

**Diving into the Tide.
Contemporary Feminist
Mobilizations and Protests:
A Global Perspective**

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Abstract

In the last ten years, a new cycle of transnational mobilisations and protests brought feminist movements to the forefront (Cavallero and Gago 2019). Transformations in the political and economic spheres have seen neoliberalism take over at the global level, in conjunction with recurring economic, environmental and health crises. The effects of globalisation, which have been targeted by social movements since the 1990s (Della Porta 2005), can be seen in political systems, social inequalities, and gender regimes. Yet, a second effect of globalisation is that it has shortened the distance between movements, and it has facilitated cross-national processes of contamination (Hamel *et al.* 2001). This paper explores some elements of innovations of contemporary mobilisations and protest. On one hand, with regard to ideology and the shift from the concept of difference to intersectionality, the critique to the gender regime together with the capitalist economic model and the development of a decolonial perspective.

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On the other hand, with regard to repertoire of contention, in terms of organisation, feminist strike, performances and direct social action. More than ever, mobilisations occurred through transnational alliances, also thanks to the media and ICT. Feminism is becoming more and more mainstream, between losses and gains.

Keywords: feminist movements, intersectionality, strike, transnational, repertoire of action, alliances.

1. Introduction

In the first editorial of the journal *AG - AboutGender* ten years ago, Abbatecola, Fanlo Cortes and Stagi (2012, II) reported that:

The very word “feminism” produces uneasiness in the new generations, as a positive outcome of a skilled operation of back lash (Falaudi 1991), to be seen as the “affirmation of a popular culture that is deeply ‘antifeminist’, hostile to female autonomy in choices for life and professional ones [...] (Campani 2009, 17).

Ten years later, the landscape seems to have radically changed. Feminist mobilisations occupy the streets and the media, the world of social media is permeated with influencers and content that thematises feminism, fashion houses launch clothing with the word “Feminism” printed on top (Cirimele and Panariello 2018; Constelaciòn feminista 2020; Phipps 2020; Bojanic, Abadìa and Moro 2021). Whatever happened to the feminist movements? How did they change and re-emerge? What is “new” about them?

In the last ten years a new cycle of transnational mobilisations and protests brought feminist movements to the forefront (Cavallero and Gago 2019). Transformations in the political and economic spheres have seen neoliberalism take over at the global level, in conjunction with recurring economic, environmental and health crises. The effects of globalisation, which have been targeted by social movements since the nineties (Della Porta 2005), can be seen in political systems, social inequalities, and gender regimes. Yet, a second effect of globalisation is that it has shortened the distance between movements, and it has facilitated cross-national processes of contamination (Hamel *et al.* 2001).

In the last ten years, together with the spread of neoliberalism, the rise of populisms, far-right parties, and religious movements, a new cycle of contention has begun. Starting in the South, such as Latin America, feminist movements activated mass mobilisations and protests (Terzian 2017). The movements have extended transnationally, have adopted intersectionality as a frame, include different generations, and make use of innovative repertoires of action (Chironi 2019; Barone and Bonu forthcoming). In addition, they use social media on a massive scale (Pavan and Mainardi 2018). The new cycle of contention denounces gender-based violence and the ongoing inequalities women and LGBTQ people are trapped in. Social change is pursued through mass mobilisation and micro-level organisation.

This article refers to the concept of tide to overcome the US and Eurocentric logic of the concept of waves, and to account for the transnational, cross-time and plural dimension of contemporary mobilisations.

In the article, I will first look at the context where the new cycle started. Then, I will explore the time and space of mobilisations: on one hand, through the challenge to traditional analysis of movement temporality (Taylor 1989), and on the other, through the challenge to the Western bias in the analysis of feminist movements (hooks 1991). The new feminist “tide” drives innovation forward on

two levels: on the one hand, with regard to ideology (and the shift from the feminism of difference to trans-feminism, queer approaches, intersectionality); and on the other hand, to repertoires of action (such as with the feminist strike and the use of performative actions). Finally, I will explore two further elements of novelty: first, the construction of a transnational network through which claims, frames, objects, codes, and symbols are connected. Second, the role of the media and ICT in the outbreak of feminist mobilisations.

In the face of the rational principles of neoliberalism, feminist movements seem to propose new social paradigms based on the contestation of individualism, extractivism, the gender regime, the economic system, and on a strategic use of collective affects (Ahmed 2004).

2. The New Cycle of Contention

Since the sixties and seventies, feminist movements on a global scale have changed shape and demands. The encounter with Black and decolonial feminism imposed a rethinking of the subjects and social structures targeted by the movement, later formalised by the intersectional theory (Crenshaw 1991). At the turn of the century, feminist claims were embedded in social justice movements and social forums (Bhattacharjya *et al.* 2013). Feminisms have therefore moved closer to criticism of globalisation and the neoliberal economic model. The changes of neoliberalism have in fact affected women and LGBTQIA+ individuals more intensely, due to the gender regime and the inequality structures that shape the world of productive and reproductive labour, the intimate sphere, and life-trajectories (Toffanin 2011; Keck and Saraceno 2013; Fraser 2021). The cyclical nature of the neoliberal economy has produced moments of crisis, such as the one that began in 2007, in the face of which new challenges and questions have opened up for feminist movements. The cycle of contention where the Arab Springs,

Occupy Wall Street and the Indignados Movement flourished has been significantly participated by feminist groups and claims, oriented to question the distortions of capitalism and austerity from a gender perspective (Craddock 2017; Kantola and Lombardo 2017; Lombardo 2017).

