

# LET'S NOT TALK ABOUT IT

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Feminism and populism in Argentina

Since the emergence of #NiUnaMenos [Not One Less] in 2015, feminism has become widespread in Argentina.<sup>1</sup> Nowadays, actions such as to identify oneself as a feminist, to cite her slogans, to use her handkerchiefs, to hold her flags, are no longer conceived as minority, elitist or radicalized practices. Feminisms are becoming more common. They slip into every day and ordinary experiences, and advocates and allies of their causes appear in the most unlikely places and contexts. There are feminists in political parties, in the state, in unions, in universities, in secondary schools, in companies, in religious groups, among housewives and among the *Madres y Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* [Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo].<sup>2</sup> As one of its flags usually holds, there are “feminists everywhere”.

**IN THIS ESSAY** we aim to offer an exploratory account of the conditions that have made this unusual scenario possible. In particular, we consider how the heterogeneous groups that gathered under the scream “*Ni Una Menos!*” have become part of a feminist “us”. That is, what were the conditions that enabled the current expansion of what is known as *the green and violet tide*<sup>3</sup> of feminism? How have the feminists’ demands articulated multiple claims and dimensions of social protest related to economic, social, cultural and racial issues? With these questions in mind, we will begin by exploring how this expansion has been addressed by the existing literature, focusing on the approach of Graciela Di Marco,<sup>4</sup> in whose view this process must be understood within the framework of the successful construction of a “feminist people”. Taking on this approach – while nonetheless

marking our differences – we will go on to explain the conditions that from our perspective enabled feminism to become popular. Firstly, we will point to the relationship that feminist groups have established with human rights activism since the early 80s. Later, we will direct attention to the effects of displacement resulting from the political articulation that took place in the new millennium between human rights groups and the political force that was in government for almost a decade, *Kirchnerism*. As we will show, this political process decisively affected the feminist movements and the positions they hold in the social and political arena at the present time.

## Dress for success: constructing “the people”

The expansion of local feminisms is provoking intense debates within different social and political spaces in Argentina. In the academic world, it has awakened an unusual interest in gender issues and motivated interesting and lucid reflections on the reasons that led to this changing reality for feminist struggles. In this respect, interventions by academics and activists proliferated on social networks and in the media, staging the multiple aspects of this phenomenon and the variety of ongoing research that addresses it. Many of these interventions focus, time and again, on the probable source or origin of the awakening of this massive feminist mobilization, attempting to find the key to understanding and explaining this unexpected situation.

Graciela Di Marco is one of the first intellectuals to approach this process of expansion, pointing to the way local activists succeeded in constructing a “feminist people”.<sup>5</sup> As Di Marco shows,

it was during the mobilization process in the face of the social and political crisis that took place between 2001 and 2002 in the country,<sup>6</sup> when feminist groups began to organize and connect with other women's fronts in a way previously unthinkable. The *Campaña por el Aborto Legal, Seguro y Gratuito* [Campaign for Free, Safe and Legal Abortion] was the main initiative through which they began this gradual but effective process of articulation with different activist groups. Di Marco points out that, whereas in the 90s convergence between feminist demands and the broader agenda of social movements seemed highly unlikely, in the post-crisis context feminists began to value women's participation in grassroots and popular groups (such as *piqueteras*,<sup>7</sup> assembly members, trade unionists) and to recognize the need to articulate with these groups to accompany and influence their struggles. "Popular feminism" would then emerge in this new scenario from the alignment of feminist activists with women from popular sectors. According to Di Marco, this was made clear in the 2003 *Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres* [National Women's Meeting],<sup>8</sup> when there was a turning point in feminist strategies insofar as feminist groups – which in previous meetings had established alliances with women from political parties – this time articulated their demands with women from popular sectors. This new experience made possible the radicalization of feminist claims, and eventually, the emergence of a *popular feminism* that made the demand for the legalization of abortion a nodal point of the feminist movement. Drawing on Ernesto Laclau's theoretical developments,<sup>9</sup> Di Marco argues that it was actually the demand for legal abortion which succeed in becoming an "empty signifier":<sup>10</sup> That is to say, a demand that was capable of bringing together the heterogeneity of the broad women's and feminist movement, transforming its own singular content into a universal one that could represent all other feminist claims. For Di Marco then, this demand embodied the representation "of women's full citizenship, secularism and pluralism", vis-à-vis the traditional and patriarchal values upheld by the Catholic Church and its conservative allies.<sup>11</sup> It was by means of that particular claim that feminist struggles became the manifestation of a *feminist people*.<sup>12</sup>

