

## Chapter 1

# #WeStrike: Toward a Political Theory of the Feminist Strike

Since 2016, the strike has successively taken on several names: “national women’s strike”; “international strike of women, lesbians, travestis, and trans people”;<sup>1</sup> “international and pluri-national feminist strike”; and even “feminist general strike.”

It has been woven together into a saga, somehow crazy and relentless in its force and continuity. The strike is not an isolated event; it is structured as a process. In that sense, it is still underway and open ended. In the space of less than three years (from October 2016 to March 2019), the strike became a tool driving the movement of women and dissident bodies in a new direction at the international level that continues to this day.

In Argentina, that movement was fueled by a slogan—“Ni una menos”—that convened the first, massive, mobilization in June 2015 against femicide, which would grow into the strike one year later, shouting “We want to be alive and free!” However, the strike also brought a historical accumulation of previous struggles to the stage. In genealogical terms, there are four lines that should be taken into account. The first is the women’s movement, whose main reference is the Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres (National women’s gathering) that has been held annually in Argentina since 1986, as well as initiatives such as the National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion, founded in 2005. The second is the human rights movement, led by the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and their campaign for truth and justice for those “disappeared” under the military dictatorship

of the 1970s and '80s. Third is the long history of movements of sexual dissidences, going from the legacy of the Frente de Liberación Homosexual (Homosexual liberation front) to the lesbian militancy in the 1970s for autonomous access to abortion to trans, travesti, intersexual, and non-binary activism. Fourth is the line of social movements, especially the unemployed movement, in which women's participation has been fundamental over the past two decades. Throughout this book, I will examine, in feminist terms, each of these lines and their modes of connection, contamination, and radicalization. Building on these struggles, the strike produced a qualitative leap: it transformed mobilization against femicide, focused on the sole demand "Stop killing us," into a radical, massive movement, capable of linking and politicizing the rejection of violence in a new way.

When the idea to call a "strike" emerged in the heat of a multitudinous assembly, it showed the potencia of an action that allowed us to go from mourning to taking our rage to the streets. In the word "strike," we perceived the strength of being able to summon and speak with all of our voices: housewives, workers in the formal and informal economies, teachers, members of cooperatives, the unemployed, the part-time self-employed, full-time mothers, militants, domestic employees, students, journalists, unionists, retail workers, women organizing neighborhood soup kitchens, and retired women. We came together based on our *doing*, and in our multiplicity we became accessible as a common ground.

Through the strike, we started to draw practical connections between the forms of violence that are tied together in sexist violence: the economic violence of the wage gap and the countless hours of unrecognized, unpaid domestic work, as well as the disciplining that results from a lack of economic autonomy; the violence of exploitation and its transfer into the household as masculine impotence, which implodes in situations of "domestic" violence; the violence of the defunding

and looting of public services, resulting in the burden of extra community work. In this way, we showed how sexist violence has to do with much more than gender.

By using the word “strike,” we began to weave connections between women’s leading role in popular economies (where they are as criminalized as they are hyper-exploited) and in conflicts over the use of urban space, and the extractivist megaprojects that are encroaching on indigenous and community territories, attended by violence against the women leading those movements in defense of their territories. Connecting the strike to these issues also frees time for ourselves: both to think and to act, to grieve and to fight; to say enough is enough, and to find one another.

In this chapter, I consider the strike as a *new form of practical cartography* of the feminist politics that is today taking to the streets en masse. The strike’s capacity to serve as both a practical horizon and as an analytical perspective emerging from struggle is what has allowed it to propel a popular and anti-neoliberal feminism from below—one that connects webs of economic violence to the violence targeting women’s bodies and feminized bodies.

How was the strike reinvented and transformed by a movement led by subjects and experiences that do not fit into the traditional idea of labor? Why does the strike, as it is reappropriated from the labor movement, manage to translate new grammars of exploitation into new grammars of conflict in the here and now? How is the strike, in its expanded meanings, capable of connecting domestic labor with financial exploitation? Why did the strike enable a new type of international coordination?

The strike as a process weaves together the intensification of insubordination in multiple forms: different modes of protest and assembly; varying uses of the strike; occupations of diverse work and neighborhood spaces. Based on this multiplicity, the very idea of the *general strike* takes on another meaning,

leading to other questions: From a feminist viewpoint, how does the multiplicity of actions included in the notion of the strike reveal and sabotage forms of exploitation and value extraction that today are no longer concentrated only in areas recognized as “labor”? How does the strike express a mode of political subjectification, a way of crossing borders and exceeding the limits of the possible?

Starting from these questions, it follows that adopting the lens of the feminist strike also serves as a means to understand the reconfiguration of contemporary capitalism—its specific modes of exploitation and value extraction, as well as the dynamics that resist, sabotage, and challenge it. The strike is a way of blocking the continuity of the production of capital, understood as a social relation. The strike is also an act of disobedience to the constant expropriation of our vital energies, plundered by exhausting routines. Therefore, more questions emerge: What happens to the very practice of the strike if it is understood and practiced based on sensibilities that are not recognized a priori as belonging to a *class* and that, nevertheless, challenge the very idea of class? How does this “displacement” of the strike, its out-of-place use, remap the spatialities and temporalities of production and antagonism?

### A Feminist View on the Heterogeneity of Labor

The strike becomes a specific apparatus for politicizing violence against women and feminized bodies because it connects it to the violence of contemporary capitalist accumulation. In this sense, the strike produces a global map: it makes visible transborder circuits and organic relations between accumulation and violence. To convene the strike, we launched the slogan #NosotrasParamos (#WeStrike); in so doing, we forced that traditional tool of the organized labor movement to mutate, to be reconfigured, reconceptualized, and reused to

reflect lives and work that escape the confines of the union (and its economy of visibility, legitimacy, and recognition).

The strike, as it has been reinvented by contemporary feminism, shows how precarity is a common condition, but also one differentiated through class discrimination, sexism, and racism. It becomes a tool for understanding violence as a juxtaposition of contemporary capitalism's forms of exploitation, and it turns feminism today into a form of organization, a practice of alliances, and a transversal and expansive narrative.

What does it mean to politicize violence through the strike? First, it means taking the strike as an action that situates us as political subjects against a systematic attempt to reduce our pain to the position of a victim to be repaired (in general, by the state). To be a victim, therefore, requires faith in the state and demands redeemers. The strike puts us in a situation of struggle. It does not forget the importance of mourning, but it removes us from the "state" of mourning.

Second, the strike is an exercise of mass suspension and sabotage of the political and economic order (in Argentina, half a million women were mobilized in each of the marches that followed the strikes in October 2016 and March 2017; 800,000 participated in March 2018, and a similar number in March 2019, on the heels of even more massive mobilizations for the legalization of abortion). Who went on strike and mobilized? It was not the workers traditionally recognized as such, but rather that heterogeneity of historically invisibilized labor. Mapping the strike thus becomes a tool for visibilizing hierarchies of work in a feminist register, giving visibility and value to forms of precarious, informal, domestic, and migrant work. This means no longer considering these forms of labor as *supplementary* or *subsidiary* to wage labor, but showing how they are fundamental to current forms of exploitation and value extraction, and also constitutive of the precarious and restricted condition of collective sustenance.

Third, the strike shaped an organizational horizon that

enabled it to play host to multiple realities, which together resignified, challenged, and updated the very dynamic of what we call a strike.

Argentina has one of the highest unionization rates in the world: two-thirds of waged workers in the country. In this context, the historic meaning of the strike was transformed by its feminist reinvention. First, it revolutionized who could call the strike: it ceased to be an order emanating from above (from the union hierarchy) to which workers simply adhered or complied. Instead, today the strike has become a concrete and situated question-investigation: What does it mean to strike from each different position? A first phase of this narrative consists of explaining why one cannot go on strike at home, or as street vendor, or as a prisoner, or as a freelancer (i.e., to identify ourselves as those who cannot strike). After all, there is no clear or identifiable boss, no one with whom to enter into immediate negotiations, and no clearly defined working hours during which to strike. Yet that *impossibility* immediately becomes its strength: it forces those experiences to resignify and broaden what is suspended when the strike must accommodate those realities, widening the social field in which the strike is inscribed and where it produces effects.

