

The New Feminist Internationale

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Introduction: The New Feminist Internationale

A new era of the feminist movement has already been established. We are living *in* it. The organization of the international strikes of women, lesbians, trans persons, and travestis since 2017 has marked a turning point in the scale of the movement and in the conceptualization and constellation of struggles that consider themselves feminist. It is this triple dimension of the movement (multiplicity of struggles, geographic scale, and common grammar) that has produced, with great political efficacy, concrete analyses and practices that oppose the predatory modes of the current phase of patriarchal and colonial capitalism.

The strike has effectively convened a series of conflicts and nurtured revolts that have made it into a long-term political process. The most salient feature of this feminist cycle is its combination of massive size and radicality. These are two characteristics that do not generally occur simultaneously, but the feminist movement has managed to bring them together. That force is also what explains the virulent military, economic, and religious fundamentalist counter-offensive that has emerged in response to feminism's concrete ability to simultaneously challenge a sexual division of labor made even harsher by precarity, the mandates of gender that structure it, and the reactionary responses to labor and existential insecurity.

A New Internationalism

The feminist tide that has surged forth from Latin America and is currently sweeping the world cannot be understood in terms of waves, with a begin-

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ning and end, and its chronology and temporality cannot be limited to a Eurocentric feminism focused on Europe and North America. A tide, rather, refers to the movement of an aquatic mass composed of multiple subterranean currents, simultaneously flowing in many directions, forming an imaginary of movements as a multiplicity. This tide has shaken up the geographies and ways of doing feminism, of naming the rebellion here and there, and of determining what practices of disobedience matter and count as such. In this sense, it has shaken up everything, including the modes of historicizing and constructing genealogies, with a radical anti-colonial imprint. The aquatic metaphors, however, propose a strange and interesting lineage. In that push, the “ironic dream of a common language”—the language of manifestos that Donna Haraway appealed to some time ago—finds a new vitality made up of specific situations, everyday scenes, and enormous mobilizations that trace a new internationalist cartography.

The transformation and importance of the current feminist movement can be confirmed and described in how it has, with all its heterogeneity, woven (and continues to weave) a global field of intervention, resonance, and coordination. We are talking about an already existing transnationalism. It is not a program for the future, to be designed and built as an evolutionary step of the movement but, rather, a dimension that has been present since its beginning and becomes more dense and rich with each successive push. It could be said that feminism has existed transnationally since the first shout of “Ni Una Menos,” when the call for a feminist strike began to go viral, ignoring national borders.

How has this new internationalism been constructed and gained consistency? What histories is it interwoven with, and which does it reinvent? What is its force based on? We want to propose some characteristics starting from these questions.

- 1) It is an internationalism that is driven from the global Souths, especially from Latin America, renamed *Abya Yala*. It is an internationalism that defies both the geographical and the organizational imaginary because it is composed of cross-border circuits of migrant women workers, community experiences that have historically disobeyed nation-states and that today confront the recolonization of the continent, and domestic spaces that resist their enclosure and silent exploitation. It finds inspiration in the autonomous struggles of Rojava and in the communitarian struggles of Guatemala, in the struggles of indebted students in Chile, “Uberized” workers in Ecuador, campesinas in Paraguay, and Afro-Colombian women in Cauca, as well as in those resisting fascism in

Turkey, India, and Algeria. However, rather than focus on countries, we want to highlight the territories in which this feminism grows: territories that historically were not considered transnational and are not counted as productive in national accounts. We are referring to domestic territories, indigenous, campesino, and community territories, and the territories of precarious, popular, and street labor. In this sense, the South is not just a set of countries; it is also a series of territorialities that are primarily in the South of the planet but have also migrated to other regions. Therefore, this mode of transnational feminism also occurs in the alliance between seasonal strawberry pickers, Moroccan women working in intensive agriculture, and the unions of rural Andalusia, as Pastora Filligrana describes in this dossier.