ALTHOUGH DI MARCO is not the only researcher to address this path of feminist alliances, her approach is provocative and suggestive, not only because she examines the relationship between feminism and popular sectors, but also because she understands that process as a *populist* articulation. However, if we examine the processes that have taken place since Di Marco wrote her book, especially the demonstrations against gender violence under *#NiUnaMenos* and the recent 8M,<sup>13</sup> it becomes necessary to reconsider her analysis and ask ourselves about the current conditions of this feminist people.<sup>14</sup> But we also consider that

there is a problem in Di Marco's argument that is mainly related to her narrow view of the process that enabled feminism to become popular. That is to say, is it only because of the feminist movement, as Di Marco suggests, that feminist ideas found the way to success and reached universalization? In other words, is it possible to understand the emergence of the "feminist people" without referring to the political tradition that historically claimed for itself the representation of *the people* in Argentina?

IN THE NEXT SECTIONS, we aim to put forward two analytical paths to address these questions. First, we consider that one of the keys to understanding how feminism became popular lies in the relationships that this movement established with human rights activism during the 1980s. Second, we argue that it was precisely because of this relationship that feminism did not remain immune to the eruption of the populist political discourse that dominated the political scene from 2003 to 2015. In other words, the relationship with human rights groups entangled feminists, not only with a new form of activism, but also with a logic of articulation that put the people at the forefront.<sup>15</sup>

### The happy marriage of feminisms and human rights

Regarding our first analytical approach, we need to address the conditions that made possible what is now openly recognized as "popular feminism". As we have noted in earlier writings, during the 1980s democratic enthusiasm brought with it encouraging views of traditional party politics, even within feminist circles.<sup>16</sup> In opposition to the deep distinction between a "pure feminism" and a "political" one present in the seventies, there was now an openness to heterogeneity, which enabled new alliances and eventually the development of multiple fronts of struggle.<sup>17</sup> Those experiences were in fact the preceding events of the *Encuentros Nacionales de Mujeres* [National Women's Meetings] that have been organized since 1986 up to the present.<sup>18</sup> This heterogeneous development of local feminisms allowed not only the displacement of old frontiers, but also the drawing of specific distinctions from which new oppositions and affinities with other groups were forged.

One of the closest friendly bonds that feminisms established in the early 80s was with the women's activist groups that had burst onto the public scene in defense of life and human rights during the last military dictatorship's repression: the *Madres and Abuelas of Plaza de Mayo* [Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo]. The intrepid and belligerent actions of these women in the search for "disappeared" people turned the struggle for "human rights" and "democracy" into one of the most important issues throughout the transition to democracy.<sup>19</sup> In those years, human rights ceased to be a problem of

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a few relatives of "disappeared" persons, becoming the very possibility of a common agreement from which to find answers to the social and political problems that Argentina had to face in the transition to a new democratic era. It was against this background that the encounter of feminisms with human rights groups was actually possible.<sup>20</sup> The new privileged position of human rights activism ensured that the feminists' instant love for the mothers and grandmothers of "disappeared" people was not overshadowed by the latter's constant vindication of the maternal role and family bonds. Rather, in the feminist view, these groups were the symbol of resistance to the *de facto* regime and represented the confrontation with the State and party politics. That is, those mothers were bringing to the fore a new contentious language that also implied a new form of activism against traditional politics and whose most visible figures were precisely women.<sup>21</sup> This last remark is crucial to understand the political identification of the majority of feminists with the *Madres and Abuelas of Plaza de Mayo*, and it makes clear that this process did not respond to any common feminist given interests or ends, but to political circumstances that ultimately involved contingent and arbitrary decisions.<sup>22</sup>

