

A New Feminist Wave?

Part of [Feminisms](#)

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Photo: Cecilia Barriga.

A phantom is making her way across Europe. We call her comrade. The fluttering of a butterfly's wings is making itself felt all over the world, multiplying like an echo.

I.

13 February 2011: *Se non ora quando?* (If not now, when?). Italian cities hosted a mass mobilisation of women fighting for recognition and dignity, and against their reification as sexual trading counters.

21 January 2017: Women's March. The largest mobilisation in the United States since the Vietnam War started in Washington and spawned a full-blown sisterhood of almost 700 sister marches around the world. The aim of this March was to remember the Million Woman March held in Philadelphia in 1997, in which hundreds of thousands of African-American women took part. Today, it centres on Women's March Global, sparking a huge wave of feminist protests.

3 June 2015: *Ni una menos* (Not One Less). Women mobilised, occupying eighty Argentinian cities to protest against gender violence and femicide. In 1995, Mexican Susana Chávez had used the slogan 'Not One Woman Less, Not One More Woman Killed' to protest against the cases of femicide in Ciudad Juárez. Chávez was, herself, a victim of femicide in 2011. Her slogan was proposed by Argentine Vanina Escales for the reading marathon of 26 March 2015, and ultimately provided the

name of the protest of 3 June that same year. The movement continued to gain momentum and has been repeated in subsequent years: 3 June 2016 *#Vivasnosqueremos* (We Want Us All Alive) and 3 June 2017 *Basta de violencia machista y complicidad estatal* (Stop Male Violence against Women and State Complicity). Today, it continues to spread relentlessly outwards across other Latin American countries such as Chile, Uruguay, Peru and Mexico.

8 March 2017: the upsurge of feminism in Spain. *Ni una menos, nos queremos vivas* (Not One Less, We Want Us Alive) and *Ni un paso atrás* (Not One Step Backwards) are the Spanish translation of a worldwide alliance. Since that 8 March, the women behind the Feminist Assembly met on the eighth of every month to generate conditions that were set this year to spark an unprecedented demonstration this year, 2018: *#HaciaLaHuelgaFeminista* (Towards a Feminist Strike), 'If women stop, the world stops', 'We're stopping to change everything', 'Together we are more'. Women who are united, combative and rebellious are not just a mass or a sum of women.

II.

In Spain, women face more unemployment, part-time work, a hefty pay gap (despite higher qualifications), more impoverished retirement and greater employment discrimination, and undertake unpaid care work that our production system is incapable of paying for. Women face a lack of parity on governing bodies and are underrepresented in positions of responsibility and management. Their sexual and reproductive rights have decreased and are now in danger of regressing due partly to the appeal on the grounds of unconstitutionality, lodged by Spain's Popular Party (PP), against the existing Abortion Act, presented before a sympathetic magistrate. Women are the victims of physical, sexual and economic violence, as cruel as it is unrelenting, which our very limited Gender Violence Act has not managed to curb.

In recent years, this Act has come up against savage cutbacks, obstructions to women's legal aid, underfunded and unequal legal counsel depending on the victim's residency, and a lack of training and specialisation of judicial staff, a Dantesque probative system that forces women not only to prove that they have been assaulted, but that the attack is the product of repeated sexist domination. In Spain, the issue has never been the false claims purported by popular male chauvinist myth; the fact is that these incidents are underreported, reports are increasingly withdrawn, and, when they are filed, neither the victims nor their children receive sufficient protection.

The Gender Violence Act has been the most strongly resisted act in Spain in the legal sphere, and has been powerless to prevent nearly 1,000 women being murdered since 2002-2003, or 1.4 million women and girls being the victims of sexual violence. The cases of Diana Quer, Nagore Lafagge and the *La Manada* ('The pack') gang-rape trial further show that this resistance is shared by much of society —the sectors that shift the responsibility from men to women, blames women for what happens to them, and casts doubt on the credibility of their statements. Regrettably, despite the Istanbul Convention, the State Pact against Gender-Based Violence, approved only a few months ago in Congress, addresses neither victims'

rights nor reparation. But in Spain, and in the rest of the world, women refuse to be silenced.

#MeToo, like other movements before it, has exploded the complicit silence of concealment that had descended on sexual assault and rape culture, generating an implacable wave of digital sorority. Mobilisations in places as widespread as Chile, Poland and Turkey highlight the pandemic scope of violence against women. In 2014, in the EU alone, thirteen million women were victims of physical violence and 3.7 millions of sexual violence (one in twenty women said she had been raped before the age of fifteen).

III.

The emergence of global feminism in response to all the male violence against women (physical, psychological, sexual, social, cultural and/or symbolic) that is constantly used in an attempt to suppress us is also women's response to policy choices that colonise institutions with aggressive, discriminatory approaches in which sexism and misogyny have a major role: Trump and his verbal attacks, Macri, Erdogan, Putin's Russia. While worldwide mobilisation surfaced in 2008 against cutbacks and austerity, the impoverishment, precarization and dispossession to which this ideology led, and the absence of an institutional response to contain it, the last few years definitely belong to women.

Feminism has undermined the meritocratic fallacies fuelling countless conservative and neoliberal governments, it has spoken out against the dismantling of social policies, the open disdain for affirmative action, and the unequivocal public-private divide; against the exclusive protection of the hetero-patriarchal family, the preservation of culture at its most reactionary, and alliances with the Church and established power; as well as against the protection of elites and racialized classism, all bearing the indelible marks of political proposals that either deny the existence of patriarchal structures of domination or find no fault with them.

