Stronger Together: feminist community weavings during the Covid-19 Crisis

Juntas nos cuidamos: entramados comunitarios feministas durante la pandemia por Covid-19

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Abstract: The pandemic makes way to a whole range of communitarian projects, and to deal with the crisis. We highlight those fostered by feminist organizations, i.e. actions motivated exclusively by women, who propose to be mutually supportive to tackle multidimensional vulnerability increased by the pandemic. Thus, this paper explores three communitarian actions led by feminists in three Chilean cities from the center-south zone (Rancagua, Talca and Chillán), in order to learn and understand their arrangements to deal with the most urgent needs during the pandemic. This exploration was developed through online interviews with some leaders of the three initiatives. Among the main findings, we found a strong conviction for politicizing the intimate sphere, constructing a network of solidarity deemed safe for women, which allows them to stick together against any adversity. All this takes place across horizontal social relations, and mutual and self-care.

Key words: feminist, care, woman, communities, pandemic.

Resumen: Entre las iniciativas comunitarias impulsadas frente a la actual emergencia sanitaria por Covid-19, destacan las de inspiración feminista: acciones impulsadas exclusivamente por mujeres, con el propósito de apoyarse ante situaciones de vulnerabilidad multidimensional acrecentadas por la pandemia. En este contexto, el artículo indaga —a partir de la aplicación de entrevistas telemáticas— en tres acciones comunitarias promovidas por feministas en ciudades de la zona centro-sur de Chile (Rancagua,

Talca y Chillán), con el objetivo de conocer sus propuestas para enfrentar las necesidades más urgentes de las mujeres durante la crisis sanitaria. Entre los principales hallazgos destacamos la fuerte convicción por politizar lo íntimo y por construir una red de solidaridad que sea segura y les permita acompañarse ante escenarios adversos. Todo esto, a partir de un vínculo horizontal, que favorece el cuidado y el autocuidado.

Palabras clave: feminismos, cuidados, mujeres, comunidades, pandemia.

Introduction

The article enquires on community action proposals promoted by feminists in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic in three cities in the central-south zone of Chile: Rancagua, Talca, and Chillán. Before an economic, social and political system that pauperizes life, which in Chile gained important visibility with the Chilean Protests in October (2019[1]) and the pandemic (2020-2021), initiatives that focus on the material and symbolical life sustainability appear (Anigstein *et al*., 2021). Among the various actions, distinguishable are those explicitly supported on a feminist logic that recognize the need to transform material, social and symbolic conditions unfavorable for women. Initiatives exclusively conceived by women, who intend to mutually support and produce collective strategies against the violences that affect them, including situations of inequality and multidimensional vulnerability increased by the pandemic.[2]

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1 The "*Estallido social chileno*" (2019-2022 Chilean Protests) started in October 18th, 2019, after the mass demonstrations due to the increase in public transport fares in the national capital. These events lead to a generalized expression of disenchantment in the face of the life conditions of the country, which later extended to other cities in Chile. After this, presently, Chile experiences a constituent process that intends to draft a new constitution.

2 The article is framed in the research projects "*Prácticas comunitarias, políticas locales y gobernanza para la gestión de la crisis por COVID-19 en ciudades intermedias*" [Community practices, local policies and governance for the management of the COVID-19 Crisis]. Contest for the rapid allocation of Resources for Research Projects on Coronavirus – Call 2020. *Agencia Nacional de Investigación y Desarrollo* (ANID, Chile); and, "*(Re) articulaciones en los entramados comunitarios frente al acontecimiento pandémico. El rol de las mujeres y los feminismos en la reproducción comunitaria de la vida*" [(Re)articulations in community frames in the face of the pandemic. The role of women and feminisms in the community reproduction of life]. Macro-research *Memorias de una pandemia* [Memories from the pandemic] by *Grupo de Trabajo Territorialidades, Espiritualidades y Cuerpos* of *Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales* (CLACSO).

Even if the health care crisis exhibited our vulnerability as a species. It also may be a good opportunity to recrate the social. Crises foster our approaching to the world we live in, which allows questioning our ways of life and the situations we daily normalize, by recognizing their deficiencies and limitations. Then, the pandemic would enable new conditions for action (Morin, 1995), activating creativity and covering relational needs; recreating and reinforcing community cohesion and driving social, even spatial, processes (Federici, 2020).

From these premises, we approach three feminist initiatives that appeared during the pandemic in the cities of Rancagua, Talca, and Chillán.[3] The approximation is on the basis of the following questions: what are the particularities of the feminist community initiatives? What are their proposals to face the pandemic and recreate social links? For the purpose of addressing such questions, the article structures as follows: it opens with the presentation of the conceptual basis that guides observation, underscoring feminist readings of the crisis, and the main problems particularly experienced by women over the pandemic, and the importance of the communal dimension of care. Then, the methodologic process to approach the three initiatives is described, as well the main aspects they share, and which link them, are exposed. Finally, the article closes with some reflections.

