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Journal of Latin American Geography, Volume 18, Number 3, October 2019, pp. 202-209 (Article)

Published by University of Texas Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/lag.2019.0047>



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Rethinking Situated Knowledge from the Perspective of Argentina's Feminist Strike

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HOW HAS FEMINISM IMPACTED INVESTIGATION and intervention, and ways of linking both practices? Here a first question emerges that we take as our premise: There are explicit connections between the movement of thought and social movements. That is, there is a direct (but not simple) relationship between what we can read, perceive, and conceptualize and the extent to which we are part of and/or connected to the dynamics of struggle that displace our understanding of what is taken as possible. As we know thanks to many feminist reflections, recognizing that connection, that dependence, implies letting go of the division between the subject who researches and the object that is made passive as the researched. But it also implies questioning what is called objectivity, which, as Donna Haraway has masterfully explained, is generally solved with the law of the father: That is, “always already absent referents, deferred signifieds, split subjects, and the endless play of the signifier” (Haraway, 1991, p. 184). It is not an issue of throwing out the notion of objectivity, but rather reformulating it in the wake of what this very text proposes: Feminist objectivity is situated knowledge. Our reflections

here are situated in the recent experience of the feminist movement in Argentina.

THE STRIKE AS A KNOWLEDGE EXPERIENCE

Argentina's massive, popular, and radical feminist movement has revitalized political struggles in the country, building a transversal movement capable of challenging multiple forms of violence that have differential impacts on women and feminized bodies. It has done so by opening up new forms of knowing and inventing new political tactics by weaving together different know-hows and knowledges based on a multiplicity of heterogeneous concrete bodies and experiences. Writing from this feminist movement, and situated within the experience of the feminist strike, we show how the strike, as a process, calls into question hegemonic forms of knowing and assumptions about the subject of that knowing, through embodied and embedded processes of investigation and knowledge creation that produce new subjects, new concepts, and new internationalist and plurinational alliances.

In the face of increasing patriarchal violence, calling for a strike allowed the feminist movement to take the offensive, to go

from mourning to expressing rage on the streets. The successive feminist strikes, in October 2016, then in March 2017, and again in March 2018 and 2019, have also produced ways of knowing, allowing us to map feminized labor and the multiplicity of forms of value production, based on disobedience to and refusal of the injunction to labor. This knowledge production is compositional, creating uncanny alliances and heterogeneous subjectivities. As a productive and generative process, it challenges pre-established categories and boundaries between subjects, concepts, and geographies, overturning colonial-capitalist-patriarchal classifications and binaries.

EMBODYING KNOWLEDGE

The feminist strike, as an ongoing and evolving practice, involves assemblies and meetings, work stoppages and blockades, encounters between women and other forms of being together, and practices of care and of invention among women (Menéndez, 2018). As such, the strike involves diverse forms of collective and embodied knowledge production that challenge clear divisions between scholars and activists. Not knowledge in the abstract, this feminist know-how, based on situated knowledge-practices in concrete territories and bodies, implies other ways of knowing, valuing the knowing body, sensibilities, and intuitions. This knowing-from-the-body challenges the colonial-capitalist-patriarchal unconscious by questioning pre-established identities and reactionary fears and creating new forms of desire and subjectivities (Rolnik, 2019). Rivera Cusicanqui (2018) also speaks of the importance of the body, of weaving together manual

tasks with intellectual ones, thinking with the hands, heart, and brain at the same time in everyday collective practices as in important feature of these new waves of movements.

The strike as an action and as a process serves a double role: both a political tactic and a research methodology, making demands and inventing new worlds. The feminist strike adds another layer to the traditional tool of the labor movement: The subject of the feminist strike is not predetermined; it does not exist before the strike itself. The call to strike convenes all of us: housewives, workers in the formal and informal economy, teachers, members of cooperatives, the unemployed, those employed part-time or intermittently, the self-employed, full-time mothers, activists, women organizing soup kitchens and food banks, retired women, etc. (for an example, see Ni Una Menos, 2018). It is in this sense that the strike functions as a new form of practical cartography of labor from a feminist register (Gago, 2019a). By calling upon us to stop working, the strike makes visible all of the ways and the places in which women and feminized bodies labor, whether paid or unpaid, recognized or unrecognized, formal or informal: affective labor, emotional labor, care labor, organizational labor, cognitive labor, material labor, etc. The labors pile up; we can map where and how women and feminized bodies work, and, making visible a form of labor that relies on invisibility and non-recognition for its hyper-exploitation, we change its conditions.

ASSEMBLIES

Assemblies that proliferate in times and spaces, that produce their own times and

spaces in the process, function as situated apparatuses of collective intelligence. That is, through thinking together, based on concrete bodies and experiences, an idea is elaborated that did not exist before the assembly itself. In this process, categories and identities are called into question, not because differences cease to exist, but because they are traversed. New subjectivities are constructed and composed. In these processes, thinking and doing are not separated, but the essential embodied nature of all thought is highlighted; the materiality of thought and its thinkers. It is in this way that the feminist strike and its constituent process functions as a form of knowledge production, as a knowledge practice that challenges different borders of thought and action.