In a collective research-action intervention in 2005, the Madrid-based collective Precarias a la Deriva (Precarious women adrift) asked: What is your strike?<sup>2</sup> We return to this question, but on a mass scale, radicalizing it in opposition to the offensive of sexist violence that puts us in a state of assembly and emergency action. A concrete question—“How do we strike?”—multiplies the strike: in Paraguay, the call was used as a protest against the poisoning of communities with agro-toxins. In Honduras and Guatemala, the organization of the measure was strongly affirmed by the call against “territorial femicides” targeting community leaders. A communiqué from women in Colombia’s FARC guerilla movement appropriated the call, which they signed “#NosMueveElDeseo”

(#DesireMovesUs), indicating that they would also be striking in the jungle. In Brazil, strikers' demands highlighted the church's advances against struggles for bodily autonomy. This organizational horizon, submerged in that dynamic of open conflict, recenters the class, anti-colonial, and mass dimension of feminism, because the situations that revolutionize the tool of the strike from within are those that the strike would disregard if it were to apply solely to free, paid, unionized, masculine labor with defined limits to its tasks.

Taken in its capacity as an anomaly, in its displacement of place, the strike has allowed for mapping, from the perspective of insubordination, the forms of labor exploitation—territories and vital webs that are made visible and given value by deploying a feminist lens. This point of view has been elaborated based on a common and transnational kind of action, leading to the production of an analysis in the form of a diagnostic—one that is elaborated in the assembly, and is not merely analytic. The practical exercise, the question of situated investigation, has been to map the unrecognized and unpaid ways in which we produce value and to elaborate a diverse collective image of what we call *work*, *territory*, and *conflict*.

A strike of women, lesbians, travestis, and trans people carries a force that overflows the space of labor because what is paralyzed and defied in the sabotage amounts to much more than a job. For a few hours at least, a mode of life in which that job is one piece among others is not recognized, the roles of the sexual division of labor are paralyzed, and the political arbitrariness that organizes the borders between work and nonwork are illuminated, as well as the historical struggles between confinement and autonomy, between recognition and rupture.

The strike exceeds and integrates the labor question. It does not leave it out, but at the same time it redefines it and brings it up to date; it problematizes and critiques it in relation to obedience. The strike multiplies this question's reach

without diluting its historical intensity. It overflows it because it includes the realities of non-waged, unrecognized, unpaid jobs that have to do with forms of domestic, reproductive, mandatory, and free work, but also work linked to popular economies and the self-managed forms of life's reproduction. Viewing work in a feminist register thus allows us to think about a politics of this reproduction that takes up and traverses the domestic, social, neighborhood, campesino, and suburban territories, and their hierarchized articulation with the territory recognized as "labor."

The strike also exceeds and integrates the labor question because we are striking against the structures and the mandates that make capital's valorization possible. Those mandates (from the heteropatriarchal family to forced maternity, from clandestine abortion to sexual education) are not merely cultural or ideological questions. The mandates respond to the very imbrication of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism. Elements considered to be "noneconomic" are key to feminist economics as an expanded and radical critique of the patriarchal notion of the "economy."

In this sense the strike is turned into a vector of transversality: it goes beyond being a specific tool, whose legitimacy and use is prescribed for waged and unionized sectors associated with the "police-like materialism" of some unions (as Rosa Luxemburg put it), to become a formula of insubordination for realities and experiences that are supposedly "excluded" from the labor world. Such transversality thus challenges the supposed impossibility of the strike and demonstrates its possible uses, by shifting it to other territories, where it vindicates a legitimate anomaly and a new, practical potencia.

We could say that the feminist strike expresses three dimensions that have been strengthened sequentially from one strike to the next. First, the strike is constituted as a process, not as an event. This entails a concrete production of the time of the strike as a time of organization, of conversation, of building



a common web, of coordination in assembly; the strike also produces subjectivations that elaborate a new type of radicality through the encounter with one another, and the effort to remain organized. The strike is not a detached and isolated date on the calendar, nor is it the creation of an event that is an end in itself.

Second, the strike produces intersections between struggles and creates transnational connections. It does so by involving a class dimension, linking violence against women and feminized bodies to forms of labor exploitation, police and state violence, and corporate offensives against common resources. This means it broadens the dimensions of conflictiveness, including questions of identity, while going beyond their neoliberal multicultural capture. The strike remaps social conflict *in practice*. By de-liberalizing the politics of recognition, quotas, and identitarian traps, the popular, Indigenous, communitarian, peripheral, slum, and Black feminisms from Latin America thus politicize the precarity of existence as a sequence that is inseparable from dispossession and exploitation.

Third, because of all of this, when we narrate the geography of fear and risk (because many of us carry a map of warnings that alerts us to multiple forms of abuse and violence), it is in terms of a fear that is translated not into victimization, but into *strategic capacity*. The map of sensibilities of the different forms of exploitation that are experienced every day in relation with others fuels radical ways of thinking about territory and, in particular, about the body as territory (body-territory).

## Our '17

The strike of our revolutionary 2017 traces a serpentine line going back a century, echoing and connecting with the strike of March 8, 1917, which was driven by the textile workers of Petrograd against the hardships of the war and in repudiation

of tsarism. The overflowing and radicalization of that strike led to the beginning of the Russian Revolution. Another origin may be closer to home. Perhaps the strike of our revolutionary '17 started brewing in the *maquilas*, those enormous assembly plants dotting the border between Mexico and the United States. That is where many of us have turned, in an attempt to understand what was also killed in us each time one of those women workers was killed. It was those murdered women who made Ciudad Juárez famous as the concentration of a true “femicide machine.”<sup>3</sup> What mode of freedom were these young women inaugurating by migrating to those factories that became part of a gruesome sequence, as well as key to global capital? This question was tattooed on each of us. We are its contemporaries, and in some way, the maquila is the beginning of the feminist strike in which we as strikers also played a leading role, and that it now falls to us to think about it.

There could have been no international strike of women, lesbians, trans people, and travestis in 2017 without the expanded geography of Ciudad Juárez, without our fears and our desires, which become mixed up there, to the rhythm of flexibilized production and the border, our practices of escape and conditions of exploitation that we never would have imagined that we would be able to handle but that we decided to confront. Who is killed in Ciudad Juárez? Julia Monárrez explains that “they are predominately young women, they are brown, they are students, they are workers, they are girls, but all of them are economically marginal.”<sup>4</sup>

March 8 commemorates other young migrant women, too: sweatshop workers who went on strike in the Uprising of the 20,000 and later died in the March 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York. Thus, in a discontinuous manner, it brings together memories of these women workers' contempt and organization with the women workers of Juárez and the force that the International Women's Strike in 2017 propelled, as a common measure, in fifty-five countries. That form of

action was repeated, weaving together even more layers of organization on March 8, 2018, and March 8, 2019 and again in March, 2020.

When we speak of the international feminist strike, then, we are referring to a transnational, but not abstract, measure. The feminist strike, following the genealogy that starts with the *maquila*, expresses the need to mourn those bodies that only come into sight as a series of cadavers surrounded by horror, always in anonymity, that recur in every femicide in Latin America, the rates of which have multiplied over the last decade.

Over the past five years, feminist struggles have also developed a capacity for analysis and have come to understand these murders not as sexual crimes, but as political ones.<sup>5</sup> When we read with trepidation the number of deaths that are repeated between the factory, the nightclub, piecework, and the border, we understand something that connects us to those women, even in a desert that we have never seen but that feels close to us. Because something of that geography is replicated in a peripheral urban neighborhood; in a slum that is also dotted with informal textile workshops; in a nightclub outside the city; in homes imploding with domestic violence; in the risks taken by migrants; and in the communities being evicted by transnational capital's mega-enterprises. It is the composition of a common body that produces a kind of resonance: a politics that makes the body of one woman the body of all. That is what draws us to that old slogan, chanted in all the marches: "If they touch one of us, they touch us all!" Then we understand that there is something in the lives of the women of Juárez that exists in all our lives: the impulse of a desire for independence, a decision to forge a destiny that one wagers on, trusting in one's own vitality, the movement and the risk fueled in equal parts by fantasy and desperation. In *Ni Una Menos* Argentina, we identify the decision to strike as also a decision regarding our mobility and desire for autonomy. #NosMueveElDeseo:

desire moves us, thus politicizing it. By naming the impulse of movement, we explicate the subjective place where we locate political force. The phrase was replicated here and there, in the jungle and in neighborhoods, in schools and during marches, in homes and in assemblies. It named a common truth. And it allowed us to coordinate multiple spaces, trajectories, and experiences to constitute a specific link between moving and stopping, blocking and transforming, striking and removing our bodies and our energies from the reproduction of capital, fueled by everyday violence. The slogans that accompanied the strike initiative summarize a sentiment shared here and there: “If our work isn’t valued, produce without us!” “If we stop, we stop the world!”

The feminist strike responds—with both a political language and form of action—to a mode of violence against women and feminized bodies that seeks our political neutralization and negation. That mode of violence seeks to confine us to the position of victims (while also almost always casting us, indirectly, as guilty of causing the violence that we suffer). By halting our activities and our roles, by suspending gestures of ours that confirm patriarchal stereotypes, we use the tool of the strike to build counter-powers against the femicidal offensive that synthesizes a specific intersection of different forms of violence.