Together with the economic crisis, a political turn occurred. Scholars have analysed the so-called backlash that in the last ten years has seen the alliances between far-right movements and religious movements tighten, often held together by criticism of gender theory and the restoration of a traditional order based on traditional family and conservative values (Zappino 2016). From a global perspective, abortion rights have been progressively restricted (as in the cases of Poland, Texas, and so on); laws against hate crimes have been increasingly opposed; and welfare policies have increasingly focused on a conservative twist based on family and the unpaid work of women. Over the last twenty years, the new paradigm of neoliberalism and “modern” societies has rebuilt part of their legitimacy on the promotion of LGBT rights. As Ayoub and Paternotte (2014) explain with regard to Europe, LGBT movements developed with specific ideas about democratic values, and the idea of Europe is related to the increase of LGBT rights. As a result, the construction of European “others” occurred (such as migrant people, Muslims and other “misfits”), with tangible consequences on migration policies, border control, and the rights to citizenship (Haritaworn *et al.* 2006; Duggan 2012; Ayoub and Paternotte 2014). This rhetoric has consolidated an “us” (Western, advanced, civilised, respectful of the rights of sexual minorities) against “them” (migrants, Muslims, backward, conservative, violent, sexist, homophobic). On the grounds of this opposition, the new border policies, the granting of citizenship, and the regulation of migratory flows have been legitimised. Through the concept of homonationalism, scholars have explored the complicity of the LGBT movement in the consolidation of a certain economic model and the idea of the nation, notwithstanding the exclusion of others, such as migrants, poor people

or people of a different religious background from that of the new idea of the nation (Puar 2007).

Quite paradoxically, this process of supposed development of civil values and human rights was followed a different and opposite process that has seen new right-wing and conservative movements increasingly present in the public sphere and involved in local government (Paternotte and Kuhar 2018; Prearo 2020). The advance of right-wing parties and movements, far-right populisms, and religious groups has also been based on a fight against the so-called gender theory. Included in this definition was the questioning of gender binarism; the development of an overly libertarian and uninhibited femininity; the questioning of the traditional family, marriage and reproductive obligation; care roles; and the fight against social expectations based on gender (Paternotte and Kuhar 2017). The advancement of civil and human rights was thus described as the drift of a modern capitalism in which traditional values and a certain political and social order seemed to be lost. In reaction to this, the conservative backlash has set out to restore a certain social and political order, a mission that has been partly successful in countries such as Hungary, the US and Brazil, whose governments have pursued strongly conservative policies (Kováts and Petö 2017; Payne and de Souza Santos 2020).

In this context, the last decade has seen a proliferation of feminist mobilisations, on the one hand against the subsumption of LGBT and feminist demands by neoliberalism, and on the other against the conservative backlash. The use of the term “gender ideology” put part of the feminist and LGBT heritage of thought, through some of its thinkers such as Judith Butler, on trial. Feminist movements, research centres, gender departments were thus called upon to position themselves in a public debate whose consequences risked being violent and very material (Petö 2017).

We are only recently beginning to have the historical perspective necessary to understand to what extent the context and political opportunity structure have favoured or limited the re-emergence of feminist movements. Undoubtedly, the conditions generated by the economic crisis, the political turn, and the shift to the neoliberal paradigm have fuelled collective reflections and emotions, prompting widespread public mobilisation. The reasons for the scale shift - from molecular and diffuse mobilisation to mass mobilisation - is an open question for contemporary researchers. Without presuming to give definitive answers, this article attempts to identify a series of characteristics that in this context are common to the new cycle of feminist mobilisations and protests, in a global perspective.

3. Feminist Space and Time

Up to a certain point, the mobilisations had a widespread but molecular character. From 2015 onwards, however, there was a scale shift. In June 2015, a series of mass protests took place in Argentina in response to the femicide of Chiara Paez, a 14-year-old woman murdered by her boyfriend (Terzian 2017). In Argentina, increasingly alarm on rates of violence against women (one woman killed every 31 hours, in the 90% of cases by partners or ex-partners) together with an economy based on debt have generated a wave of malaise that flowed into feminist mobilisations. Under the name “Ni Una Menos” (Not One Less) mobilisations and protests denounced violence, feminicides, and the ongoing mistreatment of women and LGBTQ subjects as a structural condition of contemporary capitalist society (Gago 2019). From that moment on, the ‘fever’ of mobilisation (Polletta 2009) spread to surrounding countries throughout Latin America, to Europe and Asia. In fall 2016, mobilisations and protests flood Polish cities against attacks on

abortion rights, and women march in Washington against the election of Donald Trump. In a very short time, the mobilisations turn into a global tide.

These rapidly spreading mobilisations had a number of features in common: their symbols and rituals (such as the triangular handkerchief - *pañuelos*), their claims, their slogans. But above all, a characteristic relating to space: mobilising from the Global South.

Historically, what are conventionally called waves of the movement (a concept I will try to problematise later) have been strongly Western-based, as in the case of the UK and the US and the mobilisations for the right to vote for women in the early 1900s (Rupp and Taylor 1989), or the US and Europe with the women's liberation movements from the 1960s onwards (Mohanty 1984; Gazzetta 2021). The fact that this narrative has been consolidated does not mean that other women's movements were not present elsewhere: to name but a few examples, the women involved in the liberation movements from slavery in Brazil (Ribeiro 2017), or the slow demand for women's rights in India (Chaudhuri 2005), or the role of women in the Iranian revolution (Scarcia Amoretti 2009). Quite simply, the strongly US-Eurocentric common sense has marginalised other histories of feminism, sedimented the narrative of a series of waves originating from and spreading mostly in the West. Something markedly different has happened in the last ten years. Unlike the past, the trigger for mobilisations and protests has been unquestionably and universally recognised as the Global South. Feminist movements in the Global South are significantly influenced by the peculiar history of this geographical area. The processes of colonisation and liberation struggles, the defence of territories from extractivism and capitalist accumulation of goods and resources, political instability and transitions. Between authoritarian and democratic regimes, the characteristics of neoliberalism and the spread of public and private debt are just some of the elements that have shaped the claims and forms of feminisms (Cavallero and Gago 2019). For this reason, the process of

diffusion from the south of the mobilisations has also contaminated the imaginary, the repertoire of action, the narratives, and the political culture of the contemporary feminist tide. If this process does not erase the imbalance of representation and power in feminisms globally, it undoubtedly represents a shift in the Eurocentric perspective that until recently oriented the political action of movements.