IV.

Feminism, universalized over the past decade has, moreover, revolved around the centrality of the female body, a ravished battleground assaulted by capitalist and patriarchal barbarism, but also the final frontier in the conformation/destruction of women's identities and the vindication for their rights. It is this centrality of the body that has led some feminists to enhance the experience of unfinishedness, finitude and fragility; of living submerged in an interweaving of concrete relationships that render our co- and eco-dependency visible.

Among other things, this feminism reclaims care as a civic virtue and a public duty of civility, placing feminist practices, and women's experience and learning in the forefront.

The ethics of care conceives of autonomy not as immunity or self-sufficiency, the product of strictly subjective and solipsistic psychological experiences, but as the result of relational synergies in a permanent state of regeneration, reflection,

revision and dialogue. Differentiation is seen not as separation or fragmentation, but as a particular way for women to be connected with each other. Autonomy is, then, synonymous with a capacity for distinction, to create and transform the conditions of existence and one's own life in a common world. Care is perceived both materially and immaterially, leading to talk of the politics of affects. Of course, we are not referring here to care relations generated in inequality; care must be regarded as a lever for social change. And although many people have linked this discourse with the transcendence of maternity – sometimes in a normative sense – the connection should not necessarily be seen as a reactionary code. The relevance of the 'mother' as a political subject has been articulated through from constructivist, materialist and deconstructivist viewpoints among others, sparking a long debate which, fortunately, is ongoing.

The fact is that if today the north is unaware of the major care crisis consuming it, it's because this social responsibility falls upon a contingent of migrant women, women who take care of our children, our dependents, our elderly, leaving their own to the care of other women. Women who cover for the absence of institutions and men's irresponsible behaviour, nurturing our bonds while men weaken theirs. Women who generate an affective and emotional surplus value that we cannot even calculate. These precarized, exploited, invisible women re-victimised time and again, live by connecting two territorially discontinuous spaces, one here and one there, weaving material networks and cultivating an imaginary of remote affection. It is thanks to them that we can get a paid job with better conditions, have children, bring them up, educate them, achieve work-life conciliation, set up a world where dependency is not a disabling stigma, and even enjoy a clean, tidy, peaceful home. Thanks to them, we can buy the time stolen from us by a predatory patriarchal system, at a low or affordable cost.

The care crisis we suffer from in the north is cushioned by the endemic crises in the south, by a contingent of women who struggle to get here and find it difficult to settle and acquire legal status, and who are treated as infra-citizens, as second-class women. This transfer of care from the hands of one group of women to another is structured by social class, ethnicity and race, thereby generating inter-gender inequality, reinforcing the passive role of the male, and strengthening the capitalist and misogynistic system that brings all of us down.

V.

The same violence that dispossesses us of our relationships, that fragments, divides and dissociates us, even from ourselves, also eradicates our territories and the natural resources to which we owe our subsistence. The civilisation collapse now affecting us, apparent in climate change, the end of biodiversity, animal torture, the food crisis, land grabbing, among other things, also highlights the devastating effects of male values associated with unbridled growth, selfishness as a rational assumption, individualism, narcissism, competitiveness as a driving force of 'well-being', 'progress', and the linear view of time. Every day, all around the world, women stand up to the pillaging of the commons, defending the reproduction of life, with all the material and immaterial ties on which the very possibility of existing depends.

VI.

Ultimately, by caring, we accept our radical vulnerability and the normalcy of dependency, and attempt to remove its negative stigma and see it as a necessary, universal characteristic of human relations. This is why, in this construct, needs cannot be taken apart from relational assets, or from the binding debts we have with others. This epistemology, based on experience and the situated knowledges we have drawn from it, has been an indisputable source of change, for it understands that the only coherent way of making general theoretical proposals is by being aware that we really are situated in some specific place. In fact, as has been said on numerous occasions, it is the expert discourse that has contributed to women's subjugation, removing the means they had within their grasp to channel their protests.

VII.

The rights that women vindicate and their resistance to systematic violence are strongly rooted in relational experience and in a construct that calls more for concrete, collective experience than for the abstraction and formality that characterise legal androcentrism and the classical discourse of rights. As women, we have understood that the struggle to access power and wealth on an equal footing cannot be dissociated from our difference, or from an emancipatory horizon where our place is in the plural. This discourse anchored in subjectivity has enabled us to subvert dominant cultural codes, situating us more comfortably in a post-hegemonic universe than one with rigid ideologies and grand narratives. If there is one thing feminism has made clear it is that it is not macro-narratives that motivate, mobilise and socialise.

VIII.

The feminist revolution currently underway marks the start of a long night for many, but our strength lies in having responded to the simplifying, homogenising exclusion of *unipower* with increasing doses of complexity and intersectionality; in knowing that we are different and feeling comfortable sharing a common horizon of social and cultural transformation, and a change in sensibility. We have managed to construct our own polyphonic cultural narrative and an archaeology of the commons, accepting the contradictions and the contingency with this contextual and ingrained thinking, so well represented by the name 'bell hooks', to successfully conjugate relational reality and the challenges to the canon of semantic hegemony.

The key to our resistance lies in not having simplified our ecosystems, in having been able to walk, step by step, the unfinished road of our own construction, contrasting, re-reading and overcoming our different identities, and tirelessly disputing the collective narrative and imaginary. Facing one, we are many. As long as feminism cannot be discussed in the singular, victory is ours.

IX.

Unfinished We shall overcome, because every garden bears the murmur of the forest.

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