming), which has been stopped in the other neighbourhoods in 2017. Hence, a political and economic difference exists between the legally recognized "traditional" communities and the politically "orphaned" family farming neighbourhoods – which may include "black", "white" and "mixed-raced" population and where, in some cases, groups of people organize to try to claim recognition as a *quilombo*.



Another differentiation between the neighbourhoods or even between families in the same neighborhood regards access to land. Class distinction exist, between big farmers and even family farmers who buy work force and those who sell their work force as daily laborers (in the case of men) or domestic workers (in the case of women). Preference for wage labor is observed even in some families who own land but seek monetary income, generally motivated by the purchase of consumption goods (car, appliances). Particularly in the new poor family farming neighbourhoods, few families survive solely from their own production. In some cases, the value of farm work on one's own land is asserted and the other sources of income are considered a mere subsidy. In others, this logic is reversed, production on one's own plot becoming secondary in relation to wage labour or rent seeking.

Faced with these central conflicts - between (conservative) "modernization" and the defence of "traditional" ways of living, and for access to land and resources – women's voices and work tend to go unnoticed. Generally speaking, women's situation is characterized by an unequal sexual division of labour, an unresolved demand for local nurseries and quality infant education facilities, an ultra-sexualisation of women's bodies through the imposition of a standardized beauty pattern, and an on-going risk of sexual assault, combined with high levels of domestic violence. The feminist agro-ecology proposal introduced by the SOF takes a stand in the central conflicts of the region, valuing "traditional" forms of production and social organization (including family agriculture) against excluding forms of "modernization", while at the same time pushing for a transformation of gender relations.

The proposal of feminist agro-ecology introduced in 2015 by the SOF in Vale do Ribeira results from a larger and much longer process that brought together women farmers, NGOs staff, (ex) public managers and some university professors of different regions of Brazil. This long process led to the affirmation of feminist agro-ecology as a political subject. The roots of this process can be situated in the criticism of the "conservative modernization of the countryside" model that has been diffused among "small" Brazilian producers by technical assistance and rural extension (ATER) policies from the years 1940 and that was reinforced with military dictatorships in the 1960s and 1970s. Throughout this period, this model has been challenged by so-called democratic and popular forces, defending two mains agenda: agrarian reform (first claimed by the Peasant Leagues, created in 1955, and later the Movement of Landless Rural Workers, MST, created in 1984) and rural workers' social rights (defended by new rural unionism within the National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG), created in 1963).

In the 1980s, a new branch of this popular and democratic agenda developed when a network of agronomist engineers was formed around the defence of so-called "alternative agriculture" (Luzzi 2007). At that time too, rural women began to mobilize around rural unionism and for access to social rights (maternity, childbirth and retirement). They created their own organizations, such as the Peasant Women Movement (MMC, created in some southern States like Santa Catarina as early as 1983 and unified at national level in 2003) and the Movement of Rural Women Workers (MMTR-NE, with presence in several states of the North-East region, founded in 1986), and penetrated some mixed organizations, such as CONTAG and MST (Nobre 2015, Filipak 2017). From the 1990s, rural women's mobilizations broadened to a double questioning, on the place of women in production and on the very forms of production.

These mobilizations of rural women, combined with the pressure of international donors to include gender in development projects, led, in the second half of the 1990s, to an inflection in alternative agriculture organizations. A new field emerged, which was first named "family farming and gender". In 2002, the National Articulation of Agro-ecology (ANA) was created, gathering rural movements and NGOs, aimed at coordination, political lobby and communication with society. Women activists from rural movements, NGOs and universities gradually<sup>14</sup>

organized as a cross-cutting working group within the ANA, conceived as a space for women's self-organization to question all forms of gender inequalities.

From the 2000s, the government of the Workers' Party (Lula-Dilma government, from 2003 to 2016), marked a redefinition of the relations between the government, rural movements and NGOs, and the agribusiness lobby. During this period, rural movements and NGOs benefited from unprecedented spaces (councils, forums) of participation in the definition and management of agricultural development policies. In general, "family farming" has been reinforced by these policies, but within a dual agricultural model, in which advances for family farmers have been limited by the preservation of the interests of big farmers and landowners (Sabourin 2014). In this context, rural women gained a new Directorate for Rural Women Policies (DPMR / MDA) at the Ministry of Agricultural Development, with its own team and budget. These new policies have been an undeniable progress compared to the absence, so far, of policies for rural women, however they have remained "punctual", "limited" and "bureaucratic" in the eyes of some activists. The relationship of some rural movements or NGOs with the government, including activists who held public management positions in the DPMR, was sometimes tense, requiring a subtle game of "pressure and solidarity". Central demands, such as land reform, have remained stalled, and policies have generally not been instituted so as to ensure their permanence in case of government change.

With the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff and the takeover of Michel Temer in May 2016, the Ministry of Agrarian Development disappeared and although some policies and the main spaces of "participation" have been formally maintained, they have in fact changed their nature. Some rural movements and NGOs stopped participating and those who still do express that their voice is not heard by the current government. In the case of ATER, policy has been redirected to private companies. Rural movements and NGOs from ANA now consider themselves part of the opposition to the "illegitimate" government of Michel Temer.

This position has led to affirm a strong anti-systemic position in feminist agro-ecology, which starts from a radical critique of capitalist and patriarchal society to pose the need to go beyond a mere productivist vision of agro-ecology and adopt a circular vision, centred on the reproduction of life and giving priority to the "culture of care" over the "culture of profit" (Carrasco 2003).

In Barra do Turvo, this proposal represented a paradigmatic change in two main respects. Firstly, it affirmed the status of women as farmers in their own name, in a context where the male bias of agricultural policies in general, and of technical assistance in particular, remained significant. In Barra do Turvo, agricultural projects for women (ran by the municipal Secretary for economic development) were limited to mobile hen houses and faced difficulties of implementation. At the town hall or at the farmer's house, women farmers face obvious discriminations to access official documentation as such. For instance, tax notes would be issued in the name of their husband although they do the whole administrative process for their own agricultural production. Similarly, the local rural workers' union supports family agriculture, but focuses on increasing production for sale, depreciating the "soft things" grown by women' in their "back gardens".

