

# Noiva do Cordeiro community: contributions from elements of a system based on substantive economy

LUIZ PAULO RIGUEIRA DE MORAIS <sup>1</sup>

WESLEY SILVA XAVIER <sup>1</sup>

DANIEL CALBINO PINHEIRO <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE VIÇOSA (UFV), VIÇOSA – MG, BRAZIL

<sup>2</sup> UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SÃO JOÃO DEL-REI (UFSJ), SÃO JOÃO DEL-REI – MG, BRAZIL

## Abstract

This study investigated the formation and interaction of an alternative economic system in the *Noiva do Cordeiro*-MG community with the dynamics of the mercantile economy. Qualitative research was conducted from an ethnography study developed with the rural community. Based on the theories of economic sociology by Marcel Mauss and Karl Polanyi, this paper points out that the aspects of giving and reciprocity in productive relationships were central to reproducing a strong solidarity logic. Through very own principles, structures, and institutions, in which money plays a very small role, the findings indicate that the community has been able to survive even in the face of the tensions of a market society.

**Keywords:** Solidarity Economy. Economic Sociology. Ethnography. Noiva do Cordeiro Community.

## *Comunidade Noiva do Cordeiro: contribuições por meio de elementos de um sistema baseado em uma economia substantiva*

### Resumo

Este estudo investigou como ocorreram a formação e a interação de um sistema econômico alternativo na comunidade Noiva do Cordeiro-MG com as dinâmicas da Economia Mercantil. Para atingir este objetivo, realizou-se uma investigação qualitativa valendo-se de uma etnográfica desenvolvida na comunidade rural. Baseado nas teorias da sociologia econômica de Marcel Mauss e de Karl Polanyi, este trabalho sinaliza que os aspectos da dádiva e da reciprocidade nas relações produtivas foram fundamentais para a reprodução de uma forte lógica solidária. Mediante princípios, estruturas e instituições muito próprios, em que o dinheiro tem uma importância bem limitada, os achados apontam que a comunidade desenvolveu um sistema diferenciado reproduzindo múltiplas lógicas econômicas, a despeito da tensão resultante de uma economia de mercado.

**Palavras-chave:** Economia Solidária. Sociologia Econômica. Etnografia. Comunidade Noiva do Cordeiro.

## *Comunidad Noiva do Cordeiro: contribuciones por medio de elementos de un sistema basado en una economía sustantiva*

### Resumen

Este estudio investigó la formación e interacción de un sistema económico alternativo en la comunidad Noiva do Cordeiro, Minas Gerais, con la dinámica de la economía mercantil. Para lograr este objetivo, se realizó una investigación cualitativa a partir de una etnografía desarrollada en la comunidad rural. Basado en las teorías de la sociología económica de Marcel Mauss y Karl Polanyi, este trabajo señala que los aspectos de la dádiva y de la reciprocidad en las relaciones productivas fueron fundamentales para la reproducción de una lógica solidaria fuerte. A través de principios, estructuras e instituciones propios, en los que el dinero tiene una importancia muy limitada, los resultados indican que la comunidad desarrolló un sistema diferenciado, reproduciendo múltiples lógicas económicas, incluso ante las tensiones de una economía de mercado.

**Palabras clave:** Economía solidaria. Sociología económica. Etnografía. Comunidad Noiva do Cordeiro.

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## INTRODUCTION

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The economic crisis that developed in the United States in 2008 and in Europe in 2011 spread quickly throughout the world, revealing structural problems and disruptions in financial systems which clearly denoted barriers and limitations inherent to market-based economic systems (STOREY, BASTERRETxea and SALAMAN, 2014; PARKER, CHENEY, FOURNIER et al., 2014).

In this context, the reminder of alternative forms of economy has gained strength. Laville (2014) and Storey, Basterretxea and Salaman (2014) point out that collectivist organizations played an important role in the transformation and reconfiguration of the economy as a whole. The results obtained by solidarity organizations, together with the emergence of democratic ideas in organizations, consequently, aroused interest in academic circles (CHENEY, CRUZ, PEREDO et al., 2014).

It is no wonder that the theme has been studied in several areas, especially in investigations that use the etymology of solidarity economics (commonly associated with Latin American experiences and the core of French experiences<sup>1</sup>), in order to explore the realities of little investigated environments so far, such as the North American and Canadian realities in the cities of New York (HUDSON, 2018), Boston (LOH and AGYEMAN, 2018), Philadelphia (BOROWIAK, SAFRI, HEALY et al., 2018), and Montreal (GERMAIN, 2010); in Asian countries such as Japan, Thailand and South Korea (MATSUI and IKEMOTO, 2015), Iran (BAHRAMITASH, 2014) and India (KUMBAMU, 2018); on the African continent, specifically in South Africa (SATGAR, 2011); and in European countries such as Slovakia (DUBCOVÁ, GAJDOVÁ and GRANCICOVÁ, 2016), Greece (PAPADAKI and KALOGERAKI, 2018) and Switzerland (KALOGERAKI, PAPADAKY and ROS, 2018).

The relevance of the Solidary Economy theme represents an object of study rich in its complexity, which is installed in an organizational format that in addition to exercising an innovative political role, captures and uses resources from commercial, non-market (redistribution) and non-monetary activities (reciprocity), in which the production or distribution of a good or service occurs (SERVA, 2002; LEVESQUE, 2007; FRANÇA FILHO, 2013; LAVILLE, 2016).

On the other hand, because there are innumerable logics that cross the dynamics of the solidarity economy, its analysis requires a theoretical perspective that contemplates the diverse economic, social and political perspectives. Among them, Economic Sociology, especially in the French aspect of Marcel Mauss and in the contribution of Karl Polanyi, stands as a rich theoretical instrument for its understanding.

The analysis reference proposed by the sociology of gift, by Mauss, and of reciprocity, by Polanyi, can be useful for the studies of Solidarity Economy organizations, as it allows a new look at the social interactions that take place in this organizational context (FRANÇA and DIZIMARA, 1999; SERVA, 2002; VIZEU, 2009; LAVILLE, 2014). While the donation process present in the daily life of Solidarity Economy organizations reveals to be the link of understanding of these organizational types, it is the reciprocity that establishes the necessary bonds for the donation dynamics to be undertaken.