- 2) This internationalism allows the current feminist movement to be projected on the mass scale because it creates forms of coordination that become dates and encounters across the planet, causing reverberations in organizational forms, common slogans, and types of protest. It is a two-part movement. On the one hand, it includes molecular organization, which is neither spontaneism nor eventism: two notions that are often used to highlight the ephemeral and disarticulated characteristics of a movement. On the contrary, very diverse webs collaborate, coordinate, and organize together at different scales. On the other hand, a mass convergence takes place. The feminist strikes are unthinkable without the very patient labor of assemblies, meetings, and programmatic elaborations. Additionally, the assembly mechanisms of feminist organization are transferred to unions, art collectives, and migrant organizations, and even challenge the structure of political parties in everyday life. Thus, the strike as a political process provides a common horizon of organization and practical investigation about forms of life and exploitation in specific territories while it also enables a continuous multiplication of the assembly form that becomes transversal across different spaces and produces a concrete method for understanding conflicts. The movement proceeds by constantly posing questions—What does your strike consist of? What is your struggle? What do we do? What do we *not* do?—that lead to an unprecedented level of communication expressed through war cries, chants, and actions that become tactical “passwords,” which are appropriated, replicated, and reinvented everywhere. In this way, feminist transnationalism is prolonged, it manages to last, and it resonates in situations with no clear connection. For example, the migrant caravan discussed by Amara Varela in this dossier contains, both in the practices that it brings together and in the perspective of the author’s approach, a process that is a feminist diagnostic of forms of labor, against victimization as the sole subjective position, and about violence as a productive force.

- 3) Thus we see an internationalism at work that operates through connecting heterogeneous struggles that systematize a common diagnostic and confrontation. Struggles do not recognize each other through ascription into a “greater” or “external” structure. The transnationalism that is proliferating is a *method of connection* that has been able to link sexist violence to the dispossession caused by neo-extractivist enterprises that expropriate communal lands, the militarization of cities, and the advance of churches as a way of moralizing disobedient lives. It is also a political method that has challenged the *global* scale of finance by tracing the link between sexist violence and financial exploitation through private debt and generalized impoverishment caused by structural adjustment measures. As Luci Cavallero explains, this method accounts for the resonance of the feminist call “We want ourselves alive, free, and debt free!” The transnational dimension does not require the abstraction of struggles in favor of a single strategy (which would, in a certain way, replicate finance’s logic of abstraction), but rather requires the coordination of a force that transmits ways of understanding, that spreads through images, that accumulates practices and organizes a common sensibility about what we experience and understand as exploitation, violence, neoliberalism, and racism. The global level that we experience is not a distant synthesis forcing our struggles to “leap” to further coordination, but rather qualifies each concrete situation. This transnationalism makes each struggle richer and more complex without having to pay the price of abandoning its roots; it makes them more cosmopolitan, without leading to deterritorialization that would remove our proximity. This way of connecting creates a practical ubiquity: that sensation that is expressed when we shout “we are everywhere!” The movement’s ubiquity is its true strength. It is what imprints an organizational dynamic on each space that has repercussions in others, tying together scales that go from small meetings of five people to massive demonstrations, from recurring neighborhood assemblies to collectives that come together for a specific action.

The way in which the performance of the Chilean Collective Las Tesis has circulated in very different contexts constitutes a clear example of this feminist internationalism that is not superstructural but, rather, operates through the connection and transversality of struggles and sensibilities. It is a simple script, composed simultaneously of text, rhythm, and movement, that points to the imbrication of the gender mandate, sexual violence, state violence, and patriarchal institutions. It travels at great speed, as an image that can be incorporated into and modified in the most varied of contexts, that can speak of the particularity of a local situation (state repression in Chile and Ecuador, violence of labor exploitation for cleaning workers in Mexico or home

care workers in Madrid, the struggle for self-determination in Rojava, and against the fascism of the Brazilian government). At the same time, it can produce an internationalism starting from bodies because “If they touch one of us, they touch us all!” This is possible not only because of the power of the proposal, but also because of the existence of *relational webs of listening* in countless areas of the planet, capable and willing to activate based on what others put forward. Campaigns such as #cuéntalo, in which thousands of women began narrating their stories of sexual violence and abuse on social media, constructing a collective memory of patriarchal violence, are one precedent. However, the performance of *Las Tesis* leaves the digital surface to become a common body in a multiplicity of spaces and it does so as a collective voice. It is not only the collectively written text, but also the shared performativity that creates a rupture with the generalized submission, with all victimization, and becomes present as a message, in what could be called an unplanned global protest as a sort of relay race, which, in fact, continues.