Secondly, the proposal of feminist agro-ecology has been a change in relation to the policies normally assigned to women, namely in the field of social assistance and "productive inclusion". During the Workers' Party government, social assistance programs, such as the national conditional cash transfer program *Bolsa Família*, have been considerably expanded and were considered a kind of basic income. However, the value of motherhood never stopped to occupy a central place in the social representations underlying the design and implementation of these programs. Productive inclusion policies, for their part, mainly consist in training programs for women beneficiaries of the *Bolsa Família*, aiming at getting them out of the program.

Productive inclusion programs value "entrepreneurship", but mostly push women into presumed "female" activities, not questioning the existing sexual division of labour. In Barra do Turvo, the training offer for women includes beauty, fashion and cooking, ignoring agriculture.

The arrival of an ATER project for women was therefore a novelty, introducing changes in gender relations by recognizing the women as farmers. Through meetings, technical visits and other activities organized by the SOF, the women have been incentivized to move from their initial form of organization or relations to that of a solidarity-based group with emphasis on the recognition of their agricultural work and contribution to the alimentation of the family. Solidarity of SOF technicians towards the women, in the form of a strong commitment (far beyond working hours) to help them organize and solve a wide range of concrete issues, interpreted as obstacles to the reproduction of life in the broad sense, encouraged solidarity among them.

Agro-ecological notebooks and consumer groups have, in particular, played an important role in the consolidation of the groups through the valuation of women's production. Through the notebooks, the women have been incentivized to take note of their whole agricultural production, organized into four categories: production for self-consumption, donation, exchange and selling. This instrument, which stems from a proposal of ANA Women's Working Group initiated in 2013 and expanded through a national policy in 2017, have made visible the increase in the market and non-market production the women are responsible for. The network of consumer groups consists of seven self-managed groups of consumers in the periphery of the city São Paulo buying vegetable, fruit, food, natural drugs and plants offered by five of the women groups of Barra do Turvo once a month. This network aims to create a market controlled by the women farmers. This redefinition of the relation between producers and consumers is not easy, especially on consumers' side, as it requires an engagement with feminist agro-ecology (understanding the working conditions of the women farmers, including the lack of sanitary certification and, in some cases, failure in quality or logistic), going far beyond the consumption of organic food.

A transversal aspect of the methodology of the SOF has been the interconnection between different topics. For example, discussing the effects of the use of pesticides on women's bodies, or the relation between developing financially viable production activities and increasing the possibility of women breaking free from abusive marital relations, or the idea that transition (the path linking the present reality and a desired situation) may be considered both from the perspective of change towards agro-ecology and towards a life free from violence. This interconnection manifests the shift from an understanding of agro-ecology that is narrowly focused on production techniques and sales, to a vision and practice that includes the whole human person and social relationships and seeks, broadly, to encourage more democratic and sustainable forms of reproduction of life.

Despite this, the groups remain overall fragile (depending on favourable participation conditions, partly provided by the SOF) and of limited size (from 6 to 15 women in each neighbourhood). Some issues remain, such as the insecurity of access to the means of production in neighbourhoods where landless women work in lots of other people and the small volume of demand by consumer groups compared to the volume of production of some women farmers, which may demotivate them. Throughout this process, the development of a network of agro-ecological women farmers at the Vale do Ribeira level came to a point where it requires a new step in their relationship with the other struggles that define this territory. In *quilombos*, inhabitants point out that the continuity of women's productive groups is conditioned by their capacity of being active in local territorial management. This includes new economic and socio-

political responsibilities for women's groups at the community level and the necessity to build new alliances, challenging the existing differences and conflicts.

The transition to feminist agro-ecology in Barra do Turvo is an on-going process, which began with a resignification of agricultural production and food, and continued with new value given to women's work, some renegotiations of gender relations in different spheres (family, community, market and, to a lesser extent, the local government), as well as a new commitment of women to local political issues. This process has been based on solidarities that have been strengthened and expanded on the basis of common objectives among women's groups, whose nature and place in their neighbourhood has gradually changed. This dynamic has been based on the experimentation and the progressive affirmation of new practices and social relations which broadly aim at greater autonomy and the reproduction of life in ecologically and socially more sustainable forms. However, the process relies on small groups, on a small number of local leaders, on financial and human resources provided so far by the SOF, and it faces differences among women, which tend to hinder the construction of a broader collective action.

### ***Local transformations in Batallas (Bolivia) and the "inexhaustible" capacity of women to sustain life***

Our study starts from the perceptions and practices of women heads of households, caregivers, part of them members of producers' associations in the rural municipality of Batallas. We question the idea that the principle of solidarity underlies the organization of social reproduction at its different levels. In the same way, we consider that the forms of collective organization, such as producers' associations, do not necessarily embody social and solidarity economy (SSE) practices. Rather, we studied the potential of these collective forms of economic organization for the recognition of women as workers, bearers of social rights, and as germinal spaces of common forms of management of social reproduction.

Batallas is a municipality located in the Northern Altiplano of the Department of La Paz with strong Aymara ethnic identity. It shelters a high number of producers' associations (which is common in the region) and also a high number of child care services, in comparison with other municipalities, which sounds paradoxical given the prominent place of female domestic work in social reproduction. The proximity of Batallas to the cities of La Paz and El Alto (52 kilometres away) has favoured important processes of transformation that, as in all Bolivia, are being experienced in recent years: an accelerated process of change of rural reality and the re-composition and intensification of the relations with urban areas, mediated by the expansion of transport, trade and the multiplication of urban food markets, the expansion of non-agricultural jobs and other phenomena that make the rural-urban relations very fluid and dynamic.

As a result of these processes and of the fall in birth rate, Batallas lost 2% of its predominantly male population, leaving a balance of 106 women per 100 men, 39% of women-headed households and a feminization of subsistence agriculture, while non-agricultural jobs are being masculinized. Women become more visible in mixed associations of producers, in their own emerging associations and in spaces of political representation, at the community and peasant union levels. Diversification of activities continues to hold women not only as the main responsible for work and social relations necessary for maintaining life - which involves social reproduction in families and communities-, but also for an already unsustainable productive and reproductive work. The social representations that sustain this work are based on a "maternalised image" of Aymara women and operate to such an extent that they occult the increase in women's productive work and become one of the major difficulties faced by women in being recognized as subjects of the economy in the broad sense.



