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# Care Work in a Job Guarantee Program in Brazil

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# Care Economy

*What is care? An expanded definition may be “everything we do to maintain, continue and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes (not only) our bodies, ourselves (but also) our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.” (Tronto, 2013).*

*In a more concrete way, is the production of goods and services aimed at the physical, social and emotional wellbeing of children, elderly, ill, people with disabilities, and all other people, in order to allow them to function, providing them comfort, safety and a basis for developing their capabilities.*

# Social and Nature Reproduction

*“Non-capitalist organizations provide a fertile soil for capitalism; more strictly: capital feeds on the ruins of such organizations, and although this non-capitalist milieu is indispensable for accumulation, the latter proceeds at the cost of this medium nevertheless, by eating it up.” (Luxemburg, 1913)*

*Feminist Subsistence Approach: capitalism needs to permanently expand not only accumulation and markets itself, but also the exploitation of everything that is outside it, which form its basis. Women and nature are colonies in capitalism, as well as colonial relations among countries need to be maintained, despite formal decolonization. All of these relations are structurally devaluated and turned invisible.*

# Activities in Care Economy

Indirect – activities involved in maintaining everyday functional

Cooking, washing, cleaning, shopping for house products and food, managing the house

Rural context: collecting water and wood, making fire, caring for animals and environment, growing food for own consumption

Direct – relational activities

Bathing, feeding, breastfeeding, changing clothes, advising in homework, playing, reading for someone, accompanying someone to doctors and exams, giving medicines

# Activities in Care Economy

## Paid work

**Healthcare and social service** workers, **education** workers, personal and self-care services workers, and informal market workers, like babysitters, elderly caregivers and domestic workers

## Unpaid work

**Household** production and services, volunteer and community work

\*Sectors that went in profound crisis during the pandemic

# Reinforcement of Inequalities

Labor market structure and lack of public services mixed in a reproduction of social inequalities. Brazil context:

- Women unemployment rate always higher through 2012 - 2020
- Women unemployment rate was record in the first trimester of 2021: 17,9% *versus* 12,2% of men
- Occupation level of mothers of children up to 3 years old: 49,7% (black or women) *versus* 62,7% (white women)
- The highest paid women spend fewer hours of unpaid care (18h/week) than the least paid (24h/week), showing that the lack of public services reinforces market inequalities
- Richer families can pay for products, services and even household capital goods, such as laundry machine and individual vehicle, which save time in household chores
- Outsourced domestic services will be provided mainly by poor women who will, by its turn, accumulate and/or neglect their own self care demand and family care demand, which already tend to be higher, in view of the previous point

# Crisis of Care

The pandemic has explicated something that feminist approaches have been warning for a long time: the capitalist mode of development, whose individuality and lack of assistance is reinforced by neoliberalism, leads us to a crisis of care.

By one hand, there is the aging of population, the decline in working population in rich countries, and the surge of situations that heavily rely on care, such as the pandemic and other epidemics. By the other, there are austerity measures removing social care and public services, social valuation of individuality, which leads to unwillingness, inability and lack of disposable time to care for others and oneself.

This is not only an issue of gender equality, as it is commonly treated, but a choice of whether or not we are going to be a caring society, providing the infrastructure, time, multiple training, emotional and affective availability, social appreciation and monetary recognition that care work needs, and from which the whole of society benefits.



# Crisis of Care

Jéssica is a solo mother who takes care of her two children alone, receiving US\$31 from Brazilian government. Her son has autism and her younger daughter has microcephaly and other complications, due to pregnancy infection during Zika virus outbreak, that has affected the Americas in 2015 – 2017. Now they are going through the pandemic.

She has requested over a year ago to receive a minimum wage benefit (US\$200) for her daughter, which is supposed to be released in 45 days. The benefit for her autistic son was denied, and there has been a permanent 'adding of requirements' to concede benefits.

There are 420,000 cases, waiting for this kind of benefit (BPC), which are in permanent delay, and there are on total 1.373 million in the line of social security. This queue, which administratively denies rights, has immensely increased together with austerity measures, as well as the shortage of medicines publicly given. Cuts in benefits were celebrated as an 'economy for the government'.

