

# Feminist Street: From 3 June to 8 March

Part of Feminisms

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Photo: Cecilia Barriga.

"We agree to live, and to live is to fight." Rallying cry for the meeting of Women in Struggle, Chiapas, 2018

"Here no one is left out": this is what Nora Cortiñas said in front of hundreds of thousands of demonstrators on 8 March 2018 in Argentina. A movement, a political decision, an ethical position, condensed into a single phrase. No one is left out. 2017 began with a mass women's march against the conservative offensive spearheaded by Donald Trump. On 8 March that year, movements in fifty-five countries culminated in the first international women's strike. The year before an army of women captured Raqqa, the capital of Syria, from ISIS. At the same time, the woman president of Brazil was removed from office by a coup d'état. In Mexico, Neozapatism turned their autonomist tradition to focus on an electoral campaign headed by Marichuy, a woman doctor of traditional medicine from the Nahuatl people. Part of Brazil's extensive land mass was marched upon by black women. In Argentina, a mass, diverse, working-class feminism continued to pour out into the streets, with a highlight on 3 June 2015, when it marched under the slogan *Ni una menos* [Not one less]. This is an international and multilingual human tide. Invented and transformed. A hydra of a thousand heads, a new political factor, a threatening force, a puzzle to be solved, a commitment that keeps us up at night.

The term "woman" is not a piece of biological information. It is a political statement: it is a term we use to refer to a group of lives beyond the historical construction of

the woman gender, including lesbians, transvestites, transsexuals. The movement uses this classification, which exists within the social and discursive order to make its practical and theoretical critique. The political deconstruction of our bodies is, at the same time, a construction of politics on our bodies. The subject of contemporary feminism begins with the affirmation of gender, but at the same time it questions the fixity of genders and regulated behavioural patterns. It spans from strategic essentialism to the recognition of the creation of any available identity within the social fabric. There are different rebellions within the feminist rebellion. It is not only that rebellion which seeks to break the glass ceiling and be free to compete as equals. There are other uprisings at play, egalitarian and unorthodox, that consider feminism as a type of contemporary communism, committed to a new brotherhood, to life in a working-class tenement, to a disjointed make-up of existence.

I want to emphasise what *Ni una menos* brings to the table, in terms of mobilisation and organisation as a political experience. Summed up in a single phrase that becomes a password, a common code, with multiple meanings, a tool for different political constructions, an area of controversy. It is a movement that does not have (women) bosses, leaders, or owners. Nor does it have a single or legitimate interpretation. I remember how two girls once used this motto. One, in school, could not stop crying. During an interview with a social worker, it stemmed that she could not speak, until she said: what *Ni una menos* says is what happened to me. The phrase described a situation of sexual abuse at home. An 8 year old girl asks her grandmother about a lesbian couple. She questions if their relationship, previously carried out behind closed doors, is now in public because of the existence of the *Ni una menos* movement, that defends all women's rights.

The movement emerges as a mass, collective cry against violence against women – in the context of rising femicide rates, but also of a misinterpretation of different types of violence – and articulates a series of demands that are more and more broad and radical. It states that all lives matter and every body counts. They count because they should be cared for, protected, watched over, and in the sense that their stories should be told. Justice for those lives is also a narrative; they should be removed from the discursive machines of machismo. The initial and fundamental affirmation of the movement is that no life is disposable. *Ni una menos* discusses violence that comes from areas of exception where there is no legal protection and, at the same time, emphasises the specificity of violence against women, transsexuals, and transvestites. The feminist complaint could be functional: to take care of our lives, no matter how. But if permanent attention is not paid to the specificity of violence against women, one would think that gender inequality is a question of secondary importance, neither relevant nor essential.

Contemporary social struggles resolve matters regarding the right to live. When bodies are exploited to death, when there is no access to water, when populations are displaced due to advancing agricultural limits, when health services have a purely commercial interest, when in some neighbourhoods institutions are nothing more than an armed gang solving problems with bullets, when working class neighbourhoods become ghettos, when resources are poured into lands that turn into deserts, the right to live is at play. Could one ever think about the increase in femicide violence without the context in which empathy is suppressed in favour of

suffering on a daily basis?

Thousands and thousands of us took to the streets to sympathise for women who have died. We saw ourselves in a common fragility. Recognising that we are vulnerable enables us to stand strong together and avoid the safe capture of vulnerability. The right supports a separate and independent individual, subject to all types of threats. Living in fragility drives us towards protective technologies – medical, security – or paves the way for revenge and practices of punishment: "they should pay for what they have done". The discourse on security is the way to deal with our fragility in a reactive, individualistic, and fearful way. We look to create another way, that links the singularity of every life and desire as the underlying layer of the common, political experience. Struggle and desire are experiences of dispossession, which reveal the extent to which our relationships form us, and, as Judith Butler says, "we are dispossessed by them" (2004).<sup>1</sup> The collective duel takes grief as a public matter and connects it to the question of what type of community is possible? Some kind of ecstasy, of coming out of oneself, a breaking of the individualising privatisation, is inherent in mobilisation. *Ni una menos* hatches their politics beginning at sentient corporality, the experience of fragility, and the impulsiveness of desire.

On 19 October 2016, after a brutal murder,<sup>2</sup> we carried out the first national women's strike. We said: if our lives do not matter, produce without us. From there, the women's movement was followed by the organisation of international strikes on 8 March 2017, and 2018. In 2018, the mobilisation was greater and had its own distinctive identity. It was festive, inter-generational, performative, and artistic. It took the motives of a people's carnival and dramatised the festival as people constructing themselves. It celebrated its own dawn.

The international women's strike brings a rebellious attitude to the forefront. It shakes up an agenda of vindications and emerges as a collective experience, a catharsis, and an organisational process, a privileged moment to amass political subjectivity. The women's strike has this attitude because the idea of work it acknowledges and seeks to interrupt, is not one-dimensional. It rejects the reduction of salaried jobs and refers to all productive labour, the creative effort, as creating a fabric of community bonds. It demands the recognition of all the productive and reproductive work that we do. The strike affects the very foundation of social order: it is against the idea of domesticity and gender roles that sentence women to housework and is also against the subjugation to poorly paid jobs, under the umbrella of freedom that being salaried allows. It addresses the invisible ceilings in professional careers and also postulates the notion of equality that makes these hierarchies tremble. It is against employee management with an agenda of labour demands, against the government that criminalises protests, against machistas at home and in bed. It is present in sentimental relations, politics, family, work, art, science. In the strike itself. It is disobedience running through all aspects of life as a desire for interruption and foundation. It reveals a normally invisible link: the accumulation of wealth is not only what comes out of the workplace, it also takes in the surplus produced by community know-how and jobs of domestic reproduction. Upon naming all types of work, the strike shows a collective production of wealth that is privatised, which their (women) creators are deprived of.

1. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, New York: Verso, 2004.

2. On 16 October, Lucía Pérez, a sixteen year old girl, was murdered. Two men were arrested. According to the press reports, she died of pain – a vagal reflex – in a gang rape. As the trial went on, this version was discarded, but the family believed that the current investigation theories were not correct.

Every mobilisation inherits, acknowledges, and invents. The women's movement constructs forms of intervention, political statements, and its own dramatics. Every fold through which it runs goes further in depth concerning what is understood as violence and establishes different forms of autonomy. We are that powerful dawn, amazed and excited.

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