In this sense, the present article aims to address the social structure that supports a substantive way of production and life, which incorporates social life in general (SOBEL and POSTEL, 2016). As a guiding question and from the theoretical point of view of Economic Sociology, we seek to understand how the Solidarity Economy system was formed and maintained in the community of Noiva do Cordeiro (MG).

The existence of the Noiva do Cordeiro community calls attention for its unique form of social organization and production. Full of specificities and a series of misadventures that go back to its origin in 1891, the organization illustrates the construction of an economic system that started to operate productively through productive associations, and politically through the organization and mobilization of members, investing mainly in the maintenance of its values, institutions and forms of behavior. The absence of private ownership of the means of production; living together in dormitory houses; the existence of communal housing production; the high cohesion among the more than three hundred members, all of this represents a criticism to the a-historical, and naturalistic view of analyzing the economy as a self-regulated and separate from the social phenomenon (POLANYI, 2011, 2012; MAUSS, 2008, 2013).

Thus, it is hoped that from the theoretical point of view this text can contribute by adding elements that support the interpretative possibilities of Economic Sociology for the phenomenon of organizations. In particular, by illustrating the nuances of the interrelationship of gift and reciprocity in the dynamics of solidarity economy organizations, space is opened to bring

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<sup>1</sup>For a detailed reading of the origins, philosophical and methodological aspects of Solidarity Economy, see Pinheiro (2013).

one more possible sociological interpretation that illustrates how alternative forms of economics can hybridize in multiple logics and survive, even inserted in the tensions with a mercantile economic system.

As an empirical contribution, we emphasize the scarcity of academic investigations on the object the community Noiva do Cordeiro. We highlight only the studies by Fazendeiro (2016), who identified the transition process from a conventional religion to new spiritual practices, Roesse (2015), Rose and Schultz (2010), and Schultz (2013), who analyzed religious dissent and the alternative way of life of the community, which indicates that the community has not yet reached its potential in academic research.

## Economic sociology and the Solidarity Economy organizations

Since 1980, one of the fields that has experienced the greatest growth in the social sciences is that of economic sociology (SERVA and ANDION, 2006; LESVESQUE, 2007). In an international perspective, its manifestations were marked by the creation of the Society for Advancement of Socio-Economics, in the United States in 1989, by the thematic network in economic sociology within the French Sociology Association, of the launch of the Handbook of Sociological Economics in 1994, in addition to the various academic journals and the annual holding of several international congresses.

In Brazil, although the movement came later, the highlights are the highlights of the magazine *Sociedade e Estado*, from UnB, which published in 2002 the first collection of works on Economic Sociology in Brazil. In addition to this publication, in the years 2004 and 2005 the Anpocs Annual Meeting promoted a section for the presentation of papers on the theme “sociological analysis of economic phenomena”. In 2005 the *Revista de Administração de Empresas* launched the Special Forum on Economic Sociology (SERVA and ANDION, 2006). In addition, two meta-studies point to the presence of more than 49 studies that use Economic Sociology for its application to the field of Administration in Brazil, between the years 1985 and 2008 (MACHADO and NASCIMENTO, 2012) and 2006 to 2015 (MOREIRA, 2016).

From a historical point of view, economic sociology has its roots among classic authors such as Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, Karl Marx, Georg Simmel, Marcel Mauss and Karl Polanyi. In a related way, the institutional perspective is already present at the birth of Economics, both in the English Classical School (Adam Smith, David Ricardo, John Stuart Mill), and in the German Historical School (Wilhelm Roscher, Bruno Hildebrand and Karl Knies) (SERVA, 2002; MARTES, LOUREIRO, ARAMOVAY et al., 2007).

However, between 1920 and 1960, the dialogue between sociology and economics was neglected (SERVA, 2002). Sociology reserved the study of rational individual behavior to economic theory, leaving sociology to understand the reasons, whether individual or social, guiding economic behavior (SWEDBERG, 1994). However, one should not lose sight of the fact that the decline in approaches supported at the intersection of these two fields did not mean that sociologists abandoned economic issues. Particularly, Karl Polanyi and Marcel Mauss made fruitful contributions to Economic Sociology with their writings during that period (MARTES, LOUREIRO, ARAMOVAY et al., 2007).

It is in the 1980s that economic sociology resurfaces with intensity, turning its interest to the bases left by its precursors, that is, the studies of economic phenomena in the light of a sociological approach. Economic sociology, through different currents, starts to oppose neoclassical economic science, demonstrating that economic phenomena are social and institutional constructions (SERVA and ANDION, 2006).

It is a social construction, since economic action cannot be fully explained for individual reasons: it goes through mediations and social networks (GRANOVETTER, 2000). Likewise, it is an institutional construction, because economic behavior presupposes political and normative guidelines that range from fundamental social arrangements to the predominant mental habits (LAVILLE, 2016).

From a conceptual point of view, economic sociology can be defined as a set of theories that strive to explain economic phenomena from sociological elements. We seek to study the economic in society (economic phenomena) as the way in which these phenomena influence the rest of society (economically conditioned phenomena) and the way in which the rest of society influences them (economically relevant phenomena) (SWEDBERG, 1994).

Among the many theoretical currents that seek to understand economic phenomena from a sociological perspective, it is possible to divide it into at least two major strands, these being the English and the French, with their various ramifications. The English current encompasses New Economic Sociology, represented by Mark Granovetter, Neil Fligstein; Evolutionists and Neoschumpeterians, represented by Richard Nelson, Sidney Winter and Christopher Freeman; the neo-corporatists,

illustrated here in the figures of Philippe Schmitter, Wolfgang Streeck and J. Rogers Hollingsworth; the new institutionalists, such as John Galbraith, Gunnar Myrdal and Geoffrey Hodgson; and finally, socioeconomics, represented by Amitai Etzioni and Paul Lawrence. The studies elaborated in this current, for the most part, adopt the objectivist point of view of a theory of social relations, and they mark by the little space given to the action, in the sense of transformation of the social order.