It follows that femicidal violence is not only confined to domestic violence. New forms of indebtedness to maintain daily existence are part of the violence of precarity that triggers intra-family violence. Sexist violence expresses an impotence that responds to the display of a desire for autonomy (in fragile and critical contexts) by feminized bodies. This desire for autonomy is immediately translated into practices of contempt toward masculine authority, to which it responds with new dynamics of violence that can no longer be characterized as only “intimate.”

Ciudad Juárez expands beyond Mexico because it functions as a sort of laboratory, anticipating how a certain labor and migrant energy of women expresses a political dynamism (a set of historical struggles) to escape from domestic confinement, of which transnational capital takes advantage. It is a desire for escape that the capitalist machine exploits, using the yearning for popular prosperity as fuel in order to translate it into dispossessive forms of labor, consumption, and debt—at its peak, becoming the femicidal machine.

It is through these temporal and geographic displacements that I want to account for an important reinvention of the strike, that creates a new origin story that turns on its *production of proximity* between struggles that seem chronologically and spatially distant. There is a twofold movement here: the creation of connections between struggles, which are neither spontaneous nor natural, and are produced not in a purely analytical register but through insubordination.

This dynamic, the forging of connections, is also seen in an abundance of times and spaces of creation. For example, a 2015 fanzine written by imprisoned women in Mexico entitled *Women on Strike, the World Falls* fictionalizes the beginnings of the feminist strike from within the prison.<sup>6</sup> These displacements of the strike also open up the very meanings of its placement, of its politics of place and of its appropriation of time. This is what militant intellectual Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar narrates as she passes through the Bolivian prison of Obrajes, in the city of La Paz, where the strike expresses the possibility of a different sort of political community.<sup>7</sup> Thus the strike is transformed into a tool of refusal and contempt that *transversalizes* situations at the same time that it composes them, starting from subjectivities that have been historically excluded or subordinated in the labor and political spheres.

## The First Women's Strike

#NosotrasParamos (#WeStrike) was the slogan launched by Ni Una Menos that was later interwoven with others. To say “we strike” suspended at the same time it enabled. Striking is a negative gesture, of blocking, yet it enables an indeterminacy that places us in a state of investigation: What do we do by striking? What is stopped when we strike? What other things does this form of striking allow us to do?

The feminist movement has words, but it is not only made up of words, as if they floated around collecting meanings here and there. It is important to avoid thinking about the notion of the strike as a “floating signifier,” as those who use the Argentine theorist Ernesto Laclau's theory refer to it: the sort of term that, because it is undefined, anything can fit into or be projected onto, a linguistic declination of logical and discursive connections.<sup>8</sup> The strike is able to be transversal, is able to give collective voice to so many kinds of people, precisely because it is rooted in the shared materiality of our precarity. It is these shared conditions that give the strike its meaning, rather than the inverse (as if realities would require that signifier in order for their common composition to be legible).

The first national women's strike in Argentina took place in the pouring rain on October 19, 2016, a few weeks after the women's strike for abortion in Poland. It was experienced as a vibrating sound that formed what psychoanalyst Suely Rolnik has called a massive “resonant body.”<sup>9</sup> What was heard trembling was that shout that is made by moving one's hand over one's mouth. A pack's howl. A warlike disposition. A conjuring of pain. A very old and yet very new shout, connected to a way of breathing.

That day, we were mourning the murder, by colonial methods, of sixteen-year-old Lucía Pérez in the city of Mar del Plata.<sup>10</sup> She was raped and impaled to death at the same time that 70,000 women, lesbians, trans people, and travestis were

meeting at the Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres in Rosario, the largest ever recorded in the gathering's thirty-three-year history. The previous year, when the encounter was held in Mar del Plata, there had been brutal repression on the final day and, on returning, we heard news of the travesticide of Diana Sacayán.<sup>11</sup> We had found out about the crime against Lucía on the eve of October 12, the date that “commemorates” the conquest of America. Therefore, the colonial imagery seemed inscribed between the lines: both the method and the date of the murder contained layers that resonated in the collective colonial unconscious.

Following the wave of rage that inundated social media came a message from Ni Una Menos: “Let’s meet in an assembly.” The need for a face-to-face encounter against the terror and paralysis that we felt when we saw the crime, a crime that they tried to make exemplary and instructive, allowed us to go beyond virtual lament. In that assembly, the idea-force of the strike emerged. Apparently excessive according to conventional “measures” of force to be organized in a week (irrational, that is, from the point of view of many people who were not present!), in the assembly itself, the strike was perceived as completely possible and realistic. The assembly, held in a warehouse belonging to the Confederation of Workers of the Popular Economy (CTEP)<sup>12</sup> of the Buenos Aires neighborhood of Constitución, produced another type of rationality and devised its own form of decision making, as well as something else: ways of putting that decision into practice. I want to propose the formula of a *realism of the assembly*: it is in that space where there is a collective evaluation of strength, and the ability to elaborate possibilities that did not preexist the assembly as a space of encounter. But the assembly is also constituted as an apparatus that is capable of anticipating and eventually casting out the risks and threats that will attempt to capture that common force. It is also in that sense that I refer to a realism: the assembly is not only an enthusiastic

celebration of encounter and, therefore, an “illusion” of force, but a machine of perception-evaluation that takes responsibility for limits without accepting them a priori as restrictions.

### What Is (Not) to Be Done?

There is a temporality of the strike that effectively puts into practice a refusal: a way of saying “enough!” to the violence and the way in which our time slips through our fingers; a refusal of the physical and psychic exhaustion that sustains extenuating precarity. It is saying “no!” to the fact that the multiplicity of tasks we carry out is not translated into economic autonomy, but rather is reinforced as compulsory and free labor. It is a refusal of the invisibility of our efforts and labors, and it builds on an understanding that this invisibility structures a political regime based on systematic disregard for those tasks.

The strike, then, disrupts its own temporality as a “date.” It began to be imagined—in the imagination that navigates such tight confines—in the *maquila*; it continued in homes; it transpired in assemblies; it was discussed in unions and community soup kitchens; it became a collective breath in the streets; but it had been brewing since times of sabotage enfolded in ancient memories. What, then, is the experience of time produced by the feminist strike? In what sense are we able to analyze violence against women and feminized bodies as an offensive of capital? How do we respond to state regulation that limits our gestures and language? How do we continue strengthening our feminist struggles within the popular and autonomous horizon that the strike fueled?

The feminist strike, unlike the traditional labor strike (that is, of the masculine, waged, and unionized labor movement) is not only linked to “professions.” It simultaneously refers to certain *specific* tasks linked to production and reproduction,



and therefore to a *generic* question: it explains why certain tasks correspond to a certain sexual division of labor. In this register it is both a *labor strike* and an *existential strike*.

That generic and generalized activity for which the strike is carried out means that it is not an “identitarian” strike, as claimed by certain union leaderships that saw their monopoly of the strike being questioned. Thus they argue that the feminist strike is only “symbolic” since it would not “really” alter the productive sphere and would, rather, be a demand for recognition—that is, an action that merely seeks the recognition of identity.

The key to the feminist strike is *disobedience* in a broad sense, one that both exceeds the legal framework of the “union” strike, while “using” its protection for certain specific situations. What is radical about the feminist strike is that it opens up questions about who we are disobeying (if it is not only the figure of the boss), what and who we are striking against (if it is not only bosses condensed in leaderships), and how interrupting the relation of obedience that capital imposes on us creates a space for thinking about different lives.

Striking, in this feminist meaning, involves a two-part movement, which is much more explicit than the factory strike—above all, because the strike unfolds and spills over into the street, the community, and the home. Thus, this practice opens up the spatialities of the strike; it multiplies them while showing how spheres that have been arbitrarily segmented and partitioned are, in fact, connected.

As scholar-activist Silvia Federici said of the March 8, 2018, strike, it was about “stopping the activities that contribute to our oppression and, at the same time, producing those that expand the horizon of what we want as a different society.” There is, then, a double dynamic to the strike: to stop certain activities, *to free up time and energy* in order to give time and space to others (both existing ones and those to come). Striking in workplaces, in households, in schools, as proposed by

the feminist strike, liberated time to dedicate it to the assemblies and mobilizations throughout the day. This form of strike is not merely staying home from work (one variant of the traditional strike) or going on strike from one particular job, but rather opening up the question of the strike everywhere, occupying the streets and the whole day of the strike. If our occupations and roles oppress us, to strike is to defy them, to create the conditions of possibility for other ways of existing.