Here the positions of activist and scholar become confused and blurred precisely because nowhere is safe. Academia is certainly not safe from misogynist violence and patriarchal hierarchies. But neither are the household, the park, the soccer stadium, etc., safe from feminist thought—knowledge practices that question the assumed and naturalized hierarchies and violence, put them in connection with others, and politicize them in new ways. Scholar and activist, rather than set positions, are better understood as types of doing; that through doing them together in assemblies, strikes, encounters, and thousands of conversations, create new alliances and new subjectivities and set in motion new struggles. These practices involve concrete bodies and experiences generating ways of knowing in particular situations. By theorizing based not only on one's own position and experiences, but in direct

connection with other bodies, other experiences, categories such as inside and outside are problematized, positions prove to be in constant mutation.

The embedded and embodied form of understanding violence, dispossession, and exploitation enables a questioning that runs transversally across different spaces: from the family to the union, from the university to the community center, from the border to the plazas. It does so by giving this questioning a material, corporeal anchor. Therefore, while violence displays differentiated types of oppression and exploitation, expressed in concrete bodies, the process of mapping it nourishes new forms of solidarity and sorority. It is what has allowed the formation of the interunion that historically brought together women from the distinct union federations to develop a situated analysis of contemporary labor conditions and a new repertoire of actions; a reading group of *Caliban and the Witch* in a shantytown that uses the text to develop its own analysis of the violence of ongoing primitive accumulation; a writing workshop in a women's prison to turn a critique of the violence of debt into poetry (Cavallero & Gago, 2019). Yet, we must emphasize, the common element is not violence, but the common is produced by the situated and transversal questioning of violence. Connecting violence creates a shared perspective that is both specific and expansive, critical but not paralyzing, that links experiences, producing a language that goes beyond categorizing ourselves as victims, that allows us to build our capacities and generate new alliances.

MAPPING VIOLENCE

As a specific, situated form of knowledge production and theoretical practice, the process of the feminist strike allows for expanding and pluralizing our understanding of violence based on concrete situations. This practice calls into question certain conceptual borders between notions that have been theorized as discrete phenomenon, and functions instead as a form of connection between different sites and different types of violence. In other words, it is a different form of building knowledges, with different effects and contents. This expansion and pluralization of our understanding of violence is strategic in a political sense: It creates intelligibility and thus displaces the abstract and totalizing figure of the victim, instead generating new forms of political subjectivation.

This feminist practice starts from concrete experiences, from building common connections and constructing cartographies, not from the identification of universalizing categories accounting for abstract ideas. Through assemblies, strikes, and myriad other encounters and moments of shared thought, the forms of violence against women's and feminized bodies are analyzed based on singular situations and on particular bodies and experiences, and from there a comprehension of violence as a complete phenomenon is produced. Each person's body, as a trajectory and experience, thus becomes the entry point, a concrete mode of localization, from which a specific point of view is produced that allows us to understand the whole.

This work of weaving together different situations and struggles produces a political cartography that connects the threads that

make different forms of violence operate as interrelated dynamics. With this perspective we escape the confines of gender-based violence by linking gendered violence to the multiple forms of violence that make it possible. The viewpoint generated in the feminist strike connects households imploded by domestic violence to lands razed by agribusinesses and assassinated campesina and environmental activists, with the wage gap throughout industries and academia and invisibilized care work; it links the violence of austerity and budget cuts to women's protagonism in popular economies and to financial exploitation through public and private debt (Gago, 2019b). It shows how lack of economic autonomy and violence in the labor sphere subject women and feminized bodies to violence in the household and increases their vulnerability to the violence of debt. But it also highlights how debt and multiple forms of violence expand to capture and restrain women's capacity for resistance, their networks of popular economy that they construct, and the webs of mutual aid that they weave (Cavallero & Gago, 2019).

Tracing the modes of connection of different forms of violence allows us to build a complete understanding of the contemporary complex of capitalism-patriarchy-colonialism (Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2018) through its concrete manifestations. It shows how the gendered differential of exploitation is fundamental, not an accidental or secondary characteristic, to domination and exploitation, and how ongoing violence is necessary to the maintenance of capitalism. This perspective, based on concrete lives and bodies, breaks down conceptual borders between catego-

ries of reproduction and production, formal and informal labor, the public and private spheres as relics of a form of theorization that took the white, heterosexual, male body to be the norm. The perspective of the feminist strike, as an act of mapping, shows how the labor of women and feminized bodies has always existed across these spheres, mixing and combining them in ways that defy the binaries that are essential to the functioning of domination and challenge the institutions and practices that maintain them (Gago & Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2018).