Feminist readings of crises

From the feminist economy, we understand the current health care crisis as an expression and deepening of the crises experienced by the prevailing economic system, which has emphasized capital accumulation in detriment to the protection of (human and non-human) life, thus (re)producing their pauperization (Carrasco, 2013; Pérez-Orozco, 2014; Gutiérrez and Salazar, 2019). The setting up of neoliberal policies in recent decades —in Chile and in Latin America as a whole— has pauperized, among other things, public health and the systems of social protection, reducing them to a "system impotent to save lives" (Zaldúa *et al*., 2020: 10).

Various authors have tried to conceptualize the crisis we live at global level from notions such as *systemic crisis* (Ezquerra, 2011), *multidimensional crisis* (Pérez-Orozco, 2011), and *civilizing crisis* (Escobar, 2011; Estermann, 2012; Lander, 2015; Grosfoguel, 2016)*,* among others. All of them attempt

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3 Even if the initiatives were created over the pandemic (2020), the feminist organizations that promote them were previously created.

to visualize the noxious effects of the ways which we, as a society, have adopted to produce, consume, relate and distribute wealth. In this context, we live constant crises, which overlap and acquire a multidimensional character, affecting a number of spheres of social life.

Particularly, we underscore that the Covid-19 pandemic as well as its neoliberal management, deepened the *crisis of care*, understood as "social and political inability to ensure the wellbeing of broad population sectors" (Ezquerra, 2011: 117). Over the pandemic, a harshening of the unequal distribution of caretaking was noticed (care for children and the elderly; house chores, etc.), mainly between men and women, but also between social classes, generations and countries. This situation needs special attention in Latin America, where we experience deep social, economic, and cultural differences, open deregulation and privatization, and a noticeable absence of public policies oriented to social welfare (CEPAL, 2020; Sanchís, 2020; Roig, 2020; Zaldúa *et al.*, 2020).

Over the Covid-19 pandemic, after certain institutions and services (employment, education, transport, etc.) stopped working (and / or were digitalized), we noticed significant changes in the transference of cares at the households. One of the most exhausting human activities intensifies and owing to the sexual division of labor, it is usually taken by women.

These transferences of cares also involve the community, which oftentimes has been invisible in its constant role of life sustainer, in spite of the importance it has had in the context of the pandemic, not only in low-income sectors, but also in middle-income ones (Sanchís, 2020; Castilla, *et al.*, 2020). Due to the above, there is interest in approaching the role of the community in providing individual and collective cares over the pandemic.

We focus on community initiatives fostered by women, given the leading role they have had in the actions that support life, in their households and communities. "It is women who have spearheaded the efforts to collectivize reproductive work as a tool to economize the reproduction costs so as to mutually protect themselves from poverty, state violence, and from that individually exercised by men" (Federici, 2013: 252). An instance is *ollas communes* [common pots; self-managed independent soup kitchens] in in the 1980's in Chile and Peru as well. Confidence-based actions, which not only allowed facing subsistence, but also decompressing the intensification of reproductive tasks in adverse scenarios and addressing affective- and relational-type needs (Hardy, 1986; Federici, 2013 and 2020).

In the context of the present article, it is of particular interests to enquire on the role feminist activism fulfils in the community and the

way it contributes to the communal dimension of cares. Such interest is supported upon two reasons. Firstly, the visibility acquired by feminism in the national political scenario ever since the 2018 Chilean feminist protests and strikes, not only as a political movement, but also as a territorial-local agent. In this way, a feminist activism deeply rooted in the territory and the inhabitants is configured, centered on micropolitical work, which exhibits specific organization needs of women (Hiner and López, 2021; Cruz, 2020; Solano and Farfán, 2020). Secondly, due to the orientation of this feminist territorial activism to reduce inequalities on the basis of gender women live daily, which were exacerbated by the pandemic.

How does the pandemic affect women?

In Latin America, the pandemic has evinced the crisis of the neoliberal state, which has privileged solutions organized by the market, without substantively committing to fully exercising social rights and creating collective and integral solutions to account for the complexity of the problem.

The health care crisis (or socio-health care crisis) has entailed the deepening of historic inequalities, causing specific impacts on a number of sectors. By particularly referring to women, we notice that lockdown measures are not neutral in terms of gender and increase their vulnerability and inequality inside and outside the households (Mora *et al.*, 2020; CEPAL, 2020; Zaldúa *et al.*, 2020). Among the problems that affect them, we find: an increase in the workload; increase in gender violence; deepening of socioeconomic vulnerability and difficulties in the access to sexual and reproductive health (Mora *et al.*, 2020).