French-speaking authors, more related to sociology and anthropology, are represented by those who follow Mauss' thinking (such as Alain Caillé, Jacques Goudbout), by the school of regulation (such as Michel Aglietta, Robert Boyer, Alain Lipietz), by the school of greatness (like Luc Boltanski, Laurent Thenénot), conventions (Olivier Favereau, Andre Orlean, Robert Salais) and solidarity and plural economy (Jean-Louis Laville, Benoît Lévesque). Such authors call attention to the emergence of new economic practices that could allow to exceed the limits of traditional modes of regulation (KIRSCHNER and MONTEIRO, 2002; LEVESQUE, 2007).

Within this last variant, the Solidarity Economy presents itself as a potential to explore the approaches of the non-monetary and non-market dimensions of the contemporary economy. One of its specificities can be understood as intermediate institutions in the two fields that articulate the political and the economic (LAVILLE, 1994). Unlike the formal economy, which studies human behavior as end relationships in a dynamic of commercial exchanges, the field of solidarity economics is expanded to include in the analyzes not only commercial activities, but activities of redistribution, reciprocity, activities in which it occurs the production or distribution of a good or service.

It is a matter of thinking about another form of production and distribution of wealth, that is, an economy that does not replace the State with civil society, but mobilizes the two registers of democratic solidarity, combining redistributive solidarity with a more reciprocal one to reinforce the capacity of self-organization of society (FRANÇA FILHO, 2013; LAVILLE, 2016).

Thus, the analysis of the initiatives generated by the solidarity organizations allows us to understand how the association, combined with a democratic functioning, facilitates the hybridization of a wide variety of resources. If this joint construction is observable in emerging initiatives, it supposes an operation engendered by a plural democracy that is based not only on representativeness, but also on deliberation and appropriate governance (LÉVESQUE, 2004).

A unique aspect of the solidarity economy is due to the role that the donation assumes. Even though it is present in most organizations, the gift is barely identified in market institutions. However, the role of associations is, therefore, due to the fact of implementing the institutional creation based on solidarity with the economic dimension (FRANÇA FILHO and DZIMIRA, 1999; CASTANHEIRA and PEREIRA, 2008).

Therefore, associativism is manifested by a renewal of solidarity involvement in activities that reveal solidarity behavior in current economic acts (services and modes of exchange, production, trade, consumption, savings), remembering the current situation of Mauss (2012), who insists in the construction of institutions that can preserve the concrete existence of effective solidarity dynamics (LAVILLE, 2014).

Mauss' contribution can be complemented with Polanyi (2011), who replaces the formal approach to orthodox economics with a substantial approach and recognizes, in addition to the market, principles of redistribution, domestic administration and reciprocity. The practices studied in the services of plural economies lead to the hypothesis of a hybridization impulse in a perspective of solidarity economy (SABOURIN, 2008; VIZEU, 2009; LAVILLE, 2014).

## The Gift and Bond Generation in Marcel Mauss

The motivations for exchanges in alternative societies to mercantile logic were the object of study by French anthropologist Marcel Mauss, particularly under the voluntary character of free action and mandatory retribution, the gift, from the seminal text *Essay on the Gift*, published in 1925. A discussion of the heuristic value of the interpretation of the gift served as a basis for a new paradigm in the social sciences, from a severe criticism to the current utilitarian thinking that subordinated and reduced all social action to a question of choosing rational and strategic economics (LEVESQUE, 2007; RIGO and FRANÇA FILHO, 2017).

Marcel Mauss (2008, 2013) points out that in the economies and rights that preceded there are no exchanges of goods, wealth and products in the course of a regulatory market. What we saw were collectivities that forced and hired each other according to their needs for subsistence. In addition, the exchanges carried out in these societies were not exclusively of goods and wealth or economically useful. Above all, they involved the exchange of gifts, kindness, rites, dances, making the material goods market only one of the terms of a social contract, more general and permanent than commercial transactions.

From this analysis, he defined that gifts are the set of things, both material and immaterial, that when transmitted, carried with them the obligation of retribution, not necessarily immediate or equivalent, but in the form of new gifts that would make the system circulate with better fluidity, based on the bonds that have formed in society (MAUSS, 2008). The gift comprises three moments: that of giving, receiving and giving back, which circulates horizontally in society in favor of a social bond. The logic of giving obeys a specific type of social determination; because at the same time free and obliged, the donation is essentially paradoxical (GODBOUT, 1998; CAILLÉ, 2002; FRANÇA FILHO, 2004).

Mauss (2008) observed that this continuous process of rendering and rendering of services among the members of these societies took place mostly on a voluntary basis and through gifts, being an apparently unilateral transaction with no expectation of immediate and equivalent consideration. However, the process of exchanging gifts or gifts, as it were, ended up being strictly mandatory, as its non-compliance could generate social conflicts, considering that no gift was given for free (GRAEBER, 2014). Giving-receiving without giving back creates a charitable, welfare-type relationship in which the recipient remains dependent on the donor. And, in the conventional market, selling-paying does not create dependency, but ends the obligation and the social relationship (LAVILLE, 2014; FAVARIN, 2018).

For this reason, Mauss (2008) highlights that while the logic of the market works for equivalence, in a movement of “giving-paying”, in the gift the logic is based on unequal exchange, where goods have no equal value in donation and retribution. The most important value is the relational value, which creates the bond between debt and ongoing relationships.

The donation exchange process takes place on its own, and is closely linked to man as an action to break loneliness, so that there is a feeling of belonging, of recognition as an integral part of the group. The circulation of these gifts, in turn, not only gives rise to social bonds, but also nourishes them. From personal gifts to donations for major disasters, the gift helps to break the isolation and recognize an identity (GODBOUT, 1998; CAILLÉ, 2002).

According to Mauss (2008), the actors in the donation system also demonstrate a very specific behavior regarding the perceived value of donations. They tend to explicitly deny the value of the same they donate in order to guarantee the non-mandatory payment of the debt and the maintenance of a certain personal bond. This would be a way of giving the recipient the possibility of giving back with another true gift, and not with a payment for the receipt. The actors move away from the economist conception of continuous gain, the contractual conception, and the guarantees of return. While uncertainty is avoided in the economy, uncertainty is sought in the gift as a way of establishing the link (GODBOUT, 1998).