Just as space is a new element for contemporary feminists, so is time. Feminist movements have a karst pattern: in some phases mobilisations and protests are more intense, in others they seem to disappear. Yet, despite being less visible, they continue to exist through what Taylor calls “structures of abeyance” (1989). In their work on the supposed death and rebirth of the US women’s movement, Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor (1989) show that the conventional view of the first and second wave was inherently misleading. Between the movement for the amendment granting the right to vote, approved in 1920, and the women’s movement in the seventies, the movement kept organising. Strong links between the suffrage movement and the women’s movement of the seventies exist, in terms of groups, ideas, claims, affective ties. The analysis of continuous feminist mobilisations allowed to reorient the theory of protest cycle (Tarrow 1998). Whether conflict across the social system goes in cycle or waves, opposing challengers to authorities and possibly ending in reform, repression or revolution, it is also worthwhile assuming the persistence of movement structure (such as groups, free spaces, journals) that retain claims and organisation from one stage of mobilisations to the other. With this awareness, I will look at contemporary feminist mobilisations and protests, by stressing the continuity and changes of an ongoing existing movement, that goes under the name of feminism. This is why talking about waves risks, on the one hand, making the continuity of movements invisible, and on the other hand falling into a Eurocentric reading of mobilisations, as argued above. This article refers to the concept of tide, to try and accommodate

this critical posture towards the temporality of movements. As Cecilia Palmeiro argues (2020, 2):

The feminist adaptation of the concept mobilised the idea of a massive tide of feminised bodies, albeit without invoking an essential biological identity: the tide crosses borders, languages, identities, generations, ethnicities, and social classes - transversally, horizontally, intersectionally, and in solidarity. The notion of tide (*marea*), after having been widely adopted and redefined by Argentinean and Latin American feminism, has become one of the key conceptual tools produced by the movement to reflect on itself; and to do so in ways that are very different from the periodization of feminist waves in the global north which neglects feminist movements that originated in peripheral countries (indigenous, communitarian feminisms, non-western matriarchal cultures, etc.). Aquatic metaphors in both cases are useful in that they describe the different flows of energies that feminist social movements have deployed throughout history. In this case, the tide appears as the force that disrupts and displaces waves.

The concept of the tide has been frequently used in contemporary mobilisations to evoke the idea of a powerful force, which rises and swells as it goes, and after whose passage the landscape is changed. In the tide there are no singularities or groups, but the movement expresses a common and not fragmented force. At the theoretical level, the concept of the tide enables us to grasp the global dimension of contemporary mobilisations on the one hand, and their genealogical character on the other. Mobilisations are not born out of nothing, but are the fruit of everyday political action that over time has elaborated and reproduced a certain political culture and collective action (Taylor 1989; Rupp and Taylor 1989). As noted by Gago in reference to feminism in Argentina (2019), the feminist movement has staged an accumulation of previous struggles, of which she cites at

least four strands: the national women's meetings, which have been going on for 33 years in Argentina; the struggle for human rights carried on by the mothers and grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo; the struggles of sexual and gender dissidence; and the "piqueteros" movement of the unemployed, which arose in opposition to the economic crisis and the spread of debt. This genealogical approach makes it possible not only to identify continuities but also the plurality of themes that inform contemporary feminism. With respect to the Argentinian case, this appears in terms of sexual and gender perspectives, the struggle against the economic and colonial model, against authoritarian regimes and the cancellation of human rights.

Contemporary mobilisations and protests therefore bring about novelties in terms of space and time. The article now explores in more detail what kind of novelty they bring, and what continuities and changes they represent in the history of feminist movements.

4. Claims, Framing Processes and Ideology

Social movements constantly engage with the production of ideas, interpretation, meaning and claims about the social world. In the field of social movement studies, Benford and Snow (2000) define the framing process as the process through which social movements "frame, or assign meaning to and interpret relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists". The construction of a certain reading of the world constitutes the reference ideology of social movements, transforms the interpretive frames of the activists, and constitutes the compass through which to relate to the counterparts. It is also a necessary process for the formulation of claims through which the movement expresses its worldview and will for social transformation. In the case of the feminist movements, on a global level, the framing process, ideology and claims

were as manifold as possible, referring to different strands of the movement but also to the composition and different geographical areas. From the title of this article, “tide” is not only a heuristic device to grasp the characteristics of feminist movements but also a master frame mobilised by feminist movements. First, with regard to gender-based violence as a structure. This article tries to argue some passages in the framing process and claims that, on the one hand, represent a novelty in feminist movements, and on the other hand have been widely shared on a transnational level. Then, with regard to the shift from the concept of difference to that of intersectionality. Third, in terms of the critic to economic model and finally with respect to the incorporation of decolonial perspectives.

4.1. Gender Based Violence as a Structure

In the sixties and seventies, women of the global north, in self-consciousness raising groups, started from their own experience to recount the discomfort, doubts and anger of a life often constrained by very strict rules (Sarachild 2000). Through interaction with others, the story of individual discomfort became a tool for understanding the social structures that generated and reproduced that discomfort, not in an individual but in a systemic way. Violence against women was nothing new: already in the early 1400s, the first woman writer in Western history, Christine de Pizan, devoted many passages of her work “La Cité des Dames” to this theme, looking at Greek myths, history and representations (Caraffi 2017; Bonu 2021). Yet, never before has gender-based violence been analysed as a systemic element that organises social, economic, and political life.

Ni Una Menos mobilisations in Argentina were born out of anger and indignation at yet another femicide (Cirimele and Panariello 2018). The rates of violence against women and sexual dissidence signalled a non-emergency problem. Violence, in fact, is not the result of an impulse, of an emotion of the moment, of a mistake, but the fruit of a culture based on abuse and the systemic violation of

consent in interpersonal relations (Rovetto 2015). This relational system is the result of the social construction of the male gender (as the site of force, power, privilege, and abuse) and the female gender (as the site of care, vulnerability, and subordination). This binary construction of genders is functional to preserving a social but also economic order, as Silvia Federici recounts in her analysis of the original accumulation through witch-hunting (2015).

Feminist movements in the last 50 years elaborated on subjectivity, gender based violence and social structures (Russo and Pirlott 2006; Brubaker 2021). Gender-based violence is a systemic element that regulates relations between genders, production cycles, productive and reproductive work, and the relationship between human beings and the environment (Connell 2009). Abuse, as a habit in the interaction with feminised bodies, is the key to reframe the analysis of the social production of gender, the economic and productive model, the organisation of work, education, health, and the system of government (True 2012). The killing of women and trans people is the tip of the iceberg in a pyramid of violence that runs through the whole of society, ranging from the representation of bodies in the media, to the devaluation and gaslighting in interpersonal relationships, micro-aggressions and abuse, stalking and harassment, and psychological and economic violence (Watts and Zimmerman 2002). From this framing process on violence as a mechanism that organises the social structure comes the choice of claims, counterparts, and repertoires of action of the feminist movement.