Our research shows that the dynamics of social reproduction in Batallas, within the framework of the aforementioned transitions, is still marked by the profound changes brought by the Agrarian Reform of 1953 in the rural structures of the Bolivian Altiplano and by the long memory of the traditional Aymara community. The 1953 reform abolished the regime of *haciendas* (which prevailed in Batallas) and gave back to the families of producers the usurped communal lands under the form of family ownership (*solar familiar*) within reconstituted communal structures, giving rise to the peasantry and consolidating rural villages and communities. Yet, only men were granted the right to the ownership of land; women could only obtain it as widows with minor children. This had great consequences: the communal governance structure and its representation was left in the hands of the emerging peasant unions – one per community – made up of men based on their status as landholders, hence strengthening their role as representatives of the family and the production unit. Thus, the agricultural and livestock work of non-proprietary women was left in the dark while they were excluded from any visible representation (Uriona 2010, Colque and Soria 2014).

In the last three decades, women's struggles crystallized into public policies of gender equity that favored – among others – women's right to land access and ownership regardless of their marital status (INRA Law 1996), as well as quota of representation in elected public charges (1995). Subsequently, women were recognized as representatives of peasant communities in order to make their right to land "effective" and promote their participation into agrarian procedures (Law of Community Redirection of the Land Reform, 2006). However, the existence of a right does not ensure its exercise and the traditional form of representation in rural areas tend to be maintained. In Batallas, women gain access to land in lower proportions than men (in number of properties and surface area), and they do so in subsistence units, simultaneously with the weakening of small family agriculture that pushes the temporary or quasi-permanent emigration of family members. This, paradoxically, is a means of ensuring the continuity of agriculture and to face the limitations imposed by the small scale of properties (*minifundio*) and to hold up the erosion of the community (Urioste, Barragán and Colque 2007).

The immediate effect of this process is to reduce the relative contribution of agricultural activity to household income and to increase the share of other activities (transport, trade, public employment, etc.). This situation leads to changes in the uses of the land, such as the allocation of larger areas to livestock (dairy cows, which provide a more regular income than agriculture, subject to the seasonality of harvests) and increased market uses (buying-selling and renting land). This is shaping and consolidating multi-activity, while the proximity to the cities of La Paz and El Alto favours the increase in non-agricultural occupations and the daily territorial mobility made possible by the double or triple residence-; all this is producing new family configurations, new senses of social belonging that give signs of new inequalities emerging inside and outside the home. These changes in any case contradict the official discourse – echoed by social and political organizations – that assumes the rural communities as places of homogeneous, static, harmonious, equitable and of complementary relations, etc. as inherent to the Aymara culture.

Particularly, when men are absent and women take up family agricultural work (in the communities) or small businesses (sale of their agricultural products like cheese, fabrics/textiles or others in urban centres or villages), the division of labour is unequal: if, in the past, some inequality in the distribution of household chores between men and women existed, today this inequality has been accentuated and is justified precisely because of the absence of men and their alleged lack of time. In general, women do not condemn this division as unfair. Their vision is that it needs to be shared *with other women*, and indeed they call upon their mother, mother-in-law, daughter, daughter-in-law, sister, etc. when the burden of domestic and care work becomes



too heavy. Thus, grandparents, particularly grandmothers, but also girls and boys, become pillars of domestic and care work in families.

In turn, availability and access to public services, that may reduce housework or improve the conditions for social reproduction (childcare, education and health services), depend on a complex set of factors such as distance, the quality of infrastructure and services, and their cultural adaptation to the context and the inhabitants' perceptions. In general, we observe that the population tends to believe that social services are not the means through which rights are accessed and exercised. One of the explanations lies in the very nature of social protection policies that have favoured direct monetary transfers through bonds that induce people to face deficiencies via the market. This leads to a more general explanation, namely the absence of a conception of oneself as a holder of rights, which in the case of rural women is deepened by the non-recognition of themselves as producers and workers.

One area that contributes to social reproduction is that of the producers' associations. Mixed associations are groups of producers of one or more communities belonging to the same branch of agricultural activity. This type of structure can help to create the image of women as producers, as they are part of an initiative with the capacity to generate monetary income and of being (not always) located outside the home. These associations seek to promote the collective sale of products by improving quality, promoting specialization and centralizing the products. In general, mixed associations maintain a masculine discourse in the sense that they focus exclusively on the monetary valuation of production, leaving aside the objective and subjective conditions of social reproduction. The possibility for women to influence this discourse is even lower when they replace the absent father or husband but are not recognized in their own name. And when it comes to representation in government bodies, networks or others, men assume the leading roles, although the greatest share of work might be done by women.

Women's associations, on the other hand, provide a possibility of building a collective identity by bringing the women together and reversing the imaginary of individual stories without connection with each other. This possibility is clearly limited by a series of factors: time constraints, which lead the women, for example to carry out production in shifts of 3 or 4 women who rotate each day; the distance from home and/or the need to secure their income. At the same time, being part of an association provides the opportunity to acquire skills and knowledge conducive to family well-being, to break isolation, generate a space of conviviality, close solidarity and moral support among the members. All these possibilities are positively valued by the women, even if these processes are not free of conflicts and generally fail to institutionalize.

Spaces of sociability within the associations enable the women to express certain problems as domestic violence and the fear of being abandoned by their husbands and not being able to feed the families, even though moral support of other women is almost never converted into collective action. The main limitation lies in the fact that these issues (violence or abandonment, productive and care work) are still understood as particular problems that affect women at a certain point of life instead of as public issues that structurally affect all women, for the fact of being women. One element to note is that almost all women's associations – this is not a particularity of Batallas – result of local or international NGO projects aimed at increasing women's autonomy and/or access to income. Most of the time, this occurs through the insertion of women in sectors of activity like bakery, greenhouses and handicrafts that they have not chosen themselves and that are new or at least different from their usual activities in agricultural production at family level. Consequently, women's associations tend to contribute to multi-activity, to add more work and to limit the time necessary for the women to constitute themselves as social and political subjects.