- 4) This transnationalism has a programmatic dimension: it combines “demand-based” and revolutionary aspects in a novel way. These dynamics are not experienced as opposed or only in disjunction (the traditional opposition between reform and revolution). We see a mass feminism that encompasses and exceeds the agendas, the composition, and the formats of laws and entities that previously carried out “gender politics,” at the same time as it proposes and radicalizes new demands. It is a mass feminism that is not afraid of speaking of revolution—not as teleology, but as an act of insubordination that is already present everywhere: in the streets, in homes, in bedrooms. It resists being cornered into “women’s” or “minority” issues, as something always on the side, and that therefore can be postponed. It widens, blow by blow and gesture by gesture, what can be fought for and debated from feminist positions. It sustains communal spaces and forges a new organizational grammar based on homeless women and those living in the favelas, fighting against racist, classist, predatory urbanization, as Helena Silvestre recounts in this dossier in reference to the experience in Brazil. It intervenes in highly complex conjunctures (the strike in Ecuador and the state terrorism of the Chilean government, debates about extractivism in Bolivia and Argentina, complaints of governmental violence made by feminists in Nicaragua and Guatemala, the debate around domestic debt in Puerto Rico and Spain, the characterization of precarity in Italy and France), managing to effectively denounce and render visible the harshest scenes of state repression and complexifying the debate about debt, development, and inclusion in neoliberal “normality.” In this sense, it is clear how the feminist persistence of recent years has reconfigured political antagonism.

Feminist Transversality

Feminist transnationalism is not only expressed in moments of global mobilizations. Rather, it becomes operational in political processes that at first glance appear to be “local” or “domestic.” This is because we have broken that political, spatial, and epistemological distinction in which the domestic lacks political authority and planetary projection. This is clearly shown in the texts in this dossier. In the feminist analysis of debt and its conversion into an interpretative key of mobilization, in the perspective on migration as a set of vital struggles in contexts of a triple violence (state, market, and sexist violence), in the occupation of urban and suburban lands as a dispute over and production of the common, and in the feminist reinvention of the labor struggle through new labor conflicts scales and forms of conflict “intersect” that multiply feminisms based on concrete situations, shaping a transversal map.

There is, in each of these realities, a transnationally nourished feminist spirit that enables understanding what is in play there, at the same time as it allows for inscribing these territories in the body-to-body dispute against the frontiers of capital valorization. Thus, through integrating a multiplicity of conflict, the mass dimension is redefined through what have historically been branded as “minority” practices and conflicts. With this, the opposition between minority and majority shifts: the minority takes on a mass scale as a vector of radicalization within a composition that never ceases to expand. Thus, it defies the neoliberal machinery of minority recognition and pacification of difference. This political transversality is nurtured in diverse territories in conflict and constructs a common affection for problems that tend to be experienced as individual and a political diagnostic for violences that tend to be encapsulated as domestic. This complicates a certain idea of solidarity, which implies a degree of exteriority that confirms a distance in respect to others. On the contrary, transversality prioritizes a politics of the construction of proximity and alliances without ignoring historical differences in the intensity of conflicts.

Through that transversality, which continuously goes beyond the assigned issues and agenda and overflows to connect that which is compartmentalized, the feminist movement, in all its heterogeneity, reappropriates the totality in a novel way. Slogans such as “we are going for everything” or “we want to change everything” are a way of redefining what makes up the whole, that “everything,” which is not synthesized in state power, without underestimating the possibility of directing specific demands at the state or

even disputing its resources. With its insistence on “mixing up everything,” feminism has been able to produce a practical diagnostic of the “complexity” of contemporary patriarchal and colonial capitalism starting from concrete places. Thus it renders visible the complexity of exploitation and domination without falling into powerlessness or cynicism and, rather, demonstrates and expands subjective and everyday articulations as a strategic factor for confronting capital’s violent logic of accumulation. In other words, the feminist movement has updated, through a popular feminist pedagogy, our understanding of the organic relationship between violence against women and feminized bodies and the accumulation of capital. It has done so not only as a theoretical analysis but also through practices of insubordination.