The fight against gender-based violence can only be systemic, and therefore aimed at all the fields in which violence manifests itself: the neoliberal system, the job market, health and the healthcare system, education and the education system, colonial policies, extractivism, the environment, migration control and border politics, and the social construction of gender (Non una di Meno 2017). Feminism becomes a place from which to look at the totality of social structures

through the prism of violence. If violence is a structure, within that structure feminist movements express their agency, certainly influenced and limited by the structure of opportunities, but also capable to produce social changes (Anglin 1998; Fu 2015; Montesanti 2015).

4.2. From Difference to Transfeminism and Intersectionality

Historically, the so-called “waves” were considered as inspired by some hegemonic ideology. From the second half of the 1800s on, women’s groups developed within socialist circles and parties, by claiming women’s political and civil rights (Kennedy and Tilly 1987). Later, at the beginning of the 1900s, women’s groups engaged with the right to vote - especially in the UK and the US - in the so-called suffrage movement (Williams 2016). That period has been considered as emancipatory feminism, interested in the gain of rights and State recognition (Evans 2014). Instead, the feminist wave of the sixties and the seventies has been called liberation, because of the claims on the fight against patriarchy and the male-based social structure, that went far beyond the reformist claim on women’s rights (Evans 1995). As Clare Hemmings argues (2011), all the narratives of gain, loss, and return on feminist epistemology fail to understand a way more complex development of feminist thought and are usually crushed into Western-biased analysis. In fact, at the same time when so-called emancipatory feminism was at stake, Black women in the US engaged in a fight against white women because of the end of slavery and cultural subordination of Black women and men; as well as did other women’s groups all over the world (Hull *et al.* 1982; Taylor 2017). The narrative regarding feminist movements ideology and waves is often strongly Western, white, middle-class, educated, heterosexual, able-biased, and fails to report the stratification and complexity of feminist movements reflections all over the world. These often European and US-based narratives have social

consequences, because they produce the society's imaginary on movements and their claims.

In the last decades, the concept of difference has had a widespread diffusion. The feminism of difference finds its roots in the work of a number of feminists, in Europe and the US, including Luce Irigaray. Contesting Freud's psychoanalytical approach, this philosophical current of thought focused on the analysis of phallogocentrism, i.e. how Western reason, language, and culture were constructed from a neutral idea that ignored gender differences (Irigaray 1985). Up until then, women were considered as a mirror of men, but not in her radical difference. The thought of difference, or feminism of difference, therefore claimed a radical gender difference between women and men (Muraro 2017; Cavarero and Restaino 2002). This radical epistemic gesture made it possible to claim women's difference, including biological difference, and the need for knowledge that explored this difference independently. The thought of difference has developed and evolved, but over the years it has essentially dominated the Western feminist landscape. At the same time, there has been the development of queer theory and LGBTQIA+ movements, Black feminism, decolonial feminisms, but for a long time the paradigm of difference feminism seemed, at least at the level of narrative, hegemonic over other approaches. Some unintended consequences of difference thinking have been a progressive depoliticisation of women's assertion in the social structure (Rottenberg 2018), increasingly subsumed by the neoliberal paradigm and increasingly 'ancillary' to a certain capitalist economic model (Fraser 2013).

The new cycle of mobilisations and feminisms seems to have overcome the hegemony of feminism of difference. The thrust of movements from the global South has contaminated the narrative and the imaginary towards a clear reference to intersectionality and transfeminism (Chun *et al.* 2013; Lépinard 2014; Gago 2019; Evans and Lépinard 2019; Arfini 2020; Giorgi 2021). By intersectionality we

mean that part of feminist epistemology and practice which, from the reflections of the Combahee River Collective and feminist Afro-Brazilian collective onwards (Taylor 2017), has elaborated on the intersection of gender, race, class, age, religion and so on as a matrix of power that differentially distributes privileges and oppressions (Crenshaw 1991; Taylor 2017).

While the influence of Black feminism, decolonialism, and intersectionality theories emerges, so does the influence of queer, trans, and more generally LGBTQIA+ movements (Stryker 2004; Salamon 2008; Kaas 2016; Kirey-Sitnikova 2016; Puente 2016; Silva and Ornat 2016; Van der Merwe 2017; Bettcher 2017; Vergès and Bohrer, 2021). In this sense, the difference between men and women is opposed by the social production of gender, and the proliferation of different forms of gender incorporation and expression of sexuality. As Arfini argues (2020, 161):

The inclusion of trans perspectives into feminist politics is not, however, merely a matter of assimilation of certain identities into a given community, but of the recognition of shared needs, intersecting axes of oppression, projects of emancipation and coalition building. In particular, autonomy and self-determination - on one's own body and wellbeing - may inform feminist and trans politics alike.

The subjects incorporating feminism and claiming their own liberation through feminism are not only multiplying, but the claims of feminist movements are also changing. More than an additive process, it is therefore a transformative process of the concept of gender, power, social structures and social change.

This historical transition of feminist mobilisations into a global perspective represents, also in epistemological terms, the transition from the paradigm of the feminism of difference to the consolidation of a new intersectional and transfeminist standpoint.

4.3. Bringing Capitalism Back In

In order to overcome Marxist analysis and functionalist sociology, Alberto Melucci developed the definition of new social movements (1980). The emergence, from the sixties onwards, of social movements that were not strictly class-based, such as the women's movement and the environmental movement, required new analytical categories to grasp not only the economic but also the cultural, social, and political challenge posed by the movements. However, the assumption that the "defense of the identity, continuity, and predictability of personal existence is beginning to constitute the substance of the new conflicts" (Melucci 1980) sometimes seems to have taken an involuntary turn. Far from the sociological proposal of Melucci (*Ibidem*), Touraine (1975) and Pizzorno (1966), the unintended consequences of this brilliant turn in the discipline, sometimes called post-materialism (Inglehart 1977), have been the crushing of analysis on the individual dimension and identity, the relative loss of the materialist element that guides and informs the action of the new social movements, the prevalence of the symbolic and cultural element, a certain delegation of the sphere of the emotions to the domain of psychology.