With regard to political participation and relations with the State, peasant unions as well as neighbourhood associations are organized into larger bodies, ranging from the canton or zone-level (union of communities or union of neighbourhoods), to the province-, departmental and national level. According to their level of incidence, these structures are interlocutors of the different levels of organization of the State. At national level, peasant unions are organized into the Single Union Confederation of Peasant, Indigenous and Native Workers of Bolivia (CSUTCB) and, with regard to women, into the National Confederation of Peasant, Indigenous and Native Women "Bartolinas Sisas" (CNMCIOB-S). These structures are known by the name "the Tupaks" and "the Bartolinas", respectively. Urban neighborhood associations, on their part, are grouped into the Federation of Neighbourhood Councils called FEJUVE.

In the communities, the peasant unions are the organic basis and grassroots support of the Tupaks. The Bartolinas are organized from the sub-central level and at the higher levels of aggregation. This women's organization is subordinated to the CSUTCB and does not have a community support body comparable to that of the Tupaks. In the best case, the community elects (usually through the peasant union) a representative to the Bartolina sub-central organization. Currently, the peasant union structures are privileged interlocutors of the ruling party. From the beginning, these unions are at the same time a form of communal government and instruments of protest. This dual role has been strengthened by the fact of the peasant unions having achieved an active presence in national politics, as well as new social, political and economic competences in the management of their territory. Women have always been present in these structures, participating into community tasks (Ticona 2003). In addition, women now increasingly assume the representation of their families, which implies obligations to the community and guarantees the family's belonging to the territory and access to protection and benefits. However, socially acceptable demands in peasant unions are collective, material and "gender-neutral". Women's participation faces an adverse context that continues to value and prioritize adult males for their mastery of modern codes (dominant language and culture, learned, in particular, at school and during military service) and limits their expression to a pre-established script.

Despite these limitations, the Bartolinas offer a bridge for some women to actively participate into public management. This shows, in a way, a greater autonomy of the Bartolinas at the highest aggregation levels (federation and confederation level), but which is built through contradictory processes. On the one hand, greater autonomy is indeed achieved thanks to the long individual political trajectories that led these women to these levels of representation and to the fact that, at these levels, their political participation is somehow relieved from the pressure of their grassroots community on taking care on their reputation as women-mothers. However, this does not mean that the possibilities for the Bartolinas of generating their own agenda are not limited. These remain indeed limited and even almost non-existent due to their subordinate position in relation to the government and to the Tupaks, which (supposedly) common cause they should support. Moreover, and paradoxically, the possibilities for the Bartolinas to develop their own agenda is also hampered by the law of parity, which is presented and perceived by them as an end point to any feminist claim, as it would solve all problems thanks to the presence of women in legislative and governmental institutions.

Tensions do exist between Bartolinas participating into public management and grassroots peasant women. Their relation adopts prebendalist characteristics in a sort of parody of some State and NGO projects, where the Bartolinas have sometimes encouraged discretionary practices without proper care in the management of resources. This has weakened their legitimacy in communities, which they only reach "occasionally" when they obtain funding to implement projects. This discredit has not reached the male unions, despite of being involved

in similar practices. Because of all these factors, the national Bartolinas leadership has limited ability to aggregate grassroots demands and tends to impose top down proposals rooted in national government plans and mandates. According to our interviews with Bartolinas leaders, this position is justified by the fact that, with a government headed by an indigenous peasant, their demands would already be incorporated into the government's development plans and their autonomy as an organization would be irrelevant. This shows that the constitution of this political subject at department and national level interacts in a complex way with the local level, exhibiting more ruptures than continuities between the levels of actors.

On its side, social and solidarity economy (SSE) at departmental and national level presents a complex configuration where several organizations co-exist and often compete for the representation of the sector according to different logics of aggregation and construction of networks, movements or platforms of coordination. One important organization in the agriculture and livestock sector is the Coordination of Integration of Peasant Economic Organizations of Bolivia (CIOEC). Founded in 1991, with the assistance of international development cooperation, it aims at coordinating and representing the Peasant Economic Organizations (OECAs) under the principles of SSE, food sovereignty, peasant self-management and biodiversity. In 2009, CIOEC included 661 organizations in agriculture and livestock (CIOEC 2009). Yet, all existing producers' associations or cooperatives country-wide are far from affiliated with CIOEC. This is particularly the case in Batallas where none of the associations at the municipality level was aware of the existence of CIOEC.

In addition, the Solidarity Economy and Fair Trade Movement (MESyCJ) was born in 2009 from the reconfiguration of older organizations: the National Community Trading Network (RENACC), created in 1996, and the Platform for Solidarity Economy and Fair Trade in Bolivia, which functioned between 2006 and 2008 in the context of the preparation of the new Political Constitution. Originally aimed at political lobby at national level, the MESyCJ had to shrink from its ambitions in the face of its inability to integrate the major organizations of the sector. This limited capacity and the weakness of concrete action in the field of SSE in general, combined with a tendency of public policies to favour the private and state economy, has encouraged a fragmentation of SSE actors at national level. In 2012, peasant and handicraft organizations concerned by obtaining fair trade certification grouped together within the Fair Trade Coordination and began exercising political lobby at the Deputy Ministry of Internal Trade and Exports. In our interview, leaders of this Coordination defended the idea that fair trade represents a "transparent" and more operational approach than SSE, an idea that tends to bypass the debate on strengthening productive solidarity organizations. In this context, SSE's political agenda tends to be dominated by peasant federations that occupy a position of strength within the government, even though the local function of peasant unions is socio-political and not socio-economic.

From the viewpoint of the State, the Tupak and Bartolinas are the sole representatives of the rural world, the associations having to fight to be recognized as legitimate interlocutors. This semantic and political mismatch generates a field of conflict that makes agreements difficult (Wanderley Coord. 2015). Overall, whether Tupak or Bartolinas, or platforms of producers' associations, all these actors tend to deal with gender as a matter of parity and of family, without questioning the power relations that it entails. The trend in favour of a change in the terms of social reproduction also comes from feminist organizations that have led demands for gender equity since the 1980s. Yet, the emergence of these demands is limited by the existing split in the orientation of the political action of these organizations. On the one hand, a trend emphasizes the promotion of public policies and policies to reform regulatory frameworks, achieve changes in public policies, institutionalize projects in public power structures or apply norms and

policies.. On the other hand, there is a tendency to privilege the space of civil society and dispute power relations in the different spaces. Both tendencies have united in some struggles, especially around violence against women and political participation

To conclude, our case study illustrates that the tendency to feminize all areas of social reproduction has reached a critical point in Bolivia and it points to three main and non-exclusive processes: (i) the persistence of the naturalization of reproductive activities as a responsibility of the families and the (rural) communities, that is to say, of the women; (ii) the emergence of a germinal process of politicization of social reproduction that challenges the State with regard to its shared responsibility ; (iii) the emergence from the society of common forms of management of social reproduction.