In the first place, the pandemic has intensified the so-called *crisis of care*, increasing women's global workload. Already in 2019, the International Labour Organization stated that women triplicated the hours devoted to non-paid care at their households (cooking, cleaning, childcare and care for dependent people, etc.) as compared with men (OIT, 2019). Over the pandemic, this situation aggravates.

According to measurements of *Centro de Encuestas y Estudios Longitudinales* [Center for Surveys and Longitudinal Studies] of *Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile*, in 2020, women devoted nine hours a week more than men to non-paid work. Regarding parenting responsibilities, 57% of surveyed men stated they devoted no time to childcare, while 71%, no hours devoted to school accompaniment (Cerda *et al.*, 2020: 10). This

work overload negatively impacts on women's paid work, mental health, and time use, mainly in the face of absence of care policies promoted by the government apparatus (Vaca Trigo, 2019; Arza, 2020; Alarcón-Vásquez *et al*., 2022).

Furthermore, owing to the economic recession because of the pandemic, women are at a higher risk of becoming poor, as they tend to have a worse socioeconomic status than men due to lesser labor participation, higher levels of economic dependence and labor informality, since they concentrate in the lowest productivity sectors, among others (Vaca Trigo, 2019; Mora *et al*., 2020). The effects of the pandemic –associated with the reduction of wages, increase in unemployment and abandonment of the labor market– deepen the historic inequalities that affect women; they are one of the collectives that experiences the harshest effects in labor and economic terms. Such situations aggravate when "being a woman" concurs with other conditions of vulnerability, as in the case of migrant women, housemaids, imprisoned women and women living in rural areas, among others.

Likewise, over the pandemic we noticed an increase in gender violence at the households. Before the pandemic, households were already identified as one of the most dangerous places for women (UNODC, 2018), which was stressed by the lockdown, thus increasing the risk of violence against them. In the context of the lockdown, violence may prolong and the aggressor is more likely to act with impunity, given the difficulty to access public services (shelters and attention centers) and denounce offices (Mora *et al*., 2020).

Finally, access to sexual and reproductive health has also dwindled as of the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Even if this affects men and women, the latter recognized themselves as the most affected, as for example, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, contraception methods and hospital attention to childbirths have been restricted; these aspects intensify in groups of women with greater vulnerability, as it is the case of those who experience gender violence and/or live in rural areas (CEPAL and UNFPA, 2020).

Feminist activism in the context of community weaving

Facing the disadvantageous scenario, organizations explicitly supported on feminist policies —with a strong conviction to change the unfavorable material, social and symbolical conditions of women— have devised

community initiatives to lessen the negative effects of the pandemic in the everydayness of women.

Not only do such actions intend to address material needs (food, clothing, temporary shelter in case of gender violence), but also emotional (contention, support, affection) and symbolic needs (recognition, sense of belonging). In the center of feminist action is care in an integral sense, politicizing and visualizing how such fundamental tasks are for the maintenance of society (and its members) and underscoring the strong emotional and affective component this entails (Sanchís, 2020; Batthyány, 2021; Gutiérrez and Salazar, 2019; Zibecchi, 2014).

With a view to approaching these feminist initiatives, we will understand the communal as a sort of relationship between people and their environments, on the basis of respect, reciprocity and corresponsibility; links that seek the reproduction of collective life —not necessarily following the logics of capital accumulation or the state policy—, where women have performed an indispensable role (Gutiérrez, 2017; Federici, 2020; Cruz, 2020).

From this standpoint, we understand cares as a constituent part of the communal, which after being politicized by feminism become relevant in the reproduction of collective life. Feminism makes care practices appear in all their richness and assert as autonomous forms regarding the market and the State. This does not occur in other community stances; for example, some neighbor leaderships that privilege their intermediating role between State and community, taking the position of a secondary expression, subordinate to state policies.

In this regard, we visualize that the communal also contains bonds and cares inside the households; this makes them spaces where such tasks are "de-privatized" and are taken as a shared responsibility. In this way, the organization and provision of cares entail bonds inside and outside the households, which generates modifications to the household structure and the public space (Federici, 2020). For the purpose of underscoring the synergies between both caregiving agents (households and communities), we resort to the concept of *entramados comunitarios* [community weavings] (Gutiérrez, 2011), which enables us to understand community relationships in a flexible and multi-scalar manner.

Community weavings produce a located collective network —with relatively stable bonds— of varied nature (neighbors or relatives, women's networks, mutual support groups, assemblies, councils, etc.) with multiple purposes, though prone to guarantee the wellbeing of their members. That is

to say, weavings are oriented to cover and/or broaden the satisfaction of needs considered basic for social and collective existence, enabling the production and reproduction of human life (Gutiérrez, 2011 and 2017; Gutiérrez and Salazar, 2019).