As Ahäll argues (2018, 41):

Feminism is often simplistically assumed to be 'only' about women's lives and experiences, about 'identity politics'. However, as Marysia Zalewski points out, it is more appropriate to think of feminism as primarily concerned with the kinds of questions that are fundamentally about how the world works (Zalewski 2015, 4).

It is no coincidence that many feminist movements have been concerned from the outset with analysing the way in which the economic matrix is intertwined with the gender matrix. Class relations, the logic of profit, production cycles, productive and reproductive labour have been part of feminist thought, especially

with regard to Marxist feminism (Dalla Costa and James 1975; Kollontaj 1977) and materialist feminism (Claude-Mathieu 1984; Guillaumine 2002; Delphy 2016). In her inquiry on the transition from feudalism to capitalism during the 16th and 17th centuries, Federici (2004) argues that the emerging social and economic systems were grounded on the exploitation of women and witch-hunting. The accumulation of capital was enhanced through the implementation of enclosures and through the re-collocation of women in the private space, by dispossessing them of their capacities, social skills, knowledge, and role in the community. Whoever exceeded the emerging gender norms was considered as deviant and burned at the stake. Moreover, the production of the work force in the new capitalist system was meant to be reproduced by the invisible work of women. In her work *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, Maria Rosa Dalla Costa and James (1975) sketch out a critique to Marxist orthodoxy by proving that women's unpaid work at home is the pillar on which the exploitation of the waged labour and the capitalist productivity was built upon. Since then, the exploitation of women in the capitalist setting has changed form but not nature (Cornwall *et al.* 2008). By addressing the materialist side of women's oppression, feminist movements have been targeting social reproduction, on one hand, and the gendered economic and financial exploitation, on the other.

While Marxist, socialist and materialist feminisms have always developed a critic to the economic model (Dalla Costa and James 1975; Kollontaj 1977; Claude-Mathieu 1984; Guillaumine 2002; Federici 2004; Delphy 2016), this element seemed to have disappeared from their representation (McLaughlin 1999). The new cycle of feminist mobilisations and protests seems to have strongly brought capitalism back in. As Gago, Malo and Cavallero explain (2020, 18-19), there is a close correlation between gender-based violence and capitalism, which feminist movements have pointed to as a counterpart, even beyond the State:

the complexity of exploitation and domination is thus made visible in a way that does not result in impotence or cynicism, but rather highlights and disseminates the subjective and everyday articulations as a strategic factor in confronting the logics of violent accumulation of capital. That is: the feminist movement has actualized, in a popular feminist pedagogy, the organic relationship between violence against women and feminized bodies and the accumulation of capital, and has done so from a practice of insubordination.

On one hand, because of the way the economic structures are shaped upon social structures. As a consequence, the economic and financial structures reproduce marginalisation, the gender pay gap, indebtedness. On the other hand, from an historical point of view, because of the way the accumulation of capital has been built upon the subalternity of women. This correlation between the social structure, the economic model, and the gender regime will also be at the origin of the choice of certain collective actions, such as the feminist strike, as the next sections will explore.

4.4. Bodies, Ecofeminism and Decolonisation

As mentioned several times so far, the push for contemporary mobilisations and protests comes from the Global South (Cirimele and Panariello 2018). This has led to a much more systematic interweaving of a decolonial perspective with the feminist perspective. From a historical view, the feminist perspective has often been intertwined with the decolonial perspective. The analysis of the conquest of land has been compared to the conquest of women's body-territory (Gago 2019), in the same dynamic that Lugones calls "coloniality of gender" (2010). Arguing the concept, Lugones says (Ivi, 743):

Beginning with the colonization of the Americas and the Caribbean, a hierarchical, dichotomous distinction between human and non-human was

imposed on the colonized in the service of Western man. It was accompanied by other dichotomous hierarchical distinctions, among them that between men and women. This distinction became a mark of the human and a mark of civilization. Only the civilized are men or women. Indigenous peoples of the Americas and enslaved Africans were classified as not human in species—as animals, uncontrollably sexual and wild.

The logic of colonisation thus recalls the production of the gender regime but also the classification human-non-human, nature-artifice, and so on (Mies 1986; Warren 1997; Gaard 2017; Salleh 2017). Rethinking territories from a decolonial perspective therefore means rethinking contact with non-human beings, with the earth, with the planet (Haraway 2016; Kwaymullina 2018). Ecofeminism has developed this perspective, as Warren argues (1997, 4), by extending “familiar feminist critiques of social isms of domination (e.g. sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, anti-Semitism) to nature (i.e. naturism). [...] Nature is a feminist issue”.

An ambivalence exists, related to women’s body, mothering and care, as Ledda (2018) explores with regard to the Italian context.

Decolonial and ecofeminist perspectives are strongly present in Latin American feminisms. As Gago explains (2019, 118-119):

the subjugation of women, nature and colonies, under the watchword of ‘civilisation’, inaugurates capitalist accumulation and places the sexual and colonial division of labour at its base. The feminist movement, [...] drew the same connection but in a register of insubordination.

Feminist struggles have stood in the way of extractive mega-projects (such as soybean farms or deforestation), opposing the imperialist way of life with the logic of community and emotional ties (Gaard 2011). In this context, the definition of

the body-territory emerges as a concept that expresses the indissoluble link between corporality and land, extending the capacity to see and therefore to subvert the logic of domination (Gago 2019).

The perspectives of women from communities on the frontline of the defence of their territories are now an integral part of global feminist mobilisations, forcing the questioning of colonisation even in those countries that have acted rather than suffered it, and where the consequences of capitalism also impact on the territory. It is no coincidence that there are well-established alliances with environmental movements, such as Fridays for Future, and the feminist perspective has contaminated the framing process of those movements.

At the end of this analysis of the ideology of contemporary mobilisations, it seems possible to say that the breaking of the boundaries of the category of woman has taken place in a multiplicity of perspectives that focus on the social production of gender in its deep intertwining with the economic model, the system of development, coloniality, and extractivism.

5. Repertoire of Action

With the concept of repertoire of action the literature on social movement studies addresses the set of practices from which people can draw to oppose a decision in the public sphere they consider unjust. Charles Tilly, who coined the term, refers to claim-making actions and routines that groups engage with when they have to deal with their opponents (1986). This definition helps to capture the continuity in the type of actions implemented by social movements, but at the same time limits the possibility of capturing the innovation that movements sometimes bring.