Producers' associations may be propitious for incorporating social reproduction as a principle of organization and collective action and for promoting the rights of women as workers, but this would suppose to break their current political isolation. Furthermore, in conditions of subsistence, marked by a critical level of work overload for women, the path linked to common forms of management has very precarious scope as long as the trap of conciliation (productive and reproductive work) is not overcome. Therefore, a central challenge will be to reorient state policies in two directions: to conceive care and social protection as a fundamental and universal socio-economic right; and to strengthen the associative and collective forms of economy in order to expand the emerging forms of common management of social reproduction. The expansion of the state's shared responsibility for solidarity is a major challenge in Bolivia, which involves reorienting the current pattern of development towards compliance with the normative advances, contained in the Constitution and a number of laws, in terms of social reproduction.

### ***Argentina: collectivizing care, reinventing work and solidarity***

The Argentinian case study focuses on community organizations which provide care services to children and young people in poor contexts. These organizations are self-integrated into networks. These community-based care initiatives are non-mercantile and even if they do not define themselves as part of SSE, their practices respond to what this field prescribes. They are based on the self-organization of women of poor urban sectors and they satisfy the needs of children and young people of their neighbourhoods. There is paradoxical social dynamic in which the increase of personal autonomy is rooted in gender-stereotyped tasks. On the one hand, this perspective is challenging because these associative groups are made up in a 90% by women of poor contexts, in which sexual division of labour is present, as well as the assignment of reproductive and care tasks to women. On the other hand, the *defamiliarization* of care (Lewis 1997; Rodríguez 2007; Martínez 2008; Faur, Esquivel 2010) has led to important levels of empowerment in poor women whose chances of personal development are very limited. To introduce grassroots collective care in SSE field involves reviewing the mercantile- productive approach that dominates in it.

Rapid demographical rise in the last decades in the second and third ring of the Conurbano Bonaerense, had an impact in a larger inadequacy of the public services offer for the population. This particular need has stimulated women to go out of their domestic scenes, in order to put in common an amount of material, social, affective and symbolic resources to satisfy their reproductive needs, understood as common, thus requiring a community-based approach (Gago, Quiroga 2014). In a first moment, women organized themselves to give an answer to the need of having a place for childcare in the communities while parents were off working. In a second moment, new organizations were created due to the nutrition crisis led by the two hyperinflations in 1989 and 2001. In this second moment grassroots organisation focused on nutritional policies



in a context of extreme poverty. Beyond the presence of these policies, the way in which these community organizations have started responds to a "from below" and collective logic.

*Inter Redes* is a major network that joins 6 networks of community centres located in 17 of the 24 counties of the Conurbano Bonaerense. This net operates by periodic assemblies in which the members share management experiences and information about the situation of the centres. They also generate political incidence strategies related to childhood and youth and they have developed projects for public policies for the recognition of the workers of the centres. This net of nets was born in 1991 and has 27 years of non-stop work. To define the daily tasks, all centres have an annual planning which is assessed in the midterm and at the end of the year. From this collective assessment, changes are introduced. Administrative and economic management of each centre is evaluated this way as well. This type of management and decision-making generates a collective subjectivity in which the sense of belonging and the shared identity is well rooted. The network is funded by the state and in a smaller degree by resources from private foundations.

The Centro Comunitario Belén is a member and founder of among other 3 community centres of the Red El Encuentro. It was built by the neighbours with the help of the local church in 1984. The centre is located in a periphery neighbourhood in one of the poorest counties in Conurbano Bonaerense (José C. Paz). This organization gathers 300 babies, children and young people (from 2 months to 18 years old). They have a variety of proposals for the promotion of children and youth's rights. The working areas are nutrition, recreation and education for children and youth. They perform expressive, recreational and educational activities. In the centre 32 educators, 27 women and 5 men, work. Most of the workers live in the community or in neighbouring places. Through its history, the centre has gained in human rights and gender equality awareness. The management and decision-making process is done by regular meetings (similar to the system of Red El Encuentro explained above). Internal democracy resulted in conflicts with the church, which caused the break with the institution. The main sources of funding come from the state and in a minor extent of foundations and private contribution.

Regarding the families that receive the services, we identified a strong presence of single mother families (50%), followed by mothers and children that live with grandmothers. The existence of families in which both parents are present is minimal. In terms of employment, 85% of the homes have precarious jobs. The low incomes they receive are complemented by the Asignación Universal por Hijo (AUH), a social program for vulnerable families. In all cases the reproductive tasks inside the houses are carried out by women, mothers that sometimes have the help other women to solve economic and care needs (grandmothers, aunts, neighbours).

Regarding public policies, National Education Law 26.206/06 includes the participation of community held schools in the education system. Buenos Aires Province Education Law passed in 2007 includes the participation of community organizations in the education system as well. However, it leaves out community organizations in preschool education (children of 0 to 5) because licensed teachers are required and the state cannot fund community-based kindergartens. Regarding SSE public policies, the most important programs for the urban sector are focused mainly on micro credit and subsidies for the promotion of small businesses. They also promote popular fairs and collective brands. For these programs, service businesses have a second place and they only consider personal services such as hairdressing. Most of the beneficiaries of these programs are women, but none of the policies has a gender perspective. They do not take into account the issue of care and how the responsibility for domestic work might affect the development of these businesses. In addition, they do not consider collective care services as possible initiatives to promote. An important SSE national policy is *Programa Ingreso social con Trabajo: Argentina Trabaja*. This program, based on the creation of cooperatives, started 23



in 2009 in articulating two ministries: Social Development and Education, and the National Institute of SSE (INAES). The program addresses people in vulnerable situations and values collective work as an important tool to improve their lives. Cooperative members are paid a small amount of money (half the minimum salary), having a precarious social care. They are encouraged to finish their studies. Besides, each cooperative must choose a delegate. These delegates usually take classes on SEE, association, gender, project development, among other topics.