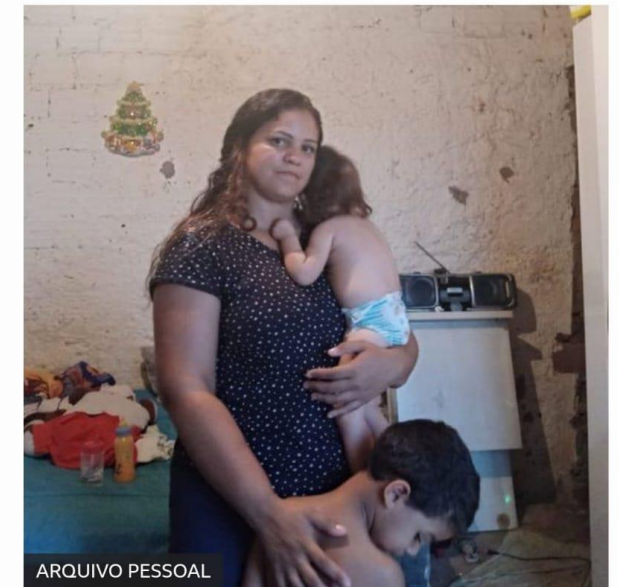
In cases like Jessica's, the scenario is of 76% of father abandonment. Beyond that, Zika Syndrome has had an income cut very well defined, since poor women were the ones which did not have the infrastructure to prevent themselves from the virus, and are the ones who suffer the most from compulsory maternity.

Jéssica is, nevertheless, performing several, crucial and invisible, works.

## 'Não tem comida em casa': o drama das mães de crianças vítimas do zika na fila do INSS

Ligia Guimarães  
Da BBC News Brasil em São Paulo

3 março 2020



Jéssica cuida sozinha dos dois filhos com os R\$ 171 do Bolsa Família e espera benefício para a filha com microcefalia há um ano, mas não passou nem pela perícia



# Relation to Environment and Specificities of Care

This is also not an issue of internalization of what is outside the market. Precisely the opposite. Orientation towards profit, acceleration of processes, competition, individualism and the treatment of social and ecological spheres as externalities is the very definition of an uncaring society.

Inherent characteristics of many activities in care economy: limited space for commodification, mecanization and rise in productivity. It is either not possible nor socially desirable, since time spent is, in many relational activities, the very service itself, and the quality of services may depend on affective bonds and time spent.

Even in formal paid care work, flexibilization of workers' rights, privatization and structural permission to push increases in productivity are damaging features, such as in the case of 'uberization' of education and health sectors.

# Proposals of Feminist Approaches

5 Rs: (i) social and economic *recognition*, (ii) *reduction* of unnecessary load of work, through technology and public services; (iii) *redistribution* towards more gender equality; (iv) fair *reward* and decent work; (v) political *representation* of care workers.

Reconceptualize the paradigm of Welfare State, including the dimensions of *family* and *community*, beyond *market* and *state*.

Establish the *right to be cared* and also, substantively, establish the *right (specially for women) to choose whether to be a caregiver or not*, addressing the lack of public services, compulsory maternity and household care, structural gender inequality, enabling and encouraging men to care also etc.

Elaborate a Brazilian Satellite Account of unpaid labor. *This is more a political decision than a technical impossibility* (Melo & Morandi, 2021).

# Problems with Traditional Heterodox Policies

Fiscal and monetary policies that are blind to inequalities and care work, foster labor market as it is and reproduce inequalities.

Job is not guaranteed directly, but as a side effect of increase in aggregate demand and capital accumulation, which is a social and environmental problem in itself.

Because of this wrong focus, policies tend to focus on high-productivity sectors, searching for rise in production complexity and economic growth, which worsens care and environmental crisis.

Major decisions about products, employment, wage, work conditions and production processes still lies on the hands of capital owners.

Welfare State paradigm focuses only on state provision, alleviating some problems, but neglecting family and community as inherent welfare providers.

# Possibilities with a Job Guarantee

Apart from the social achievement of job and public services as guaranteed rights, the program could also be a major starting point, towards a caring society, through:

- Recognition that care work exists
- Properly rewarding this fundamental work
- Decommodify care work, providing dignity for workers and at the same time, making care a fundamental right, not a merchandise
- Decelerate care activities and helping decelerate society as a whole
- Focus on quality of the activities
- Enable low productivity, high labor intensity activities, with low ecological impact or positive ecological impact, that are not profitable
- Diminish inequalities in care work which reinforce inequalities in formal labor market
- Establish minimum social standards for products, wages and productive processes

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Thank you!

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