The frantic organizing activity during the days following the decision-making assembly in October 2016 included meetings with all types of organizations, while word traveled on its own to different countries across the continent, and the calls and languages in which it was expressed multiplied. In our method of overflowing borders and limits in our practice (the excessiveness of the strike, of the time of the measure and the measure of time, of the “rationality” enacted by the call), we realized that in various places in the world, thousands of women and sexual dissidents had the same practical need to mobilize. They shared a desire to escape the confinement forced by private mourning, resulting from death and forms of violence that put existence itself in danger, that threaten any gesture of autonomy, solely for being women, lesbians, trans people, and travestis.

Organizational frenzy. Transnational resonance. Discussion over how much strike time we could “guarantee.” Everything feeds a question that has already been launched: what is the time of the strike? That day we stopped the country, in a coordinated action, for one hour, but we also did so in thousands of different and interlinked ways throughout the whole day. There were strikes in hospitals and schools, in factories and retail businesses, in the subway system and universities; there were assemblies in small towns and in large cities, mobilizations everywhere, and flags hanging from the windows and balconies of all the houses that declared themselves on strike. Throughout the day we resisted doing anything other than

organizing ourselves to be together. We made time itself shake, opening it up, exploding it.

What does it mean to strike if the *measure* of the strike does not respect, does not adjust to, and even goes beyond the “workday”? It means that the temporality in play does not coincide with working hours. But what are working hours for someone who combines domestic work with odd jobs, with state benefits and/or intermittent unemployment? When do you stop, if after work you keep working at home and in the neighborhood, in all those community spaces that, in fact, expand and overflow the domestic sphere, and reformulate work itself? When will we cease to be subjugated by the endless work imposed on us by gender roles?

There are two forms of *time* in the strike. One is the *unmeasurable quality of work time from the feminist perspective*. It is what accounts for excessive work, without a measurable amount of time, without clear limits. Feminist theories have popularized the notion of the *triple working day*: work outside the home, work within the home, and the affective work of producing relations and networks of care. To strike in that multiplicity of times is a *subtraction* that seems almost impossible because it takes place in that excess, where life and work are assembled and where reproduction is made visible as production. In the temporality of the strike, the multilayered consistency of working time is made visible from a feminist point of view: How is the very time that is counted as work time “produced”? How are workers produced by their vital and everyday reproduction? That is why to strike in this register is to rethink everything.

On the other hand, there is the time that is counted as the coordinated time of absence, sabotage, and blockage carried out anywhere at the same time: a strike of eight hours, twenty-four hours, one shift? Something of that very distinction is being undone and, at the same time, is being raised as a political strategy.

As Italian and North American feminists debated when they launched the Wages for Housework campaign in the 1970s, a fundamental question is highlighted in reproductive labor, the labor of producing and reproducing life every day: Can reproductive labor be measured with a wage? How do you calculate how many hours should be paid by a wage that remunerates domestic tasks? Furthermore, how can the intensity of work that involves care and affect, and that involves unlimited subjectivity and not simply a series of repetitive, mechanized tasks, be measured?<sup>13</sup>

That domestic labor must be compulsory and free to serve its function is pointed out and systematized by Silvia Federici in her book *Caliban and the Witch*. This text has circulated widely in Latin America following its translation into Spanish in 2011 and has nurtured debates in diverse spaces, as part of practices of popular feminist pedagogy.<sup>14</sup>

What we learn from Federici, whose theorization returns to the political experience of Wages for Housework, is that the specific mode of exploitation that capitalism organizes for women first requires them to be socially discredited. Only in this way is their enclosure and privatization justified. In capitalism, the domestic is produced as a space of “enclosure”: women are *confined* to the home, they are limited to this sphere baptized as the “private.” Later, they are forced to work for free and their tasks are rendered politically invisible.

But Federici warns of another danger: the specific relationship between reproductive labor and the wage under the formula of the “patriarchy of the wage.”<sup>15</sup> The stipulation that domestic, affective, and care work be free and compulsory, she argues, is the key to the productivity of the wage, its hidden part, its secret crease. Why is it hidden and secret? Because capitalism itself exploits that work through the sexual division of labor, creating a hierarchical relationship between the sexes (and more generally toward feminized bodies) and subordinating, while politically devaluing, free labor.

In the 1970s, Angela Davis also debated the universality of the figure of the “housewife,” arguing that those women enclosed in their homes only accounted for the status of some women, while universalizing a particular model of femininity. Black women’s experience in the labor market that Davis historicizes, however, was also a reflection on the servile character taken by domestic work after women were stripped of their position as “expert workers” during the colonial era, which saw the advent of an economy that was based on the household but not limited to it. This point is fundamental. The distinction that Davis makes between an economy based in the household, but able to project economic protagonism outside the home, on one hand, and on the other a secluded domestic sphere where work is not recognized as such, reveals the political production of the household as a space of confinement. This shows that the problem is not the existence of the home or of domestic economies, but that of the division between a capitalist economy of profit that only recognizes activity in the public sphere (i.e., nothing more or less than the “labor market”), and the private and inferior domestic economic (the reign of free and unrecognized work). Davis also emphasizes that Black women were not only housewives; indeed, upon being dispossessed of their economic protagonism in domestic economies based in the household, they were the first to be forced to enter the labor market, and even so they never stopped being treated as “strange visitors” in factories. The articulation between patriarchy, capitalism, and colonialism is evident here.<sup>16</sup>

The debate that Davis raises with the Italian feminists is very important: it focuses on questioning the “emancipatory” capacity of the wage. She argues that the oppressive and frustrating nature she attributes to domestic work would not be extinguished by receiving a wage as monetary repayment for those tasks that continue to be the same. To the contrary, the wage would legitimate “domestic slavery.” Davis takes as an example the women who work as domestic employees and

maids who, despite being paid, fail to increase the social status of that work.

Davis's critique, however, overlooks the criticism the Italians themselves made of the "domestic wage," proposed as a paradoxical demand: that is, as a specific demand and at the same time as an "impossible" measure, since it demonstrates capitalism's reliance on unpaid work as part of its structural logic. They also pointed to the "ordering" role of the wage: it operates by maintaining the division between the public and the private, hierarchically dividing spatialities and sexes.

Both theories raise common points via different entryways. First, they note that the wage under capitalism is a narrow framework for thinking about liberation from the oppressive character of domestic labor. That is why both Davis and the Italian Marxist feminists explicitly denounce the political role of the wage. Second, both argue that domestic labor is oppressive to the extent that it is part of a certain mode of confinement, one that is unpaid and obligatory. Both questions then are ways of demonstrating the original articulation between gender, class, and race.

What happens when the home is not synonymous with enclosure? Here the debate opens up over whether or not capitalism can produce value by getting rid of domestic life. But what sort of domestic life are we talking about? Davis refers to the South African case, showing how an attempt was made to dismantle households on the grounds that they were considered spaces that fomented resistance to apartheid. Yet, at the same time, she wonders how the completion of reproductive tasks could be ensured with an infrastructure of support that would not obligate women to bear the brunt. In the case of Italian women, and the debate that Silvia Federici continues today, capitalism's inability to automate reproductive tasks (a utopian imaginary of technological development) ensures that reproductive labor is not only oppressive and obsolete (as Davis affirmed in the 1970s), but also a space that deploys

another type of productivity if it is freed from its compulsory and family-based character. It is along these lines that we can return to the key point Davis makes about a domestic economy that projects political power.

### The Domestic Wage and the Social Wage

This earlier historical debate, which spanned continents and involved many participants writing from varying conjunctures, can now be brought back to a discrete and concrete situation in Argentina: the debate over state subsidies to remunerate reproductive tasks. Comprised of these tasks that make up a good part of feminized work beyond the formal waged economy, the economy of self-management or the “popular economy” is distinguished politically from concepts of the “informal,” “marginal,” and “excluded economies.” The discussion about how to compensate these tasks, which have become social and communitarian *because of the crisis*, has to do with a politicization of the subsidies coming from the state by social movements, whose history goes back to the 2001 Argentinian economic crisis.

Since then, a political question has taken shape: What forms does living labor take, today, outside of the factory? In an Argentinian context, this question has grown in importance ever since the eruption of movements of *piqueteros* (unemployed workers) at the beginning of this century. Such collective movements dislocated the workers’ “picket line”—that classic deployment of force in the factory—by taking it to the streets and highways. Since then, a myriad of forms of work “without a boss,” exemplified by the hundreds of factories and companies that have been recuperated by their workers, have emerged as a response to systematic layoffs, bankruptcies, and capital flight. Such projects have given rise to forms of self-management that have combined welfare benefits packages

won from the state with a strong desire for autonomy, territorial enterprises managed by popular assemblies, and the valorization of community work, all framed by the urgent need to survive in an increasingly desperate situation.