Many scholars have tried to understand how power circulates and is codified within social movements (Della Porta and Rucht 2013). How does democracy work within social movements? How do they criticise representative democracy and call

for participatory and direct democratic practices? Contemporary feminist mobilisations and protests show an interesting example to address the issue.

Public protests and mass demonstrations took place in many squares around the world. Denunciations of gender-based violence, of attacks on the right to abortion, of wage inequality and of the border regime are just some of the grievances that have led thousands to mobilise. Yet, mass demonstrations do not come out of nowhere.

Public marches take place after long preparation, through local and national assemblies. Many of the contexts in which feminist movements have re-emerged over the last ten years have this characteristic: assemblies located in each city and neighbourhood, then brought together at varying intervals in national and transnational moments of confrontation. This modular but also reticular form has made it possible over time to reach people who would otherwise be unaware of the movement's existence, and also to structure forms of coordination of claims and actions beyond the local level.

According to the narrative of the movements, assemblies are supposed to be places of horizontal discussion, without representatives and without delegates, where the practice of thinking together is tested. As the sociology of organisation shows, full horizontality in human assemblies is never possible. Yet, through reasoning about power, it is possible to tend towards a constant questioning of the way decisions are made, the rhythms of collective reflection, and the internal roles of collective actors.

From the assemblies, protests are elaborated, and after the protests activists always return to the assemblies. In various parts of the world and with various dimensions, the assembly form has made it possible to materialise specific demands in a broad-based participation, and the organisation of extensive public protests.

Among the most innovative and disruptive forms of action developed in the assemblies is the feminist strike, which I will explore in the following section through the, still undeveloped, available literature.

5.1. *The Feminist Strike*

As already mentioned, feminist movements engaged with the critiques to economic model by revealing the dark side of productive work, namely the unpaid care and social reproduction work done by women (Dalla Costa and James 1975). The workforce is supported by the invisible labour of women, who provide for the emotional and material needs of their loved ones while enabling them to feed the production cycle.

Historically, the strike was the form of collective action through which workers interrupted the production cycle, backing out their work and thus causing damage to the employer and the factory. However, there have been cases of women's strikes, such as the women's strike in St Petersburg on 8 March 1917, in protest against the war, from which the date of 8 March was formalised as International Women's Day (Kaplan 1985). In this sense, there is a genealogy linking feminist movements to the collective action of the strike, and to the date of 8 March. The latter has always cyclically been a day of struggle. In the periods of lower visibility of feminist movements, such as those preceding the new phase of mobilisation, the day of the 8th seemed almost emptied of meaning in favour of a capitalist appropriation of the generic celebration of women. Starting in 2016, feminist assemblies in Argentina elaborated the idea of building the 8th of March as a feminist and transnational day of strike. Feminist movements envision it as a process and not as a single day. The construction of the strike, the networking between women workers' struggles and workplace conflicts, and the dissemination of claims are a path that feeds the sense of the strike and its effects within and beyond the day of 8 March. In the shift from mobilisations against gender-based

violence and femicide to the strike form lies the leap in scale to the mass movement, which politicises the terrain of violence and connects it to the economic, social, and political structure that is its framework.

The strike was born from the outset as a strike from productive work - and therefore wage labour - and from reproductive and care work - and therefore non-salaried work. This practice thus sheds light on the breadth of the concept of work and allows the removal of all forms of labour. In this sense, Gago (2019) states that the only general strike is the feminist strike, because it is the only strike that reveals and interrupts the productive cycle in all its breadth. The conjunction of violence and labour also shows the subordinate, marginalised and discredited role of women in the capitalist structure. That is why if women stop, as a famous slogan says, the world stops. It is not only assembly lines, schools and businesses that stop, but also families, the domestic sphere and life in its fullest sense. Subtraction makes women's work visible by showing, through their absence, the systemic function of their paid and unpaid work. More than 50 countries around the world and 200 cities joined the first strike in 2017. With regard to Spain, Ines Campillo argues (2019, 252):

According to the main unions, six million workers joined the (partial) strike, which had a great impact on the education system, health services, public administration and transportation (Público, 8 March 2018). [...] TV programming had to be modified because female journalists and presenters, including mainstream, popular hosts, were on strike. Even Queen Letizia emptied her schedule for the day. Beyond the different estimates and numbers, one thing was crystal clear: women had taken the public space; there were protests with pots and pans, blockages of train lines and streets, picket lines, mass meetings, parades and demonstrations. Indeed, according to the organizers, the main demonstration in Madrid gathered around one million people; the one in Barcelona gathered 600,000; the one in Seville, more than

100,000; and the ones in the Basque Country reunited more than 130,000 people (La Vanguardia, 9 March 2018). But the mobilization wave reached for the first time other smaller towns and villages all over the country.

Since 2017, the global feminist strike has continued every 8 March until now, in 2022. As Campillo (*Ibidem*) argues, the feminist strike is a great example of innovation, in terms of repertoire of action, put forward by contemporary feminist mobilisations.

5.2. Performance and Direct Social Action

The feminist strike was a great form of innovation, but not the only one. On 25 November 2019, World Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, dozens of women lined up in front of the Supreme Court in Santiago, Chile. They had black blindfolds over their eyes, performing through the rhythmic sound of a drum, and sang a war chant accompanied by a series of gestures. The name of the performance was “Un violador en tu camino” (a rapist in your path). With the performance, the feminist collective of artists #LasTesis denounced the more than 42 sexual abuses per day - one every two hours - in Chile, 92% of which go unpunished. Revolts against social inequalities and against the brutality of law enforcement and state forces are joined by feminist protests.

In a short time, the performance went beyond the borders of Chile and multiplied in dozens of countries and cities. Thanks to new technologies and a renewed transnational attention, the rhythmic sound of the drum resonated globally, bringing feminist movements to the centre of public space and media attention (Serafini 2020). Several times contemporary feminist mobilisations have recalled performative actions. The intertwining with feminist art, the role of image, and the logic of social media have increasingly pushed towards the development of performative actions capable not only of transforming urban

space, but also of being repeated in various countries around the world (Diamond *et al.* 2017; Pavan and Mainardi 2018).