Inside "*Argentina Trabaja*", a sub program was created to work with women victims of violence. The program is called "*Ellas hacen*" ("*They do*"). Members of "*Ellas hacen*" receive talks on gender, they finish their studies, and they take special courses on different abilities such as plumbing, carpentry, and electricity. In spite all its positive aspects, the program excluded associative work for childcare, denying supporting pre-existent organizations that are in the territory and satisfy this collective need. Thanks to the political negotiations and fight, some community-based care organizations managed to include some of its members in cooperatives. They continue doing the usual tasks in the care organizations and they receive the money stipulated in the program.

One of the main funding sources that community organizations receive is the *Programa Nacional de Seguridad Alimentaria (PNSA)*, which depends of the Social Development Ministry and has an alliance with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The PNSA does not include any kind of remuneration for workers and they have a strict control over the destiny of the funds. Thus, the program is based on the principle that women that cook, feed, teach and take care of children must work for free. Even though there are many programs for children and young people in the country, the most important for the sustainability of the centers is *Programa Unidades de Desarrollo Infantil (UDI)*, depending on Social Development Ministry of Buenos Aires Province. The program UDI is a policy conceived to support and reinforce childcare centers, either managed by the counties, the community or the church.

Just in 2015, little time before Cristina Fernández de Kirchner ended her period as president, Inter Redes presented a project of law called "*Ley de Trabajadores Socio Comunitarios de la Provincia de Buenos Aires*" (project of Law of community workers of Buenos Aires Province). This project says that the state must guarantee community workers' rights. The rights they defend are to receive a salary equivalent to the teachers of private schools of the Province of Buenos Aires for those in charge of educative tasks (the same for the cooks, administration and maintenance workers). This law has not been discussed yet in the parliament. However, it shows how these social organizations widen the category of work including community work and place the state as a guarantee for the workers' rights.

The work done in these centres is a very feminized one, with a strong maternal approach. Because of this, commitment to the organization and the children themselves is usually in tension with educators' needs and wishes. In the associative process, women gradually started to generate a vision of the social scenario as different from the domestic order and were able to move towards autonomy: social mobility and the public world cannot be imagined from the barriers that the home imposes. This change of perspective about care tasks has brought a process of empowerment in personal, familial, communal and political terms. Explained it in this way, growing out of being a "caring mother" to become a "community worker", is a quantum leap. Additionally, the associative nature of community organizations has generated a sort of political awareness of care as an issue that involves the state and the society as a whole.

Those who are part of these organizations show solidarity towards other families and groups in the territory. The commitment they have for the children and their families is translated into

long hours of work that go beyond their timetable. To the paid hours they add "heart hours", as the women say. They work more than what they are expected to, they get very low economic retribution and still go ahead, they get involved in the fights for more rights and they participate in meetings and other events in the community. Solidarity takes the form of activism in which personal needs are put aside to get solutions for problems in the organization or the community in general. In these situations, reciprocity or personal benefit is not always clear. The line between work and activism is vague. Solidarity among women is not something that we can take for granted, it is a process explained by the collectivization of care and the participation of the organization's in different spaces, especially in the Regional and National Encounters of Women. For this to happen, the relationship of the community-based care initiatives with the feminist movement was a key factor.

Solidarity not only means putting aside personal interests, it also involves the capacity for empathy shared by people living in the same territory and belonging to the same social class. But for some of the interviewee's solidarity is a word used by those with more money to show charity regarding those who have less. According to one of the persons that we interrogated: "*Solidarity is not what defines us, what we do is community work. We get together to solve problems, to improve everyone's lives. For others, solidarity can be activated and deactivated. But for us solidarity is community and community are a way of life, and we take it everywhere*". Finally, it was found that parties, events and celebrations are part of the construction of collective identity upon which lies the community and solidarity sense that is not charity but common fight.

As regards the articulation with the State, as many studies explained, in the globalized capitalism it is not possible for SSE experiences to be financially sustainable without the support of the state. The systematic failure of many SSE experiences is a clear demonstration of this. Public funding is an important aspect for mercantile microbusiness and it is even more important for the childcare organizations. Community centres gathered in Red el Encuentro do not charge families for the services they provide and depend on the public funding for their daily functioning. This financial dependence is not an inhibitor factor for the ideological and political autonomy of the organizations. Through different ways, they could maintain autonomous projects from the State. However, the lack of public funding limits the growth of the organizations and the consolidation of its political and pedagogic project. The demand for integral funding and recognition is a shared topic with other SSE experiences. But, unlike the mercantile experiences, these organizations fulfil functions that the State do not provide. They deliver services that are socially necessary and that are highly demanded by the local population. In their daily tasks these centres guarantee the access to rights (of food, education, recreation).

Care includes needs that are not being fully covered by the State, by families, nor by the market. This is even more critical in the periphery areas of Conurbano Bonaerense. Social policies and the legislation of SSE do not include care and gender equality in its institutional designs. The productive bias of SSE hides the associative care work and the contribution of women to the reproduction of life in the best possible conditions. This aspect limits the potential of SSE as a contra hegemonic field.

Associativity and solidarity among women that share the same class condition and the same territory have developed concrete ways of reproduction of life that are not ruled by capitalist and patriarchal norms. Studying social reproduction as a whole allows to look at emerging ways of life, as the organizations that this research analysed, and its potential for the creation of new non-capitalist relationships of social reproduction. However, due to the global hegemony of capitalism, the question of to what extent SSE is subsidiary of the reproduction of capital or it is a systemic alternative is still open.

## 4. Conclusions

### *Work, social reproduction, social and gender relations*

The frontiers between women's productive and reproductive activities are blurred, as all six case studies illustrated. Women's work in SSE activities – like subsistence farming, selling fish in the market, caring - is frequently considered as a service more than as work, "naturally" carried out by women by virtue of being a woman, and "productive" activities are presented as being domestic ones. As a result, a common issue in the different case studies is that, since their work is not recognized as such, women have limited or no social rights as workers, and they are often not entitled to protection or support from the State. Women continue to be situated at the articulation between domestic and capitalist social relations of production and reproduction and are pivotal in organizing the reproduction of labour power and the maintenance of individuals inserted in the capitalist system. However, we also observed emerging ways of reorganising and resignifying social reproduction in sustainable ways.