Mauss (2013) points out that, in some way, the old principles based on donation are still reproduced through many social actions that seek to reduce inhumanities and asymmetries arising from new market practices. A society where the principles of donation prevail are characterized by greater humanization of professional groups and a constant encouragement to disinterest and solidarity, because, once this is done, it is able to rescue the foundations and principles of social life. It is necessary, however, that in this society man has a perception of himself, always taking into account his relationship and importance for the group, for society and, consequently, for himself. In this way, it becomes possible to form mutual and cooperative relationships based on identification with the group, which is worth more than wages and mere capitalist savings.

Thus, Mauss' Gift Theory allows us to open another window to understand how exchanges reflect and recreate people and social relations, as well as reconfigure the very social understanding of the nature of some objects. The concrete study of social life allows us to infer about various aspects of a society, its aesthetic, moral, religious motivations, which form a society and which constitute collective life (CARRIER, 1991).

Far from preaching that the lack of recognition of utilitarian motivations can condition the conduct of individual and collective actors, the theory opens space for the understanding of other, less instrumental elements, which can also participate in the explanation of individual and collective behaviors, especially in collectivist organizations (SERVA, 2002; RIGO and FRANÇA FILHO, 2017).

Furthermore, conditioned by the predominance of strengthening ties between its members, the solidarity economy can still be considered as a place prone to the manifestation and analysis of exchange-giving. This is mainly explained by the fact that the utilitarian calculation is an inadequate reference to mediate most of the interpersonal relationships in these organizations, which have emerged in recent decades addressed to the return of a humanism lost with the logic of the market (VIZEU, 2009).

## Rise of the Market and Substantive Economy in Karl Polanyi

Karl Polanyi, with the book *The Great Transformation* of 1944, made a major contribution to the consolidation of Economic Sociology by undertaking a historical analysis of the realization of the economic principle that underlies the market economy. Contrary to the idea of the historical naturalism of a spontaneous market, his analyzes allow thinking of the economic as embedded in society (embeddedness), affirming the inseparability between the economic and the social (MARTES, LOUREIRO, ARAMOVAY et al., 2007; LEVESQUE, 2007; CORAGGIO, 2014).

According to the Hungarian intellectual Karl Polanyi (2011), before the First Industrial Revolution, the market was only a part of social relations, one of the mechanisms of organization of societies. Commerce was an older institution than the market and only merchants and bankers used money regularly. Economic life was embedded in social and political organization, with more room for non-monetary economic transactions.

With industrial development, however, trade infiltrated everyday life, emerging a hegemonic market economy. We saw the institutionalization of new interesting relationships to the capital system, which added to market mechanisms, also made it possible to control the supply and demand for these resources (POLANYI, 2012).

Thus, the formal economy is converted into a market society, uprooting the substantive economy from social institutions. Instead of the economy being embedded in social relations, it is social relations that are embedded in the economic system, making access to the economic system.

However, by reducing the economy strictly to market phenomena, liberal capitalism had intrinsic characteristics that made it vitally incompatible with the reality of social equity. The apparently rational look that founded the competitive logic of the market reduced the elements of responsibility of each one before what is understood as objective forces of mercantile exchange, without, however, realizing the promise of social harmony, collective well-being that he claimed to incorporate (SUBIRATS, 2014).

Therefore, a contradiction of the market system as a regulator is identified, which generates a double movement. On the one hand, the expansion of capitalist sociability, impressed by mercantile exchange. On the other hand, its unequal and self-destructive forms, generate a counter-movement of self-protection, from economic forms beyond the market (SCHNEIDER and ESCHER, 2011), as seen in the recent advance of the Solidarity Economy in different parts of the world, which already anticipated Polanyi (2012).

This phenomenon, also defined by substantive economics, is not built from above, but in social practices that point to the reinsertion of the economy in democratic norms. Another meaning is used, with a way of understanding the exchange process between individuals in search of sustenance and survival (POLANYI, 2011, 2012). The basic organization that allows economic integration and its validation comes from the social sphere and from the institutions present and built in it. Thus, it rescues the issue of rooting, as a principle of Economic Sociology. The proposal is that society starts to be thought of in a way that the system works according to its own laws, so that the economy is controlled by society, in function of it, that is, encrusted and limited by institutional rules that connect the fabric society's morality (OGANDO, 2011).

In the substantive economy, this is possible, since economic practices include not only commercial activities, but principles of redistribution, domestic administration and reciprocity (LEVESQUE, 2007; LAVILLE, 2014). Thus, while the redistribution movement describes the productive centralization for later distribution, verified through the division of labor, taxes and social assistance, the movement known as "domesticity" describes the circulation of goods between different points of the social systems, being a pattern influenced by the interest of the gain and normally practiced in the market structures. The reciprocity movement refers to the circulation of products through the movement of goods within a community circle, whether driven by degrees of kinship, friendship or associative involvement for productive purposes (SCHNEIDER and ESCHER, 2011).

It is specifically the reciprocity dimension that can be considered a central element to dialogue with the dimensions of the gift, in the context of the Solidarity Economy. When rescuing Mauss' ideas, even though the author considered the gift the opposite of mercantile exchange and showed that the essence goes through a universal character of the triple obligation of "giving, receiving and giving back", he did not come to theorize about the reciprocity (SABOURIN, 2008).

On the other hand, Mauss inferred for its relevance when assuming that the gift without reciprocity must be avoided, because charity always hurts the one who accepts it, and all the moral effort tends to suppress the unconscious and injurious

sponsorship of the rich process of the donation (LAVILLE, 2014). Therefore, we assume as an assumption that solidarity economy organizations have the conditions to understand their plural phenomenon, by establishing the intimate relationship between gift and reciprocity. They are related in such a way that the economy, to be solidary, presupposes the gift, which in its manifestations, must incorporate reciprocity to reach a solidary dimension.