The emphasis of community weavings in the reproduction of life enables us to understand human life in terms of interdependence and underline our own reciprocal need of others, both for the development of our individual autonomies and to make our lives livable (Benhabib, 2006; Butler, 2006; Carrasco, 2013; Sales, 2016).

In this framing, we will understand cares as a sphere, and at once, as a political tool. As a sphere, it is understood as an indefinite space "of activities, services, goods, relationships and affections aimed to ensure social reproduction and life sustenance" (Sanchís, 2020: 10); while as a political tool, it allows us to visualize the fundamental actions to intend to alleviate human precariousness —both the existential and the conditioned— mainly that produced by state policies which have not prioritized social welfare (Butler, 2006; Sales, 2016). Actions conducive to sustainability will be forms of adaption and contention in the face of the negative conditions of pauperization, enabling more solid existences with long-term projection. From this standpoint, cares are not residual activities, neither of the market nor political, but indispensable fundaments for the conditions of possibility of life.

Particularly, community weavings articulate the communal dimension of care, understood as a "complex and diverse social weaving, historically inserted in the territories, which has a relevant role in the stage of cares required by broad population sectors" (Sanchís, 2020: 12). The communal is thus understood as an interpretation key to deepen into the "natural form" of reproducing life focusing on the "use value" (Gutiérrez and Salazar, 2019) and mobilized by *reproductive rationality* (Hinkelammert and Mora, 2013, in Cendejas, 2017), putting forward an alternative to the instrumental rationality of capital accumulation.

A number of researchers in Latin America have evinced the leading role and persistence of community weavings in the resolution of elemental needs that oftentimes we consider privatized (or in charge of the households): childcare, and care for the elderly, management of foods and various resources, detection and approach to different expressions of violence (gender, police, institutional, etc.), among others (Fournier, 2020; Castilla, *et al.*, 2020; Anigstein *et al.*, 2021). Owing to this, we enquire on the initiatives that came out over the pandemic stirred by feminism, in

order to learn their actions explicitly oriented to care for others and their contributions to the renewal of social bonds at community level.

Methodology

The results presented here are framed in a wider research project, which intended to enquire on various community initiatives over the pandemic in three Chilean cities: Rancagua, Talca and Chillán. To do so, a census was carried out —based on a qualitative approach to systematization, between September and October 2020— for the purpose of identifying the main actions undertaken in the three cities. The research was carried out using information available on the Internet, due to social distancing and the prolific virtual activity during lockdown (Hernán-García *et al.*, 2020). We resorted to various document review techniques to analyze the information produced by the social actors involved in the initiatives in the press and social media, without interacting with them (Orellana and Sánchez, 2006; Valles, 1999).

The census identified 310 initiatives; these were organized in seven inductive typologies: 1) solidarity actions and *ollas comunes*; 2) experience in network activities; 3) feminist experiences; 4) psycho-emotional care practices; 5) new economic practices; 6) actions of supporters' groups of soccer teams; and, 7) initiatives supported on new spiritualities (Tapia *et al.*, 2021). Out of the initiatives catalogued in the third typology, three were selected (one per city) from a new theoretical sampling (Flick, 2007), and based on two criteria: i) self-defined feminist initiatives; that is to say, driven by feminist ideals or problems identified from feminism; and, ii) ongoing initiatives as of the 2019-2022 Chilean protests, but which develop specific actions to face the problems caused by the pandemic.

Once the cases were chosen, six semi-structured interviews were held, two for each case, between February and April 2021. The criteria to select the interviewees were: pioneers of the actions to face the outcome of the pandemic; and b) a participation of at least six months. The interview transcriptions underwent content analysis using thematic screens. Firstly, based on an inductive exercise and then, deductive, in function of the research purposes (Baeza, 2002; Cruz, 2009).

The goals of feminist coming weavings

From the analysis of the interviews with the members of feminist initiatives,[4] it has been possible to identify their main emphases and common aspects. Following, there is a brief description of the three cases to later comment the transversal aspects.

The first initiative is in the city of Rancagua and was promoted by a feminist collective defined as anti-patriarchal and anticapitalistic, which in conjunction with other organizations in O'Higgins Region intended to visualize the aggravation of gender violence during the pandemic, manage transitional solutions to accompany women who experienced this sort of violence and ask the State to create, increase and improve shelters. This action is joined by other solidarity efforts for women such as those that involve gathering and distributing food and feminine hygiene products.