Along with performative actions, direct social action also plays a central role. Direct social action is historically part of the action of feminist movements: *ollas populares* (popular canteen), self-help workshops, counselling centres, anti-violence centres, abortion counselling are just some of the forms feminist movements developed. The actions do not address the State but intervene directly in their social reality to transform it. As Bosi and Zamponi argue (2015, 369), these are forms of action “that aim at directly changing, by means of the very action itself, some specific aspects of society without being primarily oriented towards securing the mediation of public authorities or the intervention of other actors”. This type of action combines mutualism with prefigurative politics. The use of this type of action has become increasingly common in contemporary mobilisations. In fact, beyond public protests, it is intervening directly in reality that allows feminist movements to produce social change, and to spread awareness and change in material living conditions. The attacks on the right to abortion in various parts of the world, for example, have made it necessary to develop a network of self-help to accompany women to abortion, even when it is not legally permitted (Braine and Velarde 2022). The worsening of living conditions during the pandemic, the impoverishment and loneliness experienced by women in particular (Dang and Nguyen 2021), made it necessary to increase food distribution, self-managed soup kitchens and feminist mutualist networks (Tolbert 2020).

These examples show how the repertoire of contemporary feminist mobilisations combines the personal and the political, the public and the intimate, street protests and direct action.

6. A Global Perspective

This article attempts to draw some suggestions to understand similarities and differences of contemporary feminist mobilisation. It does so from a global perspective. This perspective makes it possible to grasp the transnational scale which, although it has always existed, is in this specific case more structured and visible, and on the other hand to identify how precisely at the transnational level common frameworks have been elaborated between mobilisations in various parts of the world. In order to understand the relationship between global and local scales, I will elaborate on these two levels. I will then refer to transnational alliances and finally explore the role that social media and digital platforms have played in the global coordination of mobilisations.

6.1. G/local Mobilisations and Transnational Alliances

Contemporary mobilisations take place in a specific place and time: in a square, in a street, in a building, in a field, in a city. In this sense, they are closely linked to the territory in which they take place, they gather the demands of that territory and are elaborated from the grievances and shortcomings of the place. At the same time, they take place on a transnational scale, often in a coordinated manner. This double level is one of the strong features of contemporary movements.

As Gago develops (2019), the local dimension fuels the spread and radicality of feminist mobilisations. The proximity with the territory and its inhabitants allows processes of participation but also of effectiveness of demands. The struggle of the mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, the women involved in the critique of the development model in India, the claim of the right to drive in Saudi Arabia are just some of the specific and localised struggles that have fuelled large-scale feminist mobilisation processes (see DWF 2021). At the local level, the mobilisations were reformist and revolutionary in nature. Reformist in the sense

of interaction with unions, parties, and institutions in the modification of unjust political structures, without losing at the same time a revolutionary tension towards the general modification of those structures, beyond local specificities. The new cycle of mobilisations has allowed these local mobilisations to find a common frame of reference, media resonance and thus increased effectiveness. How did this conjunction of local and global come about?

The concept of transnationalism, not internationalism, refers to the relations and processes among actors beyond and over borders, and/or to the symbolic rupture of the boundaries of the nation-state, and the multiplicity of territorial identifications that exist even within individual countries (Schiller *et al.* 1992; Go and Krause 2016). Since 2015, rather than a phenomenon of spreading mobilisations, a reverberation has occurred. Slogans, symbols, and claims have travelled between countries as they resonated with specific and situated struggles. This reverberation produced on the one hand a common frame, and on the other a common affective belonging to that frame (Taylor and Rupp 2002).

In the climate of renewed activation by feminist movements, individual complaints by film and entertainment stars, through the #MeToo campaign, denouncing abuse and harassment in the workplace, found resonance (Ghadery 2019).

The strike represents the form of action through which the mobilisations have coordinated. The 25th of November and the 8th of March have been adopted on a transnational level as days of mobilisation, with similar political frames of reference. However, some steps have marked the consolidation of this network, such as at the end of March 2019 in Verona, when Non una di meno (NUDM) organised a procession in response to the World Congress of Families (which brought together anti-gender and far-rights movements internationally). The days of “Verona transfeminist city” become an opportunity to meet and coordinate. Kurdish, Polish, Swiss, US-American and Argentinean activists were present. As

Cossutta and Habed argue (2021, 148), “NUDM offered a mode of action alternative to the single vision of society promoted by the organizers of the WCF. For transfeminist activists, political action is nourished by plurality and grounded in intersectionality”.

Subsequently, the transnational network of feminist movements consolidated, also on the impulse of the Chilean Coordinadora 8M. Feministas Transfronterizas was born, whose first assembly, in early February 2020, saw the participation of more than 400 activists from around the world. The network’s first joint action, on 1 May, occurred online due to the pandemic. The participants in the call were so many that, taking turns, someone left the online platform to allow someone else to enter.

With these steps, feminist mobilisations consolidated a form of global coordination. What was previously a reverberation became a network of transnational alliances.

6.2. Media and Transnational Diffusion

The reverberation and transnational alliances have been possible because of the changed context, the propulsive force of the mobilisations, but above all because of the new technologies and social media platforms. Social movement scholars engaged with the analysis of the intersection between social movements and social media platforms - such as Facebook, Tweeter, Instagram and so on (Mattoni and Treré 2014). The global justice movement developed technical skills, as the creation of the alternative informational website Indymedia, that allowed for the spreading of alternative information, for more internal transparency and diffusion tools (Della Porta and Mosca 2005). These platforms became progressively more widespread, more numerous and more intertwined with people’s daily lives and therefore also with movements. Despite a questioning approach to the use of social media, the feminist movement has also developed technological capabilities and

an online presence over time (Ott 2018). Social media have become particularly relevant in contemporary mobilisations. The platforms multiplied images of the marches in Argentina in 2015, also thanks to the existence of alternative news channels; they disseminated the video of the LasTesis performance, allowing its repetition around the world; they allowed the connection between activists thanks to call-in and webinar platforms. The pandemic worked as an accelerator of this process, giving space for an ambivalent possibility of online activation despite offline social distancing. The use of social media activates feminist solidarity, both in a political and emotional sense. Contact with images and videos activates an emotional reaction in people, an involvement through nonconscious and non-mediated affects. Much of the diffusion, visibility, and transnational alliances can be attributed to the use of digital platforms, which, combined with the structure of political opportunities and the organisational strength of mobilisations, have driven the tide.