At the same time, it has added a new twist to the question of the means of production: what does it mean to appropriate them if today the means of production are, to a large degree, the means of reproduction? Bodies and territories, or body-territories, as spaces that generate life, memory, relations, and the struggle for their self-determination become central issues. Defending life no longer refers to defending bare life, purely biological determination, in order that our hearts continue beating at any price, but rather defending forms of life, as concrete collective assemblages, that demand the means to (re)produce themselves. Thus, in battles on every frontier of neoliberal penetration, traversed by feminism (from domestic debt to precaritization, from neo-extractivism and its “zones of sacrifices” to militarization, from the criminalization of borders to the production of “internal enemies”) the question of property is at stake and political antagonism is produced from the feminist revolution.

In the second half of 2019, the ability of the transnational feminist movement to reconfigure political antagonism has taken a new turn. In Chile, slogans and practices from the feminist strike have been implemented at a mass level, such as during the plurinational general strike in October and November 2019. This accumulation of experience has managed to change the texture of struggles, their organizational forms, their political formulas, and their historical alliances. We see it written on the walls. Consider two examples of slogans-passwords: “They owe us a life,” as a way of inverting debt, who owes whom, written on the banks in Chile, the country of the Chicago Boys, with the highest level of debt per capita in the region. Faced with the increase in the cost of everyday life, that is, the extraction of value from every moment of social reproduction, financial disobedience is

proposed with the slogan-practice: #MassEvasion. A second example of graffiti-synthesis, “Pig, fascist, your daughter is a feminist,” points to the profound destabilization of patriarchy that contemporary fascism is responding to, its simultaneously micropolitical and structural filigree. However, it also happens with the October 2019 strike in Ecuador: the reproductive dimension of the strike is seen not only in practices of gathering enormous amounts of food and hosting communities that arrive at the capital from around the country, but also when organizing collective action, thinking about the efficacy of marches, and improving defenses against repression. Additionally, the debate about abortion traverses the plurinational assemblies like never before and is particularly established in the indigenous agenda. In each of these contexts, we see the presence of the feminist movement in other processes of struggle and mobilization, which are carried out in practical, as well as epistemological, political, and sensible, terms.

Since the 2008 crisis, in order to sustain its modes of exploitation and contain the social implosions in every territory, neoliberalism has needed an increasingly tight alliance with fascism and various forms of religious fundamentalism, particularly to reorder social re-production in capitalist terms, to recenter a gender mandate that is in crisis, and to reinforce the divisions between the human and what is categorized as less-than-human (the feminized, racialized, and naturalized) that sustain necropolitics. Many analyses already predicted a chilling fate: both the electoral triumph of ultraconservative governments across the planet and the advance of social fascism on the micropolitical plane. Transnational feminism has appeared as an unexpected player at the table, or, rather, kicking the table of the patriarchal capitalist pact. It has come to reopen what seemed closed and it has done so with this mixture of radicality and massiveness, of internationalist force and local operation, of connectivity and rootedness, of totality and singularity, that we have tried to describe here. Some voices have tried issuing a call to order to those runaway and irreverent transfeminisms, inviting them to return to the delimited boxes of “women’s issues,” distinguished from economic, union, financial, and ecological issues. What is at stake today in the disputes over the meanings of feminism is not the division of a movement that was always multiple and polyhedral. What is at stake is the ability to intervene in the suture point between neoliberalism and fascism. It is the feminist power (*potencia*)¹ itself that is in play, which, as we have seen, is reflected in its constant overflow, in its desire to change everything.

—Translated by Liz Mason-Deese

Note

- 1 In Spanish, there are two words for “power”: *poder* and *potencia*, which derive from the Latin terms *potestas* and *potentia*, respectively. A Spinozist understanding of that difference underscores that while *potencia* has a dynamic, constituent dimension, *poder* is static, constituted. *Potencia* defines our power to do, to affect, and be affected, while the mechanism of representation that constitutes *poder* separates *potencia* from the bodies that are being represented. To preserve the emphasis of this distinction, the Spanish word *potencia* is used, where appropriate, throughout these texts. For the matter of this philosophical translation, see Hardt 1991. (Tr.)

Reference

- Hardt, Michael. 1991. “Translator’s Foreword: The Anatomy of Power.” In *Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza’s Metaphysics and Politics*, by Antonio Negri, xi–xvi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.