The second action is in Talca and was boosted by a feminist group identified with the defense of women and LGTBIQ+ communities against patriarchal violences. Once the pandemic started, they started to survey and map support and cooperation initiatives in Talca and other places in the region, with a view to contributing to their dissemination and greater access for individuals and families affected by the pandemic. Then, they launched a project for the purpose of articulating a network for support and "*apañe*" among women who –in spite of not been acquainted– were willing to help one another, offering their time, know-hows, and other resources. This group of feminist operates as an aid hub, connecting women who live in the city of Talca.

The third initiative, in Chillán, was devised by self-appointed women, members of a number of feminist groups, who intended to foster actions to decrease aggressions against women in the commune and its various sectors, reinforcing protective measures against gender violence. The purpose was to provide women who were experiencing gender violence in its various manifestations (physical, psychologic, economic, and emotional) with support and (psychosocial, emotional and legal) advice over the lockdown promoted by health care authorities.

Separatism and the politization of the intimate

One of the first characteristics that reveals as transversal in the three feminist initiatives —and which distinguishes them from other collective actions—

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4 Owing to confidentiality, fictitious names are used for each of the respondents.

is the exclusive orientation toward women and the strong conviction regarding that "the personal is political". The orientation to only integrate women turns into the creation of non-mixed spaces and sworn separatism; the latter is explained by the discomfort with the patriarchal organization logics, which are neither built "from a respectful nor caring paradigm" (Tamara, 28 years of age, Talca) and bad experiences in mixed spaces where she has been involved.

Noelia tells us she used to militate in an organization in which women, *cisgender heterosexual*[5] men and dissidences participated, however for men feminism was always the secondary political line. For Noelia and her collective, the fight against capitalism and patriarchy is a joint one, not so for her organization partners back then, nevertheless. Because of that, Noelia decided to leave, for "a mixed organization wasn't what we needed" (Noelia, 30 years of age, Rancagua).

For Noelia, a separatist organization allows articulating on the basis of women's common needs, many of which are linked to patriarchal violence, which men are neither always capable of seeing nor understanding. Moreover, she tells us that in mixed collectives many female members were abused by hetero-cisgender men. Owing to this, among the principles of her collective one finds separatism.

Tamara's reasoning is similar in connection with work she kept with another mixed community organization:

> We were about breaking up because we found out a case of harassment that was silenced by some partners. Once again, we come across these *machitos*, the same as in college, university, the organizations […] the same guys doing the same thing as always (Tamara, 28 años, Talca).

We notice that separatism does not necessarily limit articulation with mixed organizations that pursue common interests, though base-level coexistence rules are set for collaborative work. Above all, collective spaces must be cared for so that everyone feels comfortable and safe. This the way they contest other organizations from feminism, and depending on the answer, they decide to carry on or not.

In this scenario, it is restated that what crosses private life —as experiences linked to sexual harassment, love relations or maternity— deserves to be politicized and taken to the public space. The politization of the personal is linked to how they experience political organization and how

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5 *Hetero cisgénero* [hetero-cisgender], a concept used by some respondents, is a neologism to refer to individuals who identify themselves with their socially assigned gender (based on their biologic sex) and heterosexuality.

they understand revolution; "we do not make a revolution taking the power for us, but we do it every day" (Noelia, 30 years of age, Rancagua). For her part, Daniela expresses:

> Personal space is a space for politics and deconstruction, always, to educate oneself, to read, to analyze yourself [...], from removing words that are *machista* from your vocabulary, patriarchal, humiliating words. Understanding dissidences, accepting, not judging, caring for others (Daniela, 34 years of age, Rancagua).

The role given to the intimate sphere —where the gravest violences are experienced— not only turns into covering the material needs experienced by women in the context of the pandemic, but also providing safe spaces for them in a separatist endeavor. This, bearing in mind what an adverse and violent society may be like for women in patriarchal contexts.

In this regard, the observed feminist initiatives do not necessarily create something new by politicizing the intimate, but reinforce their feminist convictions in moments of greater adversity; when violences and overburdens in private life (mothering,[6] not having an income, defending themselves against macho violence, etc.) are commonly less visible in function of the priority acquired by public health care principles. Here, politicization takes place at micropolitical level, approaching situations that women oftentimes experience in solitude or without support and contention.

Another aspect transversal to the three experiences is the presence of women who have been able to access higher education, which not only provides them with technical knowledge regarding the management of help (material and/or psycho-emotional) or how to offer them directly, but enables them to build spaces for feminist political training from various spheres of knowledge. The links developed by the initiatives involve female attorneys, psychologists, therapists, social workers, professors and health care professionals, among others. It is worth pointing out that these women not only value professional knowledge, they also promote other know-hows or trades; for example, sewing, yoga, carpentry, cooking and natural medicine. However, what they value the most is the emotional and effective dimension. In this regard, Noelia states: "we have love, affection,

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6 *Maternar* [mothering] is a notion that underscores the social and affective practice of maternity, and the subjective appropriation of this practice, beyond the biological fact of birth. Likewise, the concept remarks actions conducive to producing an affective bond, proving cares, protection and emotional security.

values, [...] we go 'hand in hand' [...]. We care one another, we go to look for us to the *cana*[7] [...] we make things, we move" (Noelia, 30 years, Rancagua).