As a dialogue with the literature, we observed that the increase in the number of publications on Solidarity Economy in recent decades has not been accompanied by studies that explore these two dimensions as a sociological phenomenon for their understanding. If the integrative studies indicate that the theme has more than 246 articles published in the main journals in the area (CALBINO and PAES DE PAULA, 2013; ALVES, FLAVIANO, KLEIN et al., 2016; CALBINO, 2016) and 100 research groups registered with CNPq (FERRARINI, GAIGER and SCHIOCHET, 2018), however, the number of works that explores the relationship of gift and reciprocity from a theoretical-empirical perspective, is limited to three investigations (KIRSCH, 2007; DARÓS, 2016; FAVARIN, 2018).

Among his contributions, Kirsch (2007) points to the ways in which gift and reciprocity are manifested in the incubation relations between the university and solidarity economy enterprises. The study by Darós (2016) explores the respective dimensions, from its impact on the concept of happiness in the field of Solidarity Economy. The recent work of Favarin (2018), on the other hand, is dedicated to the analysis of solidarity finance initiatives spread across the country, from the perspective of gift and reciprocity.

Despite the analytical richness of the respective works, however, they also point to the emergence of new investigations that may, from the perspective of Economic Sociology, bring elements to understand the phenomenon of solidarity economy. It is in this sense that we will seek in the following topics, to analyze a centenary community, and that reinforces the dimensions of gift and reciprocity in the constitution of solidary logic.

## METHODOLOGICAL PATHWAY

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Understanding the social and productive organization of the Noiva do Cordeiro community is difficult to understand, since societies are complex objects to be systematized. As much as the community had elements of a productive organization with elements of a commune and lived without a formal normative system, they did not deny their participation in the capitalist productive mode.

Understanding the history of the community was essential to understanding the organization formed. However, the motivations involved in each action, the specific points of the group's history, the relationship of each member with the organization, would be possible through the union of different perspectives collected, and would require intense contact with the community. Thus, ethnography proved to be the most appropriate method for understanding this reality up close.

According to Mattos (2011), ethnography is a qualitative method that seeks to apprehend the ways in which people conduct their lives in order to assign meanings and senses to the observed actions.

In this way, the research that gave rise to this article started from the strangeness and approximation between two productive and economic realities, one widely known as capitalist economy, and the one still little explored, here called "Economic System of the Noiva do Cordeiro Community". During the stay in the community, it was necessary to be guided by the greatest distances and approximations between the two logics and realities, observing their own traditions, their productive system, and the economic interactions behind this dynamic.

Magalhães, Santos and Boeira (2016) explain that the ethnographic method in organizations faces the obstacles of interdisciplinary studies, in which the conceptions of one field may not be fully compatible with the conceptions of another. Thus, a minimal sociological and anthropological base should be built before the researcher of organizations uses the ethnographic method, reducing the gap between the two disciplines. Travancas (2006) describes central elements of the preparatory phase of the ethnographic study and points out that they are essential: (1) a comprehensive bibliographic survey on the topic studied and on the group in question; (2) negotiation regarding access and permanence in the field; and (3) the construction of research tools such as field diaries and key questions that the researcher seeks to answer with the study.

The bibliographic survey of this study focused on materials available about the community, articles and reports already published about the group, and theories that could minimally explain the behavior of the community and its strong bonds. The negotiation regarding access to the community took place in 2016, a year before the fieldwork began. In the meantime, there were four visits, so that some elements of the productive structures and the history of the place were understood. These visits were also important to define the details of the experience in the community.

During the research, the interaction with the members occurred gradually, given the participation and monitoring of each of the groups responsible for the main activities of the community. Thus, in addition to knowing the economic dynamics, it was possible to know all the members actively involved in these dynamics. The approaches to data collection were always informal, avoiding interviews with community members. As usual in ethnographies, the main tool for recording data was the field diary, storing observations about the situations experienced.

Clifford and Gonçalves (2011) highlight that the participation of the ethnographer in the activities serves so that, in addition to greater acceptance by the group, the researcher can have a greater understanding of it. In addition, participation in the activities gives the researcher the chance to understand the group's language, assimilate into it, and then translate it into scientific terms. In this way, the ethnographic process opens up the possibility for the researcher to establish discussions between a logic already known by the scientific community and a logic still unknown, seeking from this interlocution, to describe, understand and learn from this hitherto unknown system.

The stay in the community started in July 2017 and lasted for three months. With the exception of writing moments, which usually took place at night, the rest of the time was dedicated to collective life and activities developed in the community. At very specific times, formal conversations were held with key characters in the change process. During coexistence periods, access to the conduct and behavior of individuals was quite limited. Each family has its own reality, challenges and concerns, and as the objectives of this research were not to know the individual daily lives of the families, but rather the collective, little has been explored the traditional family dynamics.

The analyzes are based on *a priori* categories, based on the theoretical framework used here, as well as on *a posteriori* categories, which emerged from abstractions about the experience and the attribution of meaning to many of the observed dynamics. Finally, the removal phase took place gradually, since even after data were collected, contacts were maintained and three visits to the community were made.

## Ethnographic Description

Noiva do Cordeiro was founded in 1891 by Maria Senhorinha de Lima and her second husband, Francisco Fernandes. Unusual at the time, Senhorinha left an arranged marriage and together with Francisco went to live in a more distant land, inherited by her husband, where the community was formed. The land is located in the interior of Minas Gerais, in a rural area called the "Cordeiros" region, about 100 km from the capital of Minas Gerais and 16 km from the nearest city, Belo Vale. The community has approximately twenty hectares and is positioned as one of the furthest from the urban area of the municipality.

In its beginning, two inflection points marked the community. The first concerns the geographically isolated location of the land in relation to other cities. The second has a religious background, since when abandoning her first husband, Maria Senhorinha started to be considered an adulteress by the surrounding villages - mostly Catholics. This situation worsened when the priest from one of the communities excommunicated the couple and their next four generations, intensifying the family's isolation from neighbors and surrounding communities. Isolation that later served as protection to the purely marketing integration processes.

Maria Senhorinha and Francisco had nine children. Among these, two had fundamental roles in the formation of the current community Noiva do Cordeiro: Francisco Fernandes Filho and Maria Matusinha. These two children of the couple were the only ones not to share their land, and ended up also being the only ones to remain in place with their families. Francisco Fernandes Filho is already deceased, having left twelve children, including Delina Fernandes, today matriarch of the community.