The political genealogy of the valorization of reproductive labor, particularly in popular economies whose leadership is clearly feminized (i.e., starting within social movements and then achieving institutional recognition), is a key point raised today by feminist economics. What sort of dialogue is possible between the 1972 Wages for Housework Committee and the benefits packages that today are being expanded in Argentina?<sup>17</sup> How have these benefits packages, largely targeted at women, recognized—in an ambivalent way—care work and feminized community labor?

That valorization has to do with how those tasks spill beyond the confines of the home: into self-managed soup kitchens, day cares, health care initiatives, and so on. This spillover is due to the crisis that destroyed the masculine “heads” of households through massive unemployment. But, more than anything, it is the effect of the politicization of the crisis through community and popular organizational dynamics.

There is a key point here that I will attempt to develop at various points throughout this book and that forms an essential component of my broader hypothesis about the affinity between the popular economy and feminist economics: the dispute over the social “revalorization” of reproductive tasks in a context in which their political function has become a new source of dignity and prestige in neighborhoods, as their protagonists become socially and politically recognized. This situation opens up challenges to “authority” in the face of new thresholds of cruelty in the webs of violence, whose favored target is women and feminized bodies. In this sense, there is a fundamental tension in popular economies: they move between the *family-based* orientation imprinted on subsidies by the state (through the request for considerations where the family “obligation” is



used as reassurance: requirements include vaccinating children, making them attend school, and so on) and their operation as part of an overflowing of the domestic confinement of reproductive tasks that has already occurred, largely driven by the crisis.

As I indicated previously, in the 1970s, the framework was the discussion about the sexual division of labor, which highlighted the consolidation of hierarchies that organized unpaid domestic labor and the invincible border that marked the public outside. That division was put in practice by a concrete tool: the wage, that remunerated labor done “outside” the home, consecrating money’s power of command within the household. That function, thanks to feminist theorizations, became known as the “patriarchy of the wage” and was later popularized by the phrase of Federici herself: “They call it love, we call it unpaid labor.”

The wage, as a patriarchal apparatus, maintains domestic confinement as a place where an “invisible infrastructure” is produced that fuels, sustains, and enables the “independence” of the “free waged worker.” Its condition of invisibility is historically and politically produced. Domestic tasks are those that have to do with social reproduction in general and, therefore, with the very conditions of possibility of exploitation in capitalism. That they have been devalued time and time again—precisely so that they do not count, so that they are not remunerated, so that they are not recognized as immediately productive, and so that they are not politically vindicated in their centrality—is the effect of capitalist-patriarchal-colonial exploitation.

Does the “patriarchy of the wage” continue operating in the same way today? What does the patriarchy of the wage mean when the wage itself is increasingly a privilege of “stability” only available to a few? I will develop this point more extensively in Chapter 4, but for now it suffices to affirm: the feminist strike takes on the crisis of the patriarchy of the wage and opens up debate about how forms of patriarchy are being reinvented today beyond the wage.

## The Becoming-Internationalist of the Strike

In Argentina, the call to strike one year after the rise of the far-right government of Mauricio Macri was a gesture that no “organized” political force had made until that moment. We called for the strike beyond the trade union parameters and, at the same time, denounced their negotiations with the neoliberal government. “Yes we can, women were the first to strike against Macri,” was heard later in the Plaza de Mayo. “While the General Confederation of Labor drinks tea with the government, women take the streets!” was another slogan that pointed out the displacement effected by the strike, and the debate around work in relation to the neoliberal measures underway, as well and the union’s passivity. The mass resonance of the call to the streets, given what we knew was simultaneously happening in other countries, made it an unforgettable day of collective effervescence, where we shared scenes of everyday contempt, gossip about revolt—anonymous whispers on a day that, as we sang in the rain, we stopped the world and found ourselves.

But this was only the first, the one that would inaugurate a saga. The force of that strike led us to decide to call an international strike on March 8, 2017. Thus it began to be amassed, communicated, debated, and above all, built in multiple spaces, by diverse classes, in conjugations that enabled the strike to accommodate and expand with heterogeneous realities, with geographies that, although distant from one another, are connected by overlapping zones, struggles, and realities that are not reduced to the borders of nation-states.

On that day in March 2017, we felt the earth shake beneath our feet. But during the preceding months, we had moved with the certainty that what we were doing, or stopped doing, was decisive. We had organized assemblies, attended small meetings here and there, talked, wrote, listened, fought, conspired, and fantasized. We even dreamed at night about what was left to

do in the coming days. Compañeras around the world would simultaneously do similar things: coordinated by slogans and intuitions, by practices and networks we had been weaving for some time, as well as by gestures that we did not even know lived inside of us. We were magnetized by a strange shared feeling of rage and complicity, of potencia and urgency. But, more than anything, we were amazed by the surprise of that multiplicitous and effective coordination. As we operated, we were connected by images that accumulated as a password: from the streets to the internet, and from there to our retinas, sealing themselves as part of a transnational, multilingual imagination. We wove, with the horizon of those days, a new internationalism. And the strike unfolded as *rupture* and as a *process*.

The strike, then, has another double dimension: *visibilization* and *flight*. It not only seeks the recognition of invisible labor. It is also a wager on its refusal. In the combination of the two, the very radicalization of what we are going to name as work is at stake. Flight at the same moment as recognition. Simultaneous desertion and visibilization. Contempt at the same time as it is counted. It is in that two-sidedness that relations, times, and spaces are perceived based on their *becoming*.

That disjunction between visibilization and flight is understood not as a contradiction, but rather as the opening to various modalities of the strike. The strike took up another mode of demands: condensed in a practice that does not make demands, but rather expresses precisely that desire to change everything. Therefore, the strike also integrates and overflows specific demands. That was the experience of the preparatory assemblies—open calls to gather and organize the strike that took place in the preceding month. It integrates them because it does not underestimate concrete demands about budgets, laws, necessary modifications to institutions, or specific complaints. And it overflows them because placing bodies in common on the street enables a stoppage in order to give ourselves time to imagine how we want to live and to affirm

that our desire is for radical change. But these two planes are not experienced in opposition. To put it in classic terms: it is not reform *or* revolution. There is a simultaneity of temporalities that do not function in contradiction. Having concrete demands does not imply the idea that recourse to the state is the most effective response to violence: this diagnosis does not impede fighting for and winning resources that, by not being thought about as ends in themselves, are assembled with other dynamics of transformation.

In that way, the state is not invested with a capacity for “totalization.” This means that, in opposition to state-centric perspectives, ours does not continue to prioritize the state as a privileged site of transformation. And, at the same time, it does not ignore the state in its limited political capacity, which is, therefore, capable of partially modifying certain realities—for example, in relation to the allocation of resources. This position renews political theory in feminist terms and replenishes other coordinates for thinking about radical change.

### Every Strike Contains a Form of Political Thought

For the militant revolutionary and theorist Rosa Luxemburg, fascinated with the mass strike during the 1905 Russian Revolution and its implications for the international labor struggle, each strike has its corresponding form of political thought. That phrase seems to me like a talisman, and one worth emphasizing. On the one hand, she studies a combination of elements to characterize the strike as a process and not as an isolated event: “so very many important economic, political and social, general and local, material and psychical, factors react upon one another in such a way that no single act can be arranged and resolved as if it were a mathematical problem.” It is that rhythm and multiplication of elements that make Luxemburg think that the strike is a living body:

It is the living pulse-beat of the revolution and at the same time its most powerful driving wheel ... If the sophisticated theory proposes to make a clever logical dissection of the mass strike for the purpose of getting at the “purely political mass strike,” it will by this dissection, as with any other, not perceive the phenomenon in its living essence, but will kill it altogether.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, in understanding the strike as a process, Luxemburg is dedicated to investigating the different strikes that preceded the great strike of 1905 in Russia. Therefore, when she describes its expansion, an aquatic landscape appears. “It flows now like a broad billow over the whole kingdom, and now divides into a gigantic network of narrow streams; now it bubbles forth from under the ground like a fresh spring and now is completely lost under the earth.” Undoubtedly, she is accounting for a multiplicity of actions to conclude that “all these run through one another, run side by side, cross one another, flow in and over one another—it is a ceaselessly moving, changing sea of phenomena.” Adopting the strike as a lens allows us to deploy the strike’s political thought as we experienced it, and to understand its processuality and multiple geographies.

I bring up Rosa Luxemburg here not only because of that clue that she provides us with, but also because today her thought can inspire us along three lines of investigation-intervention:

1) Feminist movements, in the multiplicity of the here and now, can return to her critique of war precisely to understand the so-called war against women. Of course, while these are very different kinds of violent conflict, Luxemburg’s reflections nevertheless continue to provide vital signposts for thinking about what this warfare attempts to dismantle. (In the following chapter, I will go into more detail on the discussion around the very idea of a “war” as a way of thinking about forms of violence against women and feminized bodies.)