In all the initiatives that we studied, women led associative activities incorporating care: they care at the same time for people, for the territory, for local collective identities and for the immediate reproduction of life. These organisations fulfil functions and deliver services that the State does not provide, services that are socially necessary and highly demanded by the local population. In their daily tasks as members of these organisations, the women provide access to rights: to food, education, recreation, minimal income, environmental sustainability, social security. Huge amounts of personal time are used by women to carry out all the reproductive activities. This adds to what can be called the *mental load* of social reproduction. Within SSE's as well as in capitalist social relations of production, women's (re)productive work is still highly unrecognized and devalued even though it is the basis for the continuity of life.

### *The usefulness and limitations of the concept of solidarity*

The case studies investigated lead us to question the usefulness of a concept such as solidarity economy to depict the concrete alternative economic practices that women's associations are collectively undertaking at the local level. Rather than opposing "traditional solidarities", based on ascribed identities such as kinship, caste, ethnicity, gender, space, to "modern solidarities", based on voluntary commitment and free will, the analysis suggests that it makes more sense to explore the connections between various forms of solidarities, since it is precisely those connections that allow new forms of interdependence to emerge. In doing so, this analysis adopts an intersectional analysis examining the social, economic and political positions of people (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

The tensions between a dominant context of profit seeking and alternative economic perspectives may weaken SSE initiatives, either by creating internal tensions or by relegating such practices to marginal spheres of activity. In terms of the emancipatory potential of such initiatives, solidarity economy practices may result in the paradox of associations that on the one hand are meant to free women, but entrench them in poor paying work. Such poorly paid work may exist in parallel with profit seeking economies benefitting from the work of SSEs. The gaping inequalities of income and quality of life may destabilize SSE initiatives. While SSE is promoted as providing solutions towards greater sustainability (Sahakian, Dunand 2014) and an inclusive economy that provides an alternative model of development and thus an alternative globalisation, empirical analysis of these initiatives must interrogate if they empower women or reinforce their marginalities. Looking closely at these practices, it becomes clear that the spaces created by SSE initiatives are often contradictory, often reflecting social and structural inequalities, while at the same time challenging them.

Solidarity, understood as the search for equality-based relations of interdependence, represents a condition for the transformation of social relations at different levels. Our case studies point to interdependence not only within SSE initiatives, but also between these initiatives and the local communities and territories in which they function. This means that the adjustment of the proposal of solidarity economy to particular local conditions in order to build concrete responses to specific demands is an indispensable condition for its acceptance and enlargement. In this way, it would be possible to not fragment the political subjects of alternative economies.

In some of the initiatives studied in this research, associativity and solidarity among women that share the same class conditions and the same territory have opened opportunities to develop concrete ways of reproduction of life that are not ruled, or not exclusively, by capitalist and patriarchal norms. However, it is important to highlight that solidarity does not mean sacrificing personal interests, it involves rather the capacity for empathy shared by people living in the same territory, belonging to the same social class, sharing concrete conditions of life and struggles. In a context dominated by hegemonic global capitalism, the question of to what extent SSE is subsidiary of the reproduction of capital or it is a systemic alternative to it, is still open.

### ***Territory as the basis of the construction of a new collective political subject***

The predatory impact of global capitalism on people and environment produces a crisis of social reproduction. Regarding care for the territory, feminist studies had critically discussed the fact that the involvement of women in these activities does not derive from the fact that they have a higher "natural" propensity to protect nature, but that this is the result of a process where they have become aware that they are more directly at threat by environmental depletion or by neoliberal conservation policies (Agarwal 1997).

One of the most important bases of SSE initiatives is the territory, as a vindication, as an object of struggle, and as a source of solidarity. We use the term territory in its broad sense, both as a concrete and a symbolic space. In a context of global capitalism and so-called "deterritorialization", such a claim is directly revealing the core of the current economic and social system. Here again, women's economic alternatives reveal the main features of the system of allocation of resources and power, by constructing alternatives from a position of exclusion, as outsiders. Through their work, the no-place of exclusion and periphery becomes a territory of struggle (Segato 2002, Hadad and Gomez 2007). Thus, the notion of territory is a key dimension of SSE in a feminist perspective, that allows to articulate the disputes over resources and the construction of collective political subjectivities, showing the imbrication among people, ecosystems, and activities such as production and social reproduction, inserted in the frame of broader social systems of distribution of power in globalized economy. In this regard, it should be highlighted that the configuration of the relations of domination in a specific context is expressed through a territoriality that is particular to it. Territorialization of the economy seems to be a very outstanding feature of SSE when analysed in a feminist perspective. The territorialization of economy through SSE initiatives is strongly impacted by conflicts around the construction of space. Women, as the ones who depend more directly on the resources that they can find in their territories, historically and socially considered responsible for social reproduction, have a relevant role in such struggles. The findings of this research are coherent with the statements made by Federici, suggesting that in contemporary global capitalism land is not an irrelevant means of production, but the material basis for subsistence work, and therefore the basis of marginalized women's livelihoods and the basis of their economic and political activities and organisations. Women's struggles for the re-appropriation of the land, both in the rural and urban settings, is central (Federici 2004, 2011).



Such struggles have the potential of articulating new political emancipatory narratives in which the binaries nature/culture, reason/emotion, production/reproduction, that are constitutive of modernity (Escobar 2016), and their correspondent hierarchies and mechanism of domination are blurred. It is thus possible to state that the apparently fragile, small, dependent marginalized women's SSE organisations are actually advancing towards a renewed political decolonial entanglement, rearticulating the politics of everyday life. These apparently insignificant, maybe not that radical initiatives, are indeed particularly relevant for the comprehension and transformation of our current unsustainable, violent, sexist, classist and racist social order.