As expressed here, in the three initiatives we notice strong gender solidarity, but also with a marked social class identification. The forerunners are women who largely have been able to access higher education, unlike the generations before them, and have nourished the stances from which they live in the world and their political struggles.

However, they do not linger in the feminist politics created inside universities —which frequently provide them with conceptual support to politicize their actions— but we notice a sort of "return" to their territories, to their origin communities or toward individuals and the groups with which they identify (their neighborhoods, families, peer groups, etc.). In their actions we detect a strong orientation toward the women they recognize as the most vulnerable, on whom —somehow— these feminists are also reflected and/or see their experiences of their elders (mothers, grandmothers, aunts, etc.).

A network of solidarity that supports us

From the recognition that "the personal is political" and from separatist proposals, the three initiatives put forward building a solidarity network among women, trying to address their most pressing needs, those which not always are visible nor assisted by the State or other actors, and which even, are overlooked by other community organizations.

One of the first addressed needs is material subsistence aspects (management of foods and hygiene products, or temporarily provide women with shelter), as it is recognized that the pandemic has increased the difficulties women usually face in the labor market, while frequently, overloads them with tasks inside the households, given the reproductive role they socially receive. Nevertheless, the emphasis of the actions was in psycho-social and emotional care, as it was identified that many women they worked with needed not only money or material goods, but accompaniment due to their lack of networks.

> Covid-19 has been more than a physical condition for people, it has also produced overcrowding, social consequences for our neighbors, dwellers and women who live in violent environments and who have to stay with their abusers during the pandemic [...] Covid also means desperation for some [and] there is no psychologic support for them (Pamela, 24 years of age, Chillán).

7 Colloquial expression which refers to jail.

With the creation of a solidarity network, it is expected to offer a contention space, but at once, of enjoyment and political formation. It was sought to address the needs recognized as fundamental for women such as "organizing and protecting one another" in "a space of feminist political construction, [...] a safe space where different women concur, with and without political ideologies, but joined by feminism" (Patricia, 31 years of age, Chillán).

The supported solidarity networks moved all manner of resources, not only money, but emotional and symbolic as well. In this regard, two of the respondents express:

> The project is not only related to money, the *cabras*[8] started to link also by means of their knowledge and so we came up with a [...] sewing cooperative [...] We created a large network where in the end there were about 60 (Tamara, 28 years of age, Talca).

> It is a network that supports women in every aspect we are oppressed: education, legal, obstetric, in the family [in] unsafe spaces for women. We are a feminist network [...], a network of love that helps women (Pamela, 24 years of age, Chillán).

In this regard, the main role of feminist organizations was to mediate; connect women willing to offer time and money, and which otherwise would not be possible. As stated by Pamela, in relation to the initiative that intends to accompany women who have experienced gender violence:

> We are not one hundred percent in charge [...], we analyze that take it as aid to the corresponding entities that we know are safe for the partners. [...] The resources are partners willing to deliver their human or professional capital to accompany women in the various processes of each claim or case (Pamela, 24 years, Chillán).

The articulation of the feminist community weaving, as in other community weavings, takes place for the purpose of offering support in case of adverse scenarios. However, we notice two differencing aspects: i) private situations are addressed (i.e., domestic violence, abuse in intimate relationships, upbringing), which sometimes other agents are not capable of seeing or think they should not involve; and, ii) action openly politicizes care and the construction of a safe network in the face of scenarios deemed unfair.

It is intended "to channel help for women in precarious situations, [...] in health care, [in the] economic, labor... in all the aspects we know we women are oppressed or have difficulties to access" (Pamela, 24 years, Chillán), for the purpose of assisting them, protect them and care for them. This idea reconnects us with the generation of care based on horizontal logics, in which eventually everyone takes of everyone else.

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8 Colloquial expression to refer to young people.

I am cared for, I care for myself, we care for ourselves: the horizontality of bonds

In spite of the lockdown, these women have sought to meet and accompany themselves, even using new technologies and virtual platforms. One of the respondents commented that, together with material support, they made a group in WhatsApp with all the contacts of women in the network, where they usually interact; "some ask about something and another answers, we have a very active group" (Tamara, 28 years, Talca). Here, we reassert that in addition to concrete material help, the network articulates to offer company, to actively listen and help to address specific contingencies. For example, Tamara tells:

> I've had to take a *cabra* to CESFAM,[9] on the other side of the city on bike, [...] we've had to interfere when carabiners try to take children to SENAME.[10] Then, it's like we're available twenty-four seven for the *cabras* of the network (Tamara, 28 years, Talca).