2) In the same way, Luxemburg’s theory of imperialism can

be reappropriated and updated in relation to capital's constant need to expand its borders and, in the case of the labor of feminized bodies, to think about how the violence of the process of accumulation particularly impacts those economies in which women are the leading players.

3) Finally, her theory of the strike as a process continues to be key for thinking about the temporality and the movement itself of a historical accumulation of forces that, by starting from the practical criticism of violence against women and the reappropriation of the tool of the strike, proposes the challenge of weaving a new internationalism and political work at multiple scales.

### Unprecedented Alliances

The time of interruption that the strike produced was seized thanks to a fabric of unpredictable conversations and unprecedented encounters. We speak of unexpected alliances, as *Mujeres Creando* from Bolivia name them,<sup>19</sup> to account for the potencia that is unleashed from the way in which we interconnect, mix, and work together based on our differences, weaving the urgency to say "Enough is enough!" For the world is organized so that we do not find one another, so that we look at each other with mistrust, so that the words of other women and feminized bodies do not affect us.

What was it that created this possibility of encounter between women of the popular economy and housewives; between students and sex workers; between employees in public hospitals and hospital workers; between the unemployed and the self-employed?

To answer this, we have to look more closely at the time that preceded the strike itself, and must stop by the kitchen where the strike was cooked up: the assemblies. And not only those that were called for by the organization, but also ones

that were replicated at different scales and in various places in the face of conflicts as they transpired.

This dynamic of assemblies and the production of alliances enabled us to leave the confines of gender discourse, which seeks to limit us to speaking about femicides and positioning ourselves merely as victims. That is, it allowed us to break through the fence that makes it so that feminized voices are only listened to if they narrate an episode of pure horror and violence, without that narrative's inclusion in political enunciation that unravels the causes of violence and asks what forces are necessary to confront it. But it also allowed us to go beyond solely self-declared feminist organizations in order to bring in compañeras from unions, social movements, community spaces, organizations of Indigenous peoples or Afro-descendants, student groups, migrant collectives, art groups, and others. The assemblies are a space where those unusual alliances flourish; they also imply frictions, debates, and disagreements, as well as partial syntheses of what we are proposing.

In fact, the deepening of the strike was first demonstrated in the assemblies ahead of its announcement in 2018, where the qualitative leap, in organizational terms, was powerful. The number of attendees tripled: in the city of Buenos Aires alone turnout often exceeded 1,000. There were debates within each union about how to approach the strike. As one union activist described the scene: "I have never seen such a truly federal process of discussion." The 2018 strike increased in density by weaving together, once again, a social conflictiveness that was occurring in workplaces and, at the same time, it overflowed them because with the strike we practically redefined what we call work "places," incorporating the street and the household, creating new ways of looking at "jobs" as such. In that movement, which overturns spatiality and leads the strike to unexpected places, we also modify the concrete possibility of "striking," of "blocking," and ultimately of organizing ourselves by broadening and reinventing the strike itself.

I want to pause and focus on one of the preparatory assemblies initiated by the Ni Una Menos collective, along with many other territorial organizations, for the March 8, 2018, strike in Villa 21–24, a slum in the city of Buenos Aires. The majority of the participants were workers from the popular economy who carry out tasks of social reproduction in the neighborhood. Many worked in community soup kitchens, which became increasingly important in the face of the inflationary crisis that had been unleashed over the preceding year. They insisted on something that brilliantly points out the singularity of the feminist strike: they said both that they could not strike, and that they wanted to strike. That phrase opens up a situation of problematization; that is, a moment of thought. The *supposed impossibility* summarizes the practical dilemma of the feminist strike. In the case of women workers in the popular economy, the desire to strike was demonstrated by those who are assumed to be excluded from the prerogative (a quasi “privilege,” from a certain perspective) of that labor tool traditionally associated with the organized, waged, and masculine movement.

They could not strike, they argued, because they have a responsibility to feed neighborhood residents, especially the children. But they wanted to strike because they wanted to be part of that collective action, and to be in the street with thousands of other women. This affirmation, which at first glance seems contradictory, broadened the strike. It complicated it, forcing it to live up to the multiplicity of tasks that redefine the very idea of work from a feminist point of view. Thus an idea emerged: “Why don’t we hand out raw food? We’ll leave the food at the door of the soup kitchens, but raw food, removing all the work of cooking, serving, washing,” Gilda, one of the workers, summarized. The political occurrence unblocked the situation, adding another layer to the very practice of the strike. The idea was turned into graffiti that was spread across the neighborhood: “Today, March 8, we distribute raw food—Ni Una Menos.” The assembly thus became a way of



evaluating the logic of the sensory qualities of things—the raw and the cooked—from the point of view of women’s labor.

Another one of them, Nati, clarified during the same assembly: “I want the strike to make people notice my absence.” This supposes that the absence is not perceived, that it is corrected, replaced, precisely because there is a presence that permanently remains invisibilized and naturalized. A discussion ensued about the lack of recognition and the invisibility of reproductive tasks, the naturalization of “services” of cooking, cleaning, attending, calculating quantities. As if they were the real “invisible hand” of the economy that Adam Smith talked about. At the same time, they discussed how this work was building the neighborhood’s concrete popular infrastructure, producing common services that have a clear political value. The question becomes urgent when faced with the scenario of crisis. Austerity has a differential impact on women in these neighborhoods: they are the ones juggling everything so that there is enough food, and, to start, they reduce their own intake so as to not decrease collective distribution. These women literally put their bodies on the line so that austerity is felt as little as possible in the daily lives of others.

In these situations of collective problematization, the specific exploitation of women’s labor becomes a point of view that allows for the reconceptualization of the very notion of the bodies implicated in that work. That work is named, it becomes visible and recognized in its concrete manifestations as based on everything that is put to work in contemporary economies, as overflowing the map of formal waged labor. But by doing this based on the strategic thinking required by the question of how to strike, those forms of exploitation are revealed by the very possibility of disregarding them and not only in terms of an analysis of submission.

In this sense, the feminist strike functions as a *chemical catalyst*:<sup>20</sup> it demonstrates relations of power; it shows where and how they are inscribed and function; it discovers the bodies,

times, and spaces over which they are applied and also the mechanisms for their disobedience. The strike becomes the key to an *insubordinate* practice when it begins operating as an element of disobedience and not simply as part of a repertoire of actions of negotiation.

### The Debate *in* and *with* the Unions

In the case of Argentina, one of the particular features of the process was the tense and conflictive, yet constant, dialogue with unions of varying ideologies. This dialogue was decisive at the moment of seeking alliances. Initially, the union leadership strongly resisted giving up their monopoly over the tool of the strike. What was interesting was that the debate took place within unions themselves, empowering the young women within them, who were fighting to force the structures to open up spaces of democratization.

This was inseparable from the protagonism of women of the popular economy, including street vendors, women doing piecework out of their homes, trash collectors, community caregivers and cooks, and others, joined together in the CTEP as a particular union-esque formation. Those popular economy workers both demanded to be recognized as workers by other unions and demonstrated the limits of the “union” strike. Like the women in the villa’s soup kitchens, they force us to think about the strike of those who “cannot” strike, because they would risk losing their daily income.

However, two points need to be emphasized about the participation of popular economy workers. On the one hand, at that conjuncture in Argentina, in which president Mauricio Macri—representative of the power of transnational financial groups and agribusiness associations—governed with measures that went directly against the wage, women vindicated the tool from a position supposedly “outside” of work

that, nevertheless, is able to debate and reshape work itself. In this, it can be said that contemporary feminist struggles have a *piquetero genealogy*, referring to the struggles of the unemployed in Argentina. Those unemployed, who were supposedly condemned to the outside (so-called “exclusion”), were able to debate and reformulate what they called dignified work through the mass struggles that they developed at the beginning of this century.<sup>21</sup> At that time, the majority of the countries’ unions refused to recognize the unemployed as workers, marking another line of analogy with today’s feminist movement. On the other hand, the feminist strike *processes and takes responsibility* for the crisis of wage labor that *has already occurred*, occupying, socializing, valorizing, and reorganizing the labor of social reproduction. Here another continuity with the movement of the unemployed can be traced: it raises the issue about the current limits of inclusion through precarious waged labor and the permanent management of unemployment as a threat of exclusion from the perspective of the supposed “victims.” That movement reveals the break with the figure of victimhood.

The broadening of the strike action (like the displacement of the picket from the factory to the highway beginning in the late 1990s) functions as a practical denunciation of the ways power structures (including some union leaderships) negotiate austerity. The expansion of the strike measure does not leave out wage disputes, but, at the same it, it redefines them and forces them to face the reality of non-waged labor. It multiplies the meanings of the strike without diluting its historical force. It relaunches the strike as the key for understanding how the transversality of social conflict is at play in the intersection of exploitation and sexist violence.