The feminist strike is built on and through that understanding of the multiplicity of laboring subjects and forms of exploitation and extraction, and the connections between them. Building on that understanding, struggles led by Indigenous and campesina women throughout Latin America have invented the idea-force of the “body-territory.” The notion itself ties together a perspective that explains how today the exploitation of territories is structured in a neo-extractive mode, and how that also reconfigures the exploitation of labor, mapping the effects on everyday life produced by the dispossession of the commons. The body-territory is a practical concept that demonstrates how the exploitation of common, community (urban, suburban, campesino, and Indigenous) territories involves violating the body of each person and the collective body through dispossession. And it is strategic: It links struggles to recuperate land and territory to struggles against both the violence of war and domestic violence, to struggles against neo-extractivist devel-

opment—but again, not based on victimhood but on a collective desire to live (Tzul, 2018).

THINKING INTERNATIONALLY

This rejuvenated (but also transgenerational) feminist wave, and the ongoing process of the feminist strike, has become a global phenomenon, inverting a dominant geography of exploitation and extraction. The feminist strike that became global—with more than fifty countries participating in the March 8, 2019, strike—emerged from the South, with strong roots in Latin America, in multiple layers of histories, struggles, movements, and organizations. As we described above, it has also included a work of theorization from the South, inverting a dominant academic geography where the South serves as the empirical basis for thought constructed in the North (Gago, 2017). The feminist strike has nurtured an internationalism that disrupts the scales, scope, and forms of coordination of a movement that continues expanding without becoming diluted, precisely through multiple situated processes of translation.

This internationalism challenges both the geographic imagination and the organizational imagination: It travels through transborder circuits, without a centralized structure, transforming through engagements with concrete situations and translated interpretations. It is an internationalism that was imagined in Mexican prisons and maquilas (Draper, 2018; Gago, 2018), and that builds on that potent question posed a decade earlier by precarious women workers in Madrid: “What is your strike?” (*Precarias a la Deriva*, 2004). It is inspired by struggles

for autonomy in Rojava and Chiapas and communitarian struggles in Guatemala, by Chilean students and favela dwellers in Brazil, by campesinas in Paraguay, and by Afro-Colombian women struggling for territory. It is an internationalism that directly links domestic territories—from women workers struggling against racism in the gated communities of the Nordelta in Argentina, to those in Madrid using creative organizational forms and tactics to highlight and fight discrimination, to Latin American migrant women in the United States connecting violence in the household workplace to racist and xenophobic public policies.

Calls and communiques are translated and circulate through networks of activists and the constant labor of translators, without relying on a political party, internationally funded NGOs, or other centralized structures. Social media and messaging apps play their role, but even more important are the affective networks constructed through face-to-face encounters and friendships cultivated across borders over decades. Rather than forming a shared program, imposed from above, calls take on their own forms as they are translated into specific situations. Slogans travel and transform, allowing for knowledges and experiences to be shared across localities and across borders. Struggles against feminicide in Latin America are connected to everyday sexism and the erasure of feminized knowledges in the global university (Almenara et al., 2016). In the San Francisco Bay Area, the strike becomes a gender strike, calling into question the everyday performance of gender. Cries of “me too” transform into “we strike” when imbued with

the lessons of the feminist strike from Latin America (Mason-Deese, 2018).

Unusual and unprecedented alliances are formed in each specific place where this internationalism takes root. We see alliances between women laid off from textile factories and students fighting against education cuts; between Indigenous women in rebellion and community organizers in neighborhoods of the urban periphery. Therefore, what characterizes this feminist movement is that it is able to take root and territorialize itself in concrete struggles and to produce links and analyses based on those struggles. Those alliances are what allows for going beyond a methodological nationalism, to not assume a nation-state geometry or abstract notions of class or the people. Rather, we build an analysis that interprets global processes starting from concrete manifestations in particular territories.

The very meaning of internationalism expands and is now interwoven with the plurinational question, a demand raised by different movements in Latin America. The internationalist dimension thus also becomes a method. The perspective of feminists without borders is interwoven with a diagnosis of the counter-offensive (of a whole series of reactionary responses to the massive feminist rebellion) that complicates and exceeds nation-state frameworks because it includes the Vatican and media corporations, state and parastate militarization, the masculinist violence of drug trafficking organizations, transnational corporations that push free trade agreements, and their allies in the Women20-G20 and other institutions claiming to represent women in the name

of “development” (Paley, 2016; Gago, 2019b).

This already existing internationalism is put in practice through ongoing, daily practices of translation, dialogue, and negotiation. It does not require the abstraction of struggles in favor of programmatic unity or by adhering to a structure. This internationalist practice is a knowledge practice that qualifies each concrete situation: It makes individual

struggles richer and more complex without having to abandon their rootedness. The movement is amplified through connections with conflicts and experiences, by making the strike an excuse for meetings and investigations in each different site. That is, this internationalist, feminist thought is constructed *from* the territories and bodies in struggle.

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