These networks move from an exercise of care in horizontal terms, which intend to break the asymmetry between the caregiver and the receiver. Verticality in care comes from understanding that someone "gives something" to another one who lacks "that something". To counteract this logic, the three initiatives promote reciprocity and reinforce the figure of "*el apañe feminista*" [feminist care], which emphasizes the importance of solidarity between women before an adverse system.

Hence, the word "*apañe*" —for instance, "*apañe feminista*"— was present in various of the slogans and mottos of the actions promoted by the respondents.

This horizontality is put forward as a critique to the logics of charity —considered asymmetrical— mainly those promoted by the government. For example, Tamara and her collective consider the delivery of food boxes by the government violent because a "system of lacks is replicated" while "poverty is fed" (Tamara, 28 years, Talca). In this way, an attempt to distance from the assistentialist dynamics is noticed, which was not free from tensions, though "trial and error" is assumed as a part of the process. The key is not to lose sight of that intention and include every woman in the process with no differentiations for everyone helps one another.

Noelia, for her part, reaffirms the assistentialist spirit of the food boxes' delivery, and despite she assumes it is hard to break with the logics of assistance, recognizes that help may be offered in a different manner, and they want to try other ways.

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9 First-level health care center.

10 National Underage Service.

> We don't give boxes just because, we made a list, run a survey, we had an emotional follow-up for women, some partners were in charge of calling them to check on them, to find out how they felt. [...] Our boxes were not like the government's (Noelia, 30 years, Rancagua).

In this way, a transversal critique to the government and its measures for the pandemic is made from the three feminist organizations; they point out that such measures, in addition to not addressing the particularities of various social groups, are exclusively aimed at meeting the population's food problems, while psychosocial help has been put aside. What differentiates their actions from the government's would be the level of proximity, involvement and genuine interest in the other.

This intention to horizontalize care also underscores the importance of self-care, mainly over the pandemic, for a significant percentage of the population —largely women— had their mental health affected. In this regard, the three organizations considered "internal care work" relevant, either because of the havoc wreaked by changes due to the pandemic (for example, going from presence to virtuality) and the impact these changes had on the emotionality and mental health of the members. In this way, Claudia elaborates: "we focus on working and 'nucleate' as an organization [...] we used the emergency [...] as an excuse to meet virtually" (Claudia, 26 years of age, Rancagua), to offer companion in the case of the death of a relative or any other difficulty. This, as we will find out below, also connects with the centrality of emotionality in the actions developed.

Emotions as organizational drive and steer

Emotionality crosses the actions of the three networks of women. Not only does emotional care become relevant, but it is emotion what drives action; angst, rage, willingness to change things, hope, the drive to react to this and the conviction that actions will help the lives of women in the network. The women we talked to, at the beginning of the pandemic, did not know what to do, but they "went for it with an open heart" (Tamara, 28 años, Talca), convinced that something had to be done and safe in the knowledge that their intentions might crystalize. Tamara confesses that they maybe knew "they would not change the world", though they would be able to work avoiding violent logics that vulnerate human dignity.

This emotionality also reflects in the forms of organization proposed by feminist organizations. "We're just like that, *muy de 'la guata*"[11] [jump into action], learning *on the go* what went quite ok and apply it", "see if there is need for anything and solve *in no time*, no bureaucracy no fuss" (Tamara, 28 years, Talca). Trial and error are assumed in an attempt to enjoy individual and collective learning that may come out of it. Likewise, the need to be flexible before a context as changing is assumed; because of that, and due to the horizontality we mentioned before, in the feminist organizations with which we talked there are no defined roles, but rotative, which are redefined at any moment or in assemblies. "If someone has to moderate a meeting, she volunteers and moderates; if someone has to draft the minute, she volunteers and does so; and if someone has to take the lead in a meeting, she volunteers and performs accordingly (Patricia, 31 years, Chillán).

It is understood that partners have other jobs and activities, which turns into intermittent participation (due to constant commuting, care for others, work, studies, etc.). Women in the network change and on occasion some become protagonists, later on, other women, but there's always someone supporting, "there's always someone that 'stands up'" (Pamela, 24 years, Chillán). In this context, the decision and disposition of the partners to leave their home at the most critical moments over the pandemic were also considered. Tasks were adjusted considering these predispositions; the "*apañe*" may be virtual or face to face.