The community land is owned by the heirs of these two children. Despite the absence of an inventory, issues of ownership rights were never a cause for conflict between these heirs, as they saw the situation as an opportunity for the collective use of the property and its resources, currently serving as housing for more than three hundred members, direct and indirect descendants of the founding couple. Due to the intense number of marriages among the families themselves, the population has become strongly homogeneous, and today its members have, almost entirely, the same ancestors.



**Figure 1**  
**Aerial image of the community**



Source: Authors' collection (2019).

Delina Fernandes, daughter of Chico and granddaughter of Maria Senhorinha, also figures as an extremely important character in the history of the Noiva do Cordeiro community. Born in 1948, she lived with her parents on the current community property. In his youth, at the age of 14, he accepted to marry Anísio, a pastor who had just arrived in the region. Pastor Anísio, as he was known to all, was the founder of his own evangelical church, the “Noiva do Cordeiro” church. The religion created by Anísio, today seen by members of the community as extremely rigid and restrictive, started to be followed by practically all the inhabitants of the community.

Among the many demands made on members, there was no birth control, clothing style control, music prohibition, mandatory fasting, female haircut prohibition, among others. The impossibility of working outside the communities meant that both Delina’s family, her brothers and other family members began to find themselves in terrible living conditions, both social and working. In addition, the inhabitants of the neighboring communities, still predominantly Catholic, began to see the community with more reservations, now moved by differences in religious thought.

A few years before Anísio’s death in 1995, Delina abandoned religion, causing most of the community to make the same decision as well. Delina then used this legitimate authority to encourage reciprocal behavior among members of her family. Among the initiatives to find solutions to the problems faced, the dissemination of a logic of collective living and consumption stands out, for which the nuclei that faced financial difficulties in the cities were called back to the community in 1998, dividing the little who were still able to produce food on site.

The families started to unite their production, their gardens, their sewing work, and the entire infrastructure service. With the use of government financing lines, the community acquired land for collective planting for consumption, as well as for the large-scale production of Biquinho pepper, the main product sold by the community. In addition, external work, performed mainly by men in the community, came to represent an important source of income for the purchase of materials and productive resources, while rural work, manufactured work, and community organization were left to the other members, mostly women. Agricultural production became a joint responsibility of all families, so that, from preparation to harvest, everything was produced and distributed in community. Other forms of collective production were created, sewing professionals came together under the same production for domestic consumption and commercialization, giving rise to the “factory”, which is currently used to produce items for the pet shop market.

**Figure 2**  
**Map of the main infrastructure of the community**



Source: Adapted from Google Maps (2019).

In addition to communal production and distribution, other arrangements provided the strengthening of the collective logic of the community, such as the association created by the residents, which is configured in the instance where all decisions are made by collective consultation, in addition to acting in the capture of resources that are reverted to direct benefits for the community, and support to members in various spheres. From the association came the groups responsible for contact with private institutions, governments, markets and suppliers, and from this contact, the conquests of the productive means necessary for joint production. In addition, political representation stands out, in which a resident of the community, daughter of Dona Delina, is a counselor in the municipality of Belo Vale.

The collective nature of production, consumption, and appropriation of work generates a principle of solidarity among members of the community, in addition to bringing about a type of symmetry between the parties. This symmetry sparks what Lévesque (2004) called deliberation and appropriate governance, above all due to the determinant character of a broadly democratic process that touches all spheres of this social structure.

The community also has a school, in which residents with training in the areas of education work. In addition to the regular curriculum, the school has classes on community history, dance, music and theater. The school, as well as all other buildings, was built by joint efforts formed by the residents, with the materials purchased with the profit of commercial activities. The community also has collective houses, where many families share the same space, in addition to housing meals served for a large part of the residents.

However, families that choose to live in private homes are supported both in the acquisition of materials and in collective work (task forces) for the construction of the houses. Joint efforts are common in civil construction, agricultural production, manufactured production, and other sporadic activities. This feature of the work in the community meets the feeling of reciprocity, described by Polanyi (2011, 2012), as being one of the ways to effect non-financial economic interactions.

**Figura 3**  
**House building task force**



Source: Authors' collection (2019).

## ANALYSIS

A strong feature of the community's economic system is the organization of processes, even in the absence of a formal regulatory system. Decisions are made according to community needs through frequent assemblies. The group informally deliberates on the most different topics and the areas are responsible for implementing the decisions. The topics discussed at the assembly are diverse and mainly encompass the productive and political aspects of the community. According to Scott (2010), the absence of religious or political parameters that absorb the surplus makes the social pyramid more local and horizontal.

Despite the organization in the processes, with the exception of the statute that governs the norms of associated work, considered as proforma by the members and created only to obtain resources, the community does not have any written document containing rules or indications of appropriate conduct. Nobody is formally obliged to anything, however, the bonds act on all who live there, guide behavior and impose moral limits on conduct. This materializes in the pattern of speeches and behaviors, from children to the elderly. In this sense, it is possible to establish a relationship between gift and reciprocity, which neglects a donation expressed in the work dedicated to the collective, regardless of what the couple may do. At the same time, knowing what is received necessarily generates the obligation of retribution, in this case, dedication to other collective activities, a process that is completely absent from hierarchizing the types of work performed.

According to Mauss (2008), the creation and maintenance of social bonds of this nature can be strongly attributed to the value and meaning that are given to social relationships. There is a symbolism around social life that implicitly guarantees a moral obligation between individuals, who somehow establish the gifts. According to the author, the exchange of gifts, kindness and favors, without any counterparts or equivalences required immediately, would establish a broad and long-lasting social contract among the participants.

By establishing and historically strengthening a constant exchange of gifts, the community succeeded in building a system of benefits and counter-benefits for favors and voluntary actions that act in maintaining the bonds between those involved in the system. It is these bonds that guarantee not only the survival of the system, but also the reproduction of the logic between everyone who somehow integrates or interacts with it.