As Elena Pavan and Arianna Minardi (2018, 418) explain in relation to the study of tweets circulated before and during the dates of 8 March and 25 November 2017 in Italy in connection with the NUDM movement:

Not only these networks matter as they enrich the relational milieu of contemporary mobilizations. They nurture collective action dynamics insofar as they enable the continuous circulation of ideas, inputs, and frames which are integrated and provide an overall shared symbolic universe under which collective action can be undertaken. More importantly, our analysis highlights that the actual mode in which structural and ideational integrations occur within these online networks is not unique. Rather, it depends on how digital media are embedded within specific protest moments - depending on and, at the same time, contributing to shape them.

7. Conclusion: Toward Feminist Mainstreaming Between Gain and Losses

In her 1972 poem *Diving into the Wreck*, Adrienne Rich (2020, 102) tells of the exploration of a wreck: “I came to explore the wreck./The words are purposes./The words are maps./I came to see the damage that was done/and the treasure that prevail”. The poem recalls the link with the water element, which, as mentioned in the previous sections, has profound analogies with the feminist movement. Moreover, Rich tells of the desire to explore a submerged and ambivalent world, in which elements of risk and damage coexist with ‘treasures’ to be discovered. In an arguably more modest way, this article is driven by the same desire to explore and attempt to navigate the risks and treasures of a new phase of feminist mobilisations.

In the article, I have tried to outline some of the common elements of contemporary feminist mobilisations from a global perspective, starting with a consideration of space (from the Global South) and time (a continuous, non-linear time). From the point of view of the framing process, it is possible to observe a shift in ideology from the concept of difference to that of intersectionality. More than ever, the critique of the gender regime is intertwined with the critique of the capitalist economic model. It is precisely the fact that they come from the Global South that has increased a decolonial and ecofeminist reading, around the concept of body-territory. Another field of substantial innovation is the repertoires of action, from the point of view of organisation, feminist strike, performance, and direct social action. Much more than in the past, a transnational network has been consolidated, allowing mobilisations to “travel” in time and space, thanks also to the media and new technologies.

Recent mobilisations and protests have had the capacity to broaden political participation and bring feminist issues to the forefront of the media, the public debate and, in some cases, the political agenda. Intended and unintended

consequences followed, not necessarily in accordance with what transnational feminist movements would have wished for. This phenomenon is evident from a number of elements. For example, the approval on 30 December 2020 of the law on abortion in Argentina, which amended the previous law, in force since 1921, which considered abortion a crime except in cases of sexual violence and risk of death for the mother. As another example, the massive dissemination of feminist literature, translations, thematic publishing houses. Or also, the spread of gender mainstreaming (among other things, with the introduction of the Gender Equality Plan in the context of research organisations and higher education institutions) in the policies of the European Union. Or how the spread of “feminism” as a slogan or feminist phrases, symbols and language in fashion and clothing, through a branding operation by stylists, clothing industries and major brands. Or even as the spread of influencers on social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tik Tok) who produce content on the topic of feminism. It is not possible to assert a causal link between the spread of sensitivity towards feminist issues and contemporary mobilisations. This is the typical problem of “measuring” the outcomes of social movements, whereby in looking at the results (at the political, social, biographical level) all factors must be taken into account, such as context, changing social and economic conditions, political transitions (Bosi and Uba 2009). At the same time, it is undoubtedly possible to attribute to contemporary feminist mobilisations the effort to spread the message and the attempt to speak out more and more widely in the public sphere.

This is a new phase, in which the term “feminist” has been given new meanings, different from those that signalled ten years ago Abbatecola, Fanlo Cortes and Stagi in the first editorial of this journal. In a different political opportunity structure, feminism seems to have opened a way to sensitise new generations, to develop new languages, to implement knowledge about gender and sexuality, to

change gender expectations and gender identifications. What is won and what is lost if feminism goes mainstream?

Undoubtedly, as some authors have already pointed out, this provokes processes of neoliberal appropriation of feminism and, consequently, the weakening of its transformative struggles (Fraser 2013; Rottenberg 2018). Gender mainstreaming programmes are often oriented towards supporting female entrepreneurship and, in the cases of developing countries, micro-credit. Women are thus taken into account - often only - as subjects to be valued in the capitalist market. Emancipation is understood in an economic sense and is perfectly consistent with the social order. If feminist movements propose a radical subversion of the gender regime and of the social structures that allow its reproduction, the inclusion of some of the feminist claims in government policies and rhetoric runs the risk, on the one hand, of weakening the scope of those claims, and, on the other, of weakening the capacity for action of the movements, which seem less legitimate to express their claims when they seem to have been already resolved. This strategic move allows the social system to preserve the gender order, and thus the distribution of the burden of care, income inequality, social roles and roles in intimate relationships, and the status in the political arena, while manifesting an apparent equality based on inclusion in some of the functions compatible with the economic order, such as profit, competition, productivity. It is no coincidence that feminism has become a brand. In the transition to commercialisation, the subversive reach of feminist claims is downgraded, and the ideas of the movement become liable to be used again in the neoliberal market circuit (Koyama 2006; Fraser 2013; Rottenberg 2018). It is also no coincidence that the dissemination of feminist reflections through social networks also takes place through forms of individual activation, outside of collective action, and therefore outside of any real possibility of organisation and intervention in the mechanisms of social inequality (Rockler 2006).

Moreover, far-right and anti-gender movements seem to have intensified the radicality and conservatism of their anti-feminist stances. The spread of an apparent gender progressivism, which is mirrored by gender mainstreaming, branding and social networks, is matched by a reaction of strong conservatism stirred up by the threat to the social order based on the family and the subordination of women, lesbians, trans and non-binary people (Verloo 2018; Paternotte and Kuhar 2018; Lavizzari 2019; Lavizzari and Prearo 2019). Feminism going mainstream, in this case, does not produce real consequences in terms of women's material lives, but it does produce consequences at the level of narrative and imagination. The battle of anti-gender and far-right groups therefore moves on a material level while referring to elements of narrative, and in this way, here too, it produces violently material consequences (Verloo 2018).

Therefore, much remains to be understood about gain and losses in the mass dissemination of feminism. Yet, there is no doubt that the phase of contemporary feminist mobilisations seems to be bearing results. And these results are also significantly contributing to social change.

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