In the manifesto calling for the international strike on March 8, 2017 (which was quickly translated into several languages), we denounced the ways capital exploits our informal, precarious, and intermittent economies; how nation-states

and the market exploit us when they put us in debt. And we declared that those forms of exploitation go hand in hand with the criminalization of our migratory movements. We made it clear that this feminist movement, by taking itself as a political subject, has the strength to denounce violence against women and feminized bodies as a new form of counterinsurgency, one that is necessitated by the expansion of the current modalities of exploitation and multiple forms of dispossession. The strike is shown, therefore, as a gesture of revulsion, not of negotiation. It is a rebellion against its decorative uses (as a folkloric occasion or preestablished date on the calendar) or its reduction to a “symbolic” effect that is only communicable on social media. The communication initiated by the strike phenomenon is sustained by the potencia of bodies in the street, by the eruption of words that create a new way of naming, by the rage unleashed by the violence, by the necessity of thinking about forms of self-defense and of explicating the new modes of exploitation and extraction of value.

Here, another point is worth highlighting: feminism becomes more inclusive because it is taken up as a practical anti-capitalist critique. Therefore, we can evoke Luxemburg again: the strike is not a “purely technical” weapon that can be “decreed” or “prohibited” at will. To the contrary, by including, highlighting, and valorizing the distinct terrains of exploitation and extraction of value by capital in its current phase of accumulation, the strike as *blockade*, *challenge*, and an act of *contempt* allows us to account for the conditions in which struggles and resistances today are reinventing a rebellious politics. Therefore, the use of the strike proposed by the movement of women, trans people, lesbians, and travestis expresses and disseminates a change in the composition of laboring classes, overflowing its classifications and hierarchies—namely, those that are so well synthesized by the patriarchy of the wage. And it does so from the register of a practical feminism, rooted in concrete struggles.

In February 2017, the Ni Una Menos collective met with the general secretary of Equality of Opportunities and Gender of the General Confederation of Labor (CGT), in their mythical building on Azopardo Street. The reception reminded us that the women's movement can be a nongovernmental organization, but it cannot call a strike. Our interlocutor insisted on this, expressing her concern with the "foreignization" displayed by the movement's internationalism. She also warned us that radicalization in our country "has always ended badly," referring to the armed struggle during the 1970s. There was something comical and anachronistic about her words: the secretary was worried that solidarity was our "weapon," interpreting the slogan "solidarity is our weapon," which originated with the feminist movement in Poland, as the promotion of an armed movement.

A year later, at a February 21 workers' march, the leaders of the union federations announced, from a shared stage, that March 8 was the next date for workers' mobilization, because it was the international feminist strike. The meeting we had with one of the male members of the CGT's triumvirate at its headquarters had ended with the leader's promise that he would be fulfilling tasks in a soup kitchen on the city's periphery on the day of the strike. On the eighth he sent us a photo of himself serving food to children. For the first time in its history, the CGT used the word "feminist" in an official communiqué, informing their members about the strike. Both scenes are vignettes of displacement, driven by a force from below: over the course of the entire year, the feminist movement was shown to be truly active, building the strike as a process.

The multiplication of the assemblies was connected with social conflict, from layoffs in factories to evictions of the Mapuche community, giving the movement a capacity for transversality that no other political actor could achieve. This implied having the skill to include conflicts that until recently were not considered part of feminism's concerns, reinventing

feminism itself, but above all, transversalizing a mode of action and feminist problematization in all political spaces. The affirmation of the strike as a process accumulates concrete reference points in specific places because it delineates a feminism that is constructed as popular and anti-neoliberal.

However, it did not take long for arguments against feminism to emerge from union leaders opposed to the feminist strike. Such argument included the following:

— “Feminism functions as a form of sectarianism”: it leaves out men and weakens the unity of demands. The women’s movement is here presented as a sort of “external agent” to unionism, erasing the intersectionality of alliances and experiences, along with the potencia of questioning masculine authority and its logic of patriarchal construction *within* unions.

— “Women are not prepared to take the spaces of power that they demand”: an intransigence is attributed to them that makes them supposedly unable to negotiate. It is not recognized that the feminist movement is putting into play a different logic of movement building, which, furthermore, uncovers the limits and inefficiencies of a conciliatory and extremely patient negotiation.

— “For the feminist movement to call a strike delegitimizes and weakens the power of the union leadership, in a moment of attacks and campaigns to discredit unions”: they blame feminism for taking the initiative in the face of the unions’ sectoral inaction.

— “The action of the feminist strike takes away force from other union actions”: in this way, they ignore and disregard the inclusive form produced by a feminist understanding of conflicts.

These arguments structured the unions’ reaction, in the face of a confluence of struggles linking diverse territories of work (domestic, community, waged, precarious, care, migrant) from the feminist view, which allowed for the radicalization and deepening of demands *within* the unions as well.

Despite these objections, the international strike on March 8, 2018, was accompanied by a historic achievement: in the heat of the preparatory assemblies, a “feminist intersindical” (inter-union) was formed. In an unprecedented milestone, women leaders from all of the federations (five from Argentina), which have historically had political differences, held a joint press conference on March 7, 2018, to announce the transversal call to action. Today that confluence continues functioning and organizing common assemblies in places of labor conflicts and confronts the government’s initiatives to translate demands about gender into neoliberal proposals (e.g., Argentina’s November 2017 gender parity and pay gap law).

## Difference and Revolution

The feminist revolution reshapes and reconceptualizes the meanings of both work and the strike. This is what allows the strike to function as both a *cartographic method* and an *organizational apparatus*. Here I draw on lines of analysis that historically have placed emphasis on the “making” and the “composition” of the working class, to demystify and oppose a certain crystallized idea of a class “identity” or “consciousness.”<sup>22</sup> There are also decisive feminist theorizations about the conjunction between class and feminism as a method against the “male handling of the class struggle”<sup>23</sup> and about class as an element of racist discipline.<sup>24</sup> The strike, as it is taken up by feminism, forces us to reinvestigate what working-class lives are today. In this sense, starting from the *impossibility of the strike* opens it up to its *possibility in terms of the multiplicity of labor forms*, showing that the feminist movement is not simply a set of sectoral or corporate demands. To the contrary, it launches a question that affects the entire working class in its redefinition of class itself. As such, it opens a situated field of investigation.

The strike does so, first, because it shows how all of the exclusions that historically constituted the “class” have been dismantled and disputed through concrete struggles. Today the class is a multiplicity that has expanded the borders of what we understand as the “working class,” thanks to those struggles that redefine who are considered to be productive subjects based on specific conflicts. At the same time, the class never ceases to be a partiality: a division in society between those, following Marx, who depend on their labor power in order to relate to themselves and to the world, and those who do not.

The *expansion of the class through the multiplication of labor* demonstrated by the current feminist movement is due to the fact that it does not accept the premise that workers are only those who receive a wage. In this sense, by expanding the tool of the strike, we provoke a crisis in the patriarchal concept of labor because we question the idea that dignified work is only that which receives a wage; therefore, we also challenge the fact that recognized work is predominately masculine. Like in a game of dominoes, this implies questioning the idea that productive work is only that which is done outside the home.

Thus, feminism takes up the problem of redefining labor—and, therefore, the very notion of class—because it demonstrates the heterogeneity of unrecognized tasks that produce value and disobey the hierarchization and division that the wage creates between workers and the unemployed. It is a political movement: by decoupling recognition of work from the wage, it rejects the idea that those who do not receive a wage are condemned to the political margins.

The feminist movement, especially the movement of popular feminisms (which brings together a multiplicity of Latin American experiences under diverse names), shows that we cannot delegate to capital—through the tool of the wage—recognition of who are workers. That is why we say #TrabajadorasSomos Todas (#AllWomenAreWorkers). Now, that statement does not



operate as a blanket that covers and homogenizes an abstract class identity; rather, it functions because it reveals the multiplicity of what labor means from the feminist point of view, with all of its hierarchies and all of its struggles.

When it is connected to difference, the class dimension does not turn class into a privileged element for understanding conflict (which, by flexibilizing the notion of class, risks ultimately putting it in the center again). It is something that is more radical, precisely *because* it emerges from the feminisms of the peripheries: the question of class can no longer be abstracted from the colonial, racist, and patriarchal dimension without being revealed as a category that covers up hierarchies. In this way, we also put another idea of *productivity* into play: productivity is not confirmed by whether or not we are exploited under the wage form. Rather, the reasoning is different: the form of exploitation organized by the wage invisibilizes, disciplines, and hierarchizes other forms of exploitation.