### ***Articulation with the State: support, autonomy or co-optation***

One of the objectives of this research was to critically analyse the role of the State in relation to women's SSE practices. The teams observed how these initiatives responded to State projects, laws or public policies, and how existent or disappearing social policies indirectly sustained or brought obstacles to these practices. We observed the negative effects of the absent or reduced State support to SSE initiatives. However, the effects of dependency vis-à-vis the State can be variable, and they differ according to the type of relations established between the SSE groups, the public institutions and their allies. In some of the case studies, there is a contradictory relation with supposedly progressive governments and policies that actually weaken women's collective initiatives through its clientelist logics, its patriarchal rationality and its alliances with corporative interests. For example, strong mafia-like nexus between the State and private capital (Tamil Nadu) partake in the urbanization and financialization of social reproduction that contributes to the fact that women, ultimately, have lost control over their livelihood and territories. In other cases the privatization of state institutions (Udupi) results in the State being one of those competing with other private interests to occupy spheres of work that women occupy, thus threatening women's livelihoods. On the other hand, more substantially progressive governments in Latin America (for instance in Argentina and Brazil) were recently defeated by right-wing opponents through different political processes, and these changes have had a negative impact on the solidity of the analysed SSE initiatives and on the possibility of emergence of new SSE initiatives. In the case of Bolivia, because of the historical links between several women's organisations and the ruling party, they have been subject to co-optation and local representatives typically complained about being used by their federations. They summon them to mobilize in mass demonstrations to support the government, even though the latter is not really listening to and supporting their needs.

In these contradictory and complex scenarios, the relationships of the analysed initiatives with the State are of permanent tension and negotiation and can vary between bubbling up in autonomy and fragility, scaling up with risks of co-optation and exploitation, fade away or wear out, loosing their *raison d'être*. Still, what is clear is that State's co-responsibility in the provision of all services and means that are necessary for social reproduction is not being fulfilled. Claims to the State to accomplish these responsibilities should be pursued as these should not rest on families, associations, nor SSE initiatives only, without due recognition and reward.

The Brazilian case study illustrates that well. The transition to feminist agro-ecology in Barra do Turvo is an on-going process, which began with a resignification of agricultural production and food, and continued with new value given to women's work, some renegotiations of gender relations in different spheres (family, community, market and, to a lesser extent, the local government), as well as a new commitment of women to local political issues. This process has been based on solidarities that have been strengthened and expanded on the basis of common objectives among women's groups, whose nature and place in their neighbourhood has gradually changed. This dynamic has been based on the experimentation and the progressive affirmation



of new practices and social relations which broadly aim at greater autonomy and the reproduction of life in ecologically and socially more sustainable forms. However, the process relies on small groups, on a small number of local leaders, on meagre financial and human resources - in part provided by the SOF-, and it faces differences among women, which tend to hinder the construction of a broader collective action.

In the same sense, a central challenge founded on the Bolivian case study is to reorient State policies in two directions: to conceive care and social protection as a fundamental and universal socio-economic right; and to strengthen the associative and collective forms of economy in order to expand the emerging forms of common management of social reproduction. The expansion of the State's shared responsibility for solidarity is a major priority in Bolivia, which involves reorienting the current pattern of development towards compliance with the normative advances, contained in the Constitution and a number of laws, in terms of social reproduction, without expanding co-optation of civil society organisations by the State.

The case study in Argentina also confirms that in the globalized capitalist system it is not possible for SSE experiences to be financially sustainable without support of the State. Public funding is an important aspect for childcare organisations. The network of community centres charges minimal or no fees to families for the services they provide and depend on public funding for their daily functioning. In this case, the financial dependence was not an inhibitor factor for the ideological and political autonomy of the organisations. Through different ways, they could maintain autonomous projects from the State. However, the lack of public funding limits the growth of the organisations and the consolidation of its political and pedagogical project. The demand for integral funding and recognition is a shared topic with other SSE experiences. But, unlike some other SSE mercantile initiatives, SSE community care centres deliver services that are socially necessary and that are highly demanded by the local population, that the State does not provide. In their daily tasks these centres guarantee children's access to rights (to food, education, recreation). Social policies and the legislation of SSE do not include care and gender equality in their institutional designs. The productive bias of SSE hides the associative care work and the contribution of women to the reproduction of life in the best possible conditions. This limits the potential of SSE as a counter hegemonic field.

While one can observe effervescent initiatives that are bubbling up, multiplying, in autonomous and creative ways, the lack of State support and the productive bias in the conceptualization of SSE may let them be as fragile as soap bubbles. As the case studies encompassed in the research show, the pathways out of fragility may depend on an articulation of these multiple initiatives, leaving them with autonomy without being co-opted through state-led programmes. This needs political environments that allow the constitution of networks and discursive fields to sustain the confluence of dispersed initiatives, as well as the expansion of the productive bias that SSE practices have had until now.

## 5. Final thoughts

Some of the findings of the research confirmed our initial hypothesis and some added new layers to the analysis of the ways in which reproductive work is organized. As expected, our findings show that in order to be transformative, SSE needs to introduce a feminist perspective questioning the way in which social reproduction is organized. The research confirmed the blurred lines between production and reproduction and the importance of making visible women's reproductive work both within SSE initiatives and outside it. It has emphasized the urgent need of redistributing this work not only within the family, in particular with men (no solely other women and girls), but also with other institutions responsible for social

reproduction, in particular the State or State-supported community-based case associations. It has also underlined the need for decent and stable incomes and workers' rights for all, in particular marginalized women who are not in formal sectors – like SSE initiatives. These are conditions to build social justice, defend women's rights and progress towards gender equality and open up spaces of social transformation.

This research has underlined the importance of promoting an articulation of these multiple and often fragile initiatives, and to create political environments that allow the constitution of networks and discursive fields to sustain the confluence of dispersed initiatives. It has demonstrated the enormous political relevance of women's SSE initiatives in the sense that they can provide the setting for the construction of new political emancipatory narratives. The SSE experiences here analysed are searching to reconstitute non-capitalist, non-liberal and non-State forms of organisation, (Escobar 2016), combining autonomy, communality and territoriality.

The defence of the right to earn a livelihood - in good and healthy conditions - on their place of living has inspired women to organize themselves and the community. Having been socialized as partly responsible for the sustainability of life has been a driving force for their involvement in SSE practices. Consciousness is strong among marginalized communities that the territory is vital for their survival. SSE experiences may thus constitute spaces of resistance for the reproduction of life in the best possible conditions, spaces of defence of life in opposition to the destruction through the financialisation of nature and social relations. The research confirmed that a feminist analysis of SSE initiatives can help understand these as germinal processes that open opportunities for new social relations, challenging gender, social exclusion and power, despite the many nuances and contradictions that these practices entail. In line with Escobar (2016), a feminist analysis of these practices allows to reaffirm that life is interdependency at all levels, including with nature.

## 6. References

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