The bonds established and strengthened by each small gift exchanged during the integration processes generate reciprocity in all individuals in the community, based on the personal feeling of debt and credit with everyone who lives there. This double feeling of having to repay everything received from the system, but at the same time of feeling worthy of gifts, which are gradually returned, makes each personal bond with the community extremely strong.

This cohesive and standardized behavior appeared only in the late 1990s, in parallel with changes in the productive logic, that is, there was a behavioral change induced by a collectivist discourse, originating in a group of individuals who had influence and authority in the group, which ended up reproducing almost all individuals, changing individual conduct and actions.

The economic system with the level of behavioral cohesion found also exists due to the coercive forces that also end up acting in the group. The absence of formal norms does not remove the group's ability to inhibit potential deviations in conduct and discourse. According to Mauss (2013), the social debt would be both the guarantor of community bonds and the cause of the break of that bond. In the continuous process of giving-receiving-giving, non-giving generates social discontent that interferes with the individual's belonging. In the gift relationship, the individual is not formally bound to anything, but morally compelled to return the gifts received. Whoever receives gifts and does not return them in any way can suffer social sanctions, feel excluded, and even lose their bond with the whole.

On the other hand, the intense participation in the donation system generates many benefits for the individual who perceives his belonging to increase and his bonds with the whole. The image that some specific members - such as Delina and her daughter Rosalee - have of "creditors" of the system is perceptible, originating from the past contributions of these members to the community - in the case of Delina, in all her community training actions, and in the case of Rosalee, mainly for her efforts in politics and in winning the factory and financing the planting land.

The feeling of debt in relation to the main characters in the history of the community is one of those responsible for stimulating work and maintaining collective activities, since no member wants to feel indebted to others. In this way, everyone seeks to keep their contributions in new gifts, whether through work, gifts or fraternal gestures.

We believe that this is one of the major reasons why the rural exodus process was stopped. The abandonment of the community in search of new opportunities, in addition to not being interesting due to the many benefits that are provided there, can be considered an abandonment of the community logic, a departure from family principles, and consequently, the weakening of bonds with the family whole.

The bonds observed among members of the community come not only from the gifts or principles established in the group, but also from more understandable aspects, such as family bonds, neighborhood and sharing property. These, added to the aspects of the gift and the principles of all, is what defines love as a central word in the members' discourse, generating the desire to remain and contribute to the reproduction of the system.

A gift system is based on the intensity of the feeling of solidarity and care for others. In these aspects, the Noiva do Cordeiro community has its own dynamics of helping members and strengthening social bonds. Starting with childcare, there is a range of single mothers and women who take care of everyone who is not in class. The elderly also receive special attention. Those who need more care are helped by young people, who take turns to keep company and sleep together when necessary. The same is done with a member who is sick or needs more care, whether at home, in a hospital or anywhere else. The community's care for its visitors should also be highlighted, being something institutionalized and well accepted by all.

Marcel Mauss (2013) had already described that receiving visitors is something of great importance in systems inspired by aspects of donation. According to the author, it is common that when receiving visits, the best is offered. The treatment given to visitors used to be much higher than the local daily life, as there was an understanding that efforts should not be spared in these circumstances. The gift is established at the collective level, and presenting cohesion and solidarity of the group in relation to the other is a key point in the establishment of community alliances with their environment.

In the Noiva do Cordeiro community it is possible to identify numerous alliances that have been formed through this type of relationship. Police officers, lawyers, politicians, reporters, researchers, teachers, businessmen and many other "contacts" were built through friendship and redistribution, the fruits of the different treatment that is given to everyone who arrives there for different purposes. The number of alliances built is notorious, and in times of need these contacts are resumed so that they can be met. As an example, it is fitting to illustrate the organization of the release of the CD by the community's back country duo. In search of suppliers, many calls were made, and the network of contacts proved to be helpful in face of the demands. For the day of the party, dorms were prepared, mattresses and bedding were distributed throughout the houses, and even the factory and houses in the final stage of construction were used as dorms.

Godbout (1998) explains that the need to exchange gifts would come by itself, in search of breaking the isolation and feeling part of an identity. According to Mauss (2008, 2013) the donation exchange process does not require the individual to be

too good or bad, it would only be necessary for the individual to always act taking into account his role in relation to the other and in relation to the group to which he belongs. In Noiva do Cordeiro, this relationship is very evident, the collective thinking is intense and intuitively all members know the conduct they must follow in order not to harm the other, protecting themselves from social sanctions and the loss of ties with the whole. Here again, reciprocity as a category is important for the gift to manifest in the social structure, although not in a conditioning way, but relatively crystallized as behavior.

Regarding the systems of production and circulation of goods in the community, the donation exchange process directly affects the production organization, approaching the ideas of reciprocity in Polanyi (2011, 2012) in many aspects. The community has been able to maintain its own working and distribution relationships, ensuring its growth and continuous improvements in the quality of life of its members. Its economic system differs from other productive modes today, precisely because of the very specific social arrangements that have developed in the community over the years. Recognition at work, the relative distance from market operations, the strengthening of identity and the training of young people, and especially the mechanisms of cohesion and coercion of conduct, are some of the ways of observing aspects of the survival and reproduction of this system.

Within the community, all work takes place without monetization, on a voluntary basis, that is, without fixed remuneration on work. The income from these activities is reverted to improvements in the community itself, as in the mother house, and in other collective consumption purchases. Participation in activities is neither mandatory nor formal. Many individuals, for various reasons, do not take part in any collective work, either because of age, health, or because they live outside the community. Even so, the results of the work are used by the entire community, even by those who are unable to work. Food, housing and leisure are guaranteed to everyone, from the most to the least involved in the work.

Food is, for the most part, communal. The basic food of the community comes entirely from the cultivation itself, with rare exceptions such as oil, salt, sugar, wheat flour and pasta. Despite the existence of many houses around the mother house, few of them prepare their own meals. The management of community resources is also done with a certain autonomy through centers that coordinate the activities of the areas. Each of the work areas has a person responsible for the income and expenses of the activities, as well as being responsible for controlling the demand for labor, asking for help from other areas when necessary, either financially, intellectually or just in times of need for more manpower.