This opens up another fundamental line of investigation: How do financial apparatuses update the colonial pact today with forms of domination and exploitation that, as Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar indicates,<sup>25</sup> are revealed as a fundamental point for understanding the war against women in its role as counterinsurgency? Here it is essential to create connections between the *most precarious territories of labor* and the *most abstract apparatus of finance* in order to think about new forms of exploitation and value extraction and, especially, the role of women's bodies and feminized bodies in them.

The collective and multitudinous body of the feminist movement is now disputing the body in terms of its potencia: that is, it is defending the indeterminacy of what the body can do. In other words, the very idea of labor power. That is where its multiplicity, its expansion, comes from. With this understanding, the body ceases to be individual confinement and the object of liberal rights, and instead becomes interwoven with insurgent territories, putting social wealth into dispute.

## Excursus: The Collective Invention of an Origin

The collective invention of a fable is a way of dismantling, critiquing, and tearing apart the origins that consecrate our secondary place—which is described as natural, pre-political, and generally muted. It also consists of telling alternative stories.

The attempt to narrate and conceptualize the feminist strike aims to vindicate our power of collective fabulation and, therefore, that of the invention of a logic that defies what is considered “political” rationality. For that reason, it invents its own origin, to the point of imagining a movement that does not have origins but is composed of displacements.

The theory of the social contract (which abstractly guarantees the order in which we live, and compels us to obey those who govern us) projects an idealized previous state that gives rise to it: the state of nature. In philosophical debates, it is said that this state is a sort of imaginary site (or, as Hobbes described it in the seventeenth century, as existing in the Indigenous populations of America).<sup>26</sup>

But we can make a different hypothesis: that women are the concrete reference for the materiality of the state of nature, due to the embodied form of their political existence, which in turn *naturalizes* and *invisibilizes* them. Thus, arguing that the state of nature is fictitious is a double negation: it strips existence and dignity from nature (denigrated as nonrational), and it denies the effective persistence of that state of nature in the feminized mode of existence. And, let’s add something else: it mystifies women as an exploitable natural resource.

Religious, political, mythological stories narrate the origin of things. Indeed, British political theorist Carole Pateman has shown that by repeating the story of the social contract as the origin of the political pact, women accepted a subordinated role under the covert form of a sexual contract that we “signed” in advance.<sup>27</sup> An always-hidden hem, the sexual

contract is that marriage contract that, in turn, operates in relation to the employment contract. Both are inseparable from the social contract, that is, from the way the political order functions; from the way in which social obedience is structured, where women are uniquely obligated both in relation to the unpaid work that we do as well as to the fidelity that we must promise.

In Pateman's unparalleled account, the "civil contract origin story" of societies is a fiction made to the measure of men. On the one hand, it synthesizes a specific dispute over the power to "give birth." The contract grants men a "specifically masculine creative power": the capacity to generate new forms of political life. In this sense, men also make a body to their measure. This fable is part of the *gestation* of modern patriarchy, which distinguishes the power that men exercise over women and feminized bodies, via a form of political right. It is here that the male body is revealed as a rational and abstract body with the capacity to create order and discourse.

On the other hand, these "origin" stories are mounted over material expropriations: conquests and appropriations of communal and Indigenous lands, conquests and appropriations of female and feminized bodies (of both slaves and migrants). The figure of the individual is shaped through that dispossession. There is no "natural" possibility of such a subordination of women, without having *previously* stripped them of any possibility of economic autonomy. There is no confinement and impoverishment of women, no way of making them dependent and submissive, without a previous dispossession of their capacities for self-management and their own economies.

Political creativity—in the alliance between patriarchy and capitalism—thus becomes a strictly male power, based on an earlier expropriation. And the contract that acts as a body (as a body of text and a civil body) for that creativity organizes a whole system of subordination and delegation, one that later takes the name of rights and obligations. Pact and contract.

But who signs? Pateman says that it is white men (who no longer represent the old power of the father, but a power distributed fraternally, among equal men), and that this contract is, in turn, three in one: a social contract, a sexual contract, and a racial or slave contract that legitimizes the government of whites over Blacks. Thus, what it organizes is not a paternalism, but a specific form of masculinity.

Yet, it is not men that are spoken of, but rather something more abstract: individuals. It is a party that women are apparently invited to, if they dress the part: that is, if they recognize the political fiction of liberal equality and speak its language, even as they are excluded from it. However, there is a trap. As women—as aspiring individuals—they are only allowed a single contract at the beginning: that of marriage. The sexual contract thus establishes the political right of men over women as the first clause, which is transcendental to all other contracts. It is a contract with a “specific content”: that of “loyal service,” which in turn structures access to the female body as a male prerogative, as well as the sexual division of labor, organizing the patriarchal meaning of what we understand as femininity. Because along with fidelity, we “sign a pact” to do free domestic labor.

Pateman makes the point, again with extreme clarity: despite the individual and metaphysical language of contracting wills, an examination of the contracts of which women are a part (marriage, prostitution, surrogacy) shows that what is at stake are *women's bodies*. The philosopher's thesis is acute: the sexual contract is the *repressed* part of the social contract that is always *displaced* under the form of the marriage contract.

Marriage and prostitution contracts reveal the core—and recall the origins as a founding fiction—of modern contractual patriarchy because it both “denies and presupposes women's freedom,” and it cannot operate without that assumption. Freedom and contract are linked at the same time as women's power is confined: the freedom to make decisions about

gestation in one's body and to not remain enclosed in the domestic sphere. In women, however, the body is something that is *not* property (a quality that is necessary in order to be an individual). Sexual difference thus turns into political difference.

Women, then, are presupposed as individuals (because they can sign the marriage contract), yet they are not, because they are not owners of themselves (since they signed the contract that consecrates their "natural" subordination to men). A similar structure functions in the parable of the Aventine, which French philosopher Jacques Rancière recalls as the "unequal fiction": the owner who gives orders to the slave presupposes that he has a faculty of comprehension and language, a humanity that Rancière calls the "equality of intelligences," without which it would not be possible to comply with the order.<sup>28</sup> But that humanity is immediately denied by the affirmation of the hierarchy: the distinction between the one who commands and the one who is forced to obey is later translated into a "natural" distinction, in which slaves are no longer rational beings.

In a way, the double standard of women as *individuals who are not individuals* functions similarly. However, it can be used to their favor, as Pateman proposes: the figure of the woman opens up a critical path that can lead the feminist perspective beyond the liberal horizon. It is not about a race to finally become full individuals, in the way propagandized by the women who "lean in" to the top levels of corporate management or political power. Quite the opposite: it demonstrates that the figure of the individual as owner is inexorably masculine, an idea that is foundational to patriarchy: that way of converting the power men exercise over women into political power, and the reassurance of the sexual division of labor.

Their paradoxical relation to *exclusion* is fundamental to this way of understanding women's situation: they are both excluded from the contract as well as (in a certain way)

included in it. Women are simultaneously an object of property and a person. This reasoning can be interwoven with forms of argumentation that critique the very figure of exclusion. As the French theorist Michel Foucault indicates, the notion of exclusion “does not take into account—is consequently unable to take into account—or analyze the [struggles], relations, and specific operations of power on the basis of which, precisely, exclusion takes place.”<sup>29</sup> The notion reinforces an almost metaphysical distinction between inclusion and exclusion, in which exclusion is a complete outside, a desert.

Women, then, are trapped if we want to be included in the world of equal opportunities that is promised to individuals. Because women and migrants (and feminized bodies) will never reach the status of full citizen or individual, their condition raises a critique of “exclusion itself”: it denounces its symbiotic and synthetic relation with the very structure of inclusion.

This schema can be used precisely to think about sexual difference as a political hierarchy: it is not so much that one sex is excluded at the expense of the inclusion of the other, but rather that exclusion (for example, of domestic labor in respect to the wage) explains the very way in which inclusion is internally structured by specific forms of exclusion (for example, in the way in which the wage “includes” domestic labor as a family allowance). This brings us back to the relation that organizes the “patriarchy of the wage.” And it is the same dynamic that projects sexual difference in terms of difference between public and private space. Here, public space (civil, masculine, and white) demands attributes and capacities that imply the repression (or the inclusion through exclusion) of the private sphere (natural, of sexed bodies).

However, if we manage to dismantle the figure of the woman (and feminized bodies) as *excluded*, we get closer to the possibility that her mode of existence can *decompose* the individual, contest its limits, move against and beyond it. On

the one hand, if this exclusion is intrinsic to the functioning of the formula of inclusion, to escape it allows for dismantling of the binary. On the other hand, precisely by being a corporeal figure, it proposes a relation with the body that is not that of property. We could add that it is instead a relation with the body as composition. The body never depends solely on itself.