### Three's a crowd: the Kirchnerist people

The second point of our argument takes us from the 80s to the new millennium. During the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the

heterogeneous character of the feminist movement gained a new impetus and feminist politics also acquired a renewed popular slant. As we pointed out in the above section, according to Di Marco, it was the demand for legal abortion that enabled the feminist movement to succeed in representing vast and heterogeneous feminist and women's claims. However, Di Marco's assumption relies mainly on the feminist achievements, but devotes little attention to the political context that enabled these successful moves. The argument that we put forward here attempts to show that this articulatory capacity cannot be understood without paying attention to the effects produced in the social imaginary of Argentina by the political experience that began in 2003, under Néstor Kirchner's government. Our aim is to trace not only the conditions that feminism itself engendered from its laborious activism, but also the singular political context that sheltered and helped determine them: "the Kirchnerist people". And when we refer to Kirchnerism, we do not define it simply as a government; but as a political phenomenon that implied a novel social and political mobilization from which a new political identity emerged.

As we explained elsewhere,<sup>23</sup> this form of identification shaped a new populist experience in the country that affected all the social and political actors of the time in one way or another. That is to say, the changing and porous border of the "Kirchnerist people" had disturbing effects that not only provoked the emergence of new popular identifications, but also influenced



existing ones, as happened with feminism. But how did that populist discourse achieve this?

**AS WE HAVE POINTED OUT**, this political project managed to articulate one of the most valuable causes of Argentina's recent history: that of human rights. It was precisely in the legacy of the *Madres and Abuelas of Plaza de Mayo*, in their unyielding struggle for justice, memory and truth, that Kirchner's discourse inscribed and legitimized the origin of its own political project. It is important to point out that this was the result of a political act that took place at an early stage, starting from the enactment of a double rupture: on the one hand, with a recent past embodied in *Menemismo* [Menemism]<sup>24</sup> and in the market reform process of the 90s; on the other, with a distant past that went back to the military dictatorship and whose effects are still felt today. Both ruptures were organized around a critique of the prevailing impunity in the country that placed the democratic governments in a line of continuity with the last dictatorship.<sup>25</sup> In this critique of past and present impunity, Kirchner's discourse laid the foundations for a broad relationship of solidarity with the struggle for the human rights of relatives of victims of repression, with the victims themselves, and with a whole field of contiguous social and political struggles against social and economic inequalities. As a result of this metonymic displacement, Kirchner's fight against impunity was also meant as a fight against exclusion and social injustice. In the name of those who had been mistreated by a terrorist state and by the impunity of the democratic governments that followed (mothers, grandmothers, daughters, relatives), in the name of those excluded by an unjust economic model initiated in the dictatorship and deepened by Menemist neoliberalism, in the name of the idealistic youth of the past and present hurt by repression and the economic crisis, Kirchnerism burst forth as the possibility of representing a new legitimate community protected by human rights, justice and social inclusion.<sup>26</sup> In doing so, Kirchnerism highlighted something of the order of the unthinkable or implausible with respect to the existing community: A possibility of inclusion that the *Madres and Abuelas* indicated was "something they had not dreamed of".<sup>27</sup> This "unthinkable" shows the radical character of Kirchner's discourse: the imagination of a new "All". It is there, in that radical mark, that we consider it is possible to trace the origin of the proliferation of many of the claims for greater inclusion that were present at that time, including the claims historically held by feminists.

### "Feminist people" or "popular feminism": what does the name tell us?

But how has this process of populist articulation, which made "human