Networks, spatialities and public-private interdependencies

The flexibility of solidarity networks created by feminist women has a spatial correlate as well. From the respondents' narratives, we notice that the actions are carried out in alliance with various women and organizations, which may be continuous in time, one-time, or sporadic, and also change, depending on the wills involved and the goals pursued. These relationships not only are established at local or group level, but at various scales; they reach commune, provincial, regional and even national levels. We interpret such specialty from a relational perspective, from the notion of place (Massey, 1994). That is to say, we understand these feminist organizations as meeting points for a number of trajectories —which cross time and scales— and which as a whole produce a particular *locus*. The spatiality of these initiatives, therefore, is always open and plastic, not enclosed within boundaries or predefined delimitations.

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11 Colloquial expression that refers the stomach; in this case, it refers actions carried out without thinking further.

From here, we are able to understand the communal beyond the local (barrio or neighborhood), as it is built by means of multiple spatialities. Though —as stated by Noelia (30 years, Rancagua)— the closest level is the most valued: "if you asked me about the most important, I'd tell you that the communal, it is the most accessible, the most real". In this way, the value of the "face-to-face" bond, getting to know and recognize one another in joint action acquires value.

Likewise, we notice that the networks created also blur the border between the public and the private. It is evinced that mainly in times of crises, family survival, or inside the households, is sustained on social structures that overpass them: a friend or someone with common interests, a next-door neighbor, people we meet at the plaza or even the landscape.

Tamara puts it as follows: "if you like to spend time with your granny and cousins, this [in reference to the network] is as if you had grannies and cousins all over Talca. Terrific!" (Tamara, 28 years, Talca). Households are constantly dialoging with their closest environments (geographically territorialized and non-territorialized) to sustain life, being always a shared task and hard to carry out on the basis of privatization logics. This privatization of cares entails costs not only in the weakening of social fabric, but also social, emotional, and material costs for women, who have been over-demanded in their social role of caregivers.

Presently, due to the pandemic, we clearly see the border between the domestic and communal blurs. We also notice that lockdown mainly in territories with a deficit of public services and infrastructure is unsustainable (Roig, 2020). Owing to this, we believe it is relevant to recognize the potential of community actions, mainly those supported on feminisms, as these forge a collective identity, both in the domestic and in the community spheres, that enables the self-valuing and empowerment of women upon whom the weight of caregiving activities has fallen and as a society, we have not always been able to recognize it, nor offering the optimal conditions to do so. Somehow, these solidarity, horizontal, and flexible networks of women who are trying to redress such aspect.

Final reflections

The present article explored the community action of feminist organizations deployed in the pandemic in three cities of the center-south region of Chile: Rancagua, Talca and Chillán. The research intended to ascertain the particularities of such initiatives and their proposals to face the health care

crisis. Among the main characteristics of these actions are the politicization of the intimate and the construction of a solidarity network exclusively composed of women for the purpose of creating safe spaces, where not only a source of strong gender solidarity is observed, but also class.

These networks focus on covering the most pressing needs of women —aspects not always visualized or politicized by other community efforts—, from a link of horizontality that favors care and selfcare, where emotionality acquires centrality. Finally, we observe that community feminist weaving, as other human trajectories, which are flexible and dynamical, operate at various scales. Here, the notion of place and community weavings enable us to see the continuities between the links inside the households with their closest environment, which may be or not geographically territorialized.

The centrality acquired by solidarity and care among women in the initiatives revised comes to three aspects. First, in the revalorization of care as a fundamental human activity for personal and collective wellbeing, mainly in adverse scenarios. Second, care is detached from the *must be* associated to femininity —which oftentimes entails self-exploitation and postponement— to practice it from enjoyment and affective and political conviction. Third, care is recognized as a shared and necessary responsibility to collaboratively produce in a way that such care goes not against women (physical health, metal and emotional), but in their benefits and their collectivity.

In this way, the health care crisis is harnessed by these feminist organizations as an opportunity to recreate social links, rearticulate community weavings and open new social processes. We consider these endeavors have the potential to circulate different values in a society where market logic prevails: competence, exchange value and individual merit.

Finally, we underscore that —unlike the other surveyed initiatives in Rancagua, Talca, and Chillán in the context of the pandemic (Tapia *et al.*, 2021)— feminists contribute to recognize the communal as a sphere at least in three ways. First, because —more than other initiatives—it has a less state-centric and more socio-centric vocation, which facilitates the recognition of the fundamental place of the properly communal logics, without subjecting them to the market or State. Second, since feminism affirms the transformation of the present escaping from the logics of revolution as a destination and the detachment from daily practices. Third, because feminist practices —intending to politicize the personal— make the border between the private and the public, the individual and the communal porous, which might relate to the explicit emphasis they give care (physical,

psychical and emotional). While other observed community weavings are not necessarily aware of the community dimension of cares and emphasize the intermediation logic between people and State, feminisms reach the center of life reproduction, where the issue is a matter of life and death.

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