**Figure 4**  
**Pepper separation for packaging in the central table of the Mother-House**



Source: Authors' collection (2019).

The worker in the community has responsibilities very well defined by the working groups, and each individual is aware of his role and his responsibility in the functioning of the whole, since he himself defines a large part of his responsibilities. Regarding the distribution of activities, these are based mainly on the skills and desires of people, being divided according to demands, and organized through small scales set up in groups, or through WhatsApp, the main means of communication

between members. As much as there are fixed responsibilities for most members, these activities do not consume all the time, so that aid to other activities is possible.

The income earned individually from outside work is under the control of the families themselves, however, as there are no significant expenses in the daily life of the community, this income ends up going through a process of redistribution according to the demands of the community or members who do not have a fixed income. Although each individual is responsible for their own income, their use in the community is almost unnecessary.

Another way of reading the process of centralization and reciprocity in the community is through the circulation of currency within it. The use of currency and financial exchanges are limited to three structures - supermarket, leisure center and shop of community products - governed by traditional market concepts. However, the profit generated in these structures comes from the financial resources obtained by external work and by families in general, which is later used to finance the community itself.

Among the ways of using this profit, it is worth mentioning the monthly payment of installments of the financing acquired for investments in the collective production itself. The rest of the centralized resources are destined to new demands, such as renovations and construction of new structures in the school to receive secondary education; the purchase of basic necessities items for collective houses; the contribution in the most important kitties, as in the construction of new houses.

The elucidated examples come close to what Polanyi (2011, 2012) defines as redistribution and reciprocity, linked to the recognition of a center where the resources are destined and later distributed. The “vaquinhas”, in addition to representing the redistribution movement itself, can still be considered as support structures for reciprocity so that this operation occurs in a coordinated and fair manner. Justice, in this case, is also symbolic, and it is up to each member to decide whether or not to ask for help, and for the rest to decide whether or not to participate in the process.

In summary, the Community of the Cordeiro coincides with the central lines of a solidary, substantive economy, in which a system distinct from the market and competition is sought as an economic foundation, placing the value of reciprocity and redistribution, along with interest, as three economic poles that can intertwine in different ways the forms of gift, and consequently, of solidarity. It is this view of a broad, plural economy that can be thought of to avoid following the serious costs of the social disintegration of the mercantile economy (SUBIRATS, 2014).

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

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In this work we seek to analyze the social structure that supports a way of production and life far beyond the strictly market dimensions. With the support of theories of economic sociology, starting with Marcel Mauss and Karl Polanyi, it became possible to highlight aspects of gift and reciprocity in productive relations, as central to the reproduction of a strong solidarity logic.

In the work, we found that their processes found in the Noiva do Cordeiro community are presented as alternatives to many of the reproductive dynamics of social differences in market societies, brought by Polanyi (2011, 2012), about the influence of institutions in exchange operations. The recognition at work, the construction of a productive and intellectual base and aspects of the sociology of donation in Mauss (2008, 2013), were observed in the productive and social relations to explain the maintenance and reproduction of the community logic.

In addition, the sense of family impregnated in the community, in particular by the example of solidarity and affection of Dona Delina, matriarch of the community, were fundamental in this process, since the examples of collective behavior and action were shared among all members. It is also worth highlighting the role of the school in the community itself, where children, in addition to basic training, are exposed to history and values as teachings.

Kinship and neighborhood relations encouraged a strong culture of non-financial economic integration, which directly implies the ability to generate strong bonds between the participants in the system. The bonds are strengthened due to a solid collective identity and the constant reaffirmation of that identity.

The lack of formalization of work processes indicates the community's little concern in defining the participation of each individual in activities. The lack of obligation has stimulated group work through a constant feeling of reciprocity and a return of the effort spent. Their organization and participation are guaranteed through social mechanisms, closely related to the

feeling of belonging. The collectivist character and the reproduction of complementary behaviors of the community inhibit individualistic behaviors, as well as removing a significant part of the characteristics of capitalist societies.

In the wake of Sabourin's (2008) assertion about the non-theorizing of Mauss about reciprocity, everyday elements of the Noiva do Cordeiro community allow us to affirm that solidarity economy organizations are highly favorable environments for the existence of a donation system. And these, in turn, have their consolidation dependent on the reciprocity that exists among the members, present in the case from the voluntarism in the division of labor, the circulation of goods, the return of profit on the goods sold, care for people who demand greater attention, among other aspects.

However, the removal does not present a deliberate confrontation with the logic of the mercantile economy and of the political representation that sustains it. Based on a collective decision-making process, the community defines its political representation, uses financing and prospecting business with other organizations, however, without giving up social balance and exchange connections.

Not denying the mercantile logic, but taking advantage of its structure for the dissemination of its own productive logic, the Noiva do Cordeiro community shows itself as a unique case, in the field of substantive organizations. Above all, for taking economic organization and division of labor as potential for social relationships through exchanges, instead of being characterized as the organization of productive arrangements for accumulation (O'HEARN and GRUBAČIĆ, 2016).

In this way, their practices contribute as empirical elements of value to the context of organizational studies, by composing references for the analysis of the growing phenomenon of this organizational type, which is not limited to the references of utilitarianism. Furthermore, by pointing to the possibilities of interpreting this phenomenon from the theories of gift and reciprocity, the text reinforces the fruitful possibility of this perspective for a field that is still little explored.

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Luiz Paulo Rigueira de Morais

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6573-3366>

Master in Administration from the Federal University of Viçosa (UFV), Viçosa- MG, Brazil. E-mail: [lpmmorais@gmail.com](mailto:lpmmorais@gmail.com)

Wesley Silva Xavier

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3524-3566>

Ph.D. in Administration from the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG); Adjunct Professor at the Federal University of Viçosa (UFV), Viçosa- MG, Brazil. E-mail: [wesley@ufv.br](mailto:wesley@ufv.br)

Daniel Calbino Pinheiro

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8260-6126>

Ph.D. in Administration from the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG); Adjunct Professor at the Federal University of São João del-Rei (UFSJ), Sete Lagoas- MG, Brazil. E-mail: [dcalbino@ufs.edu.br](mailto:dcalbino@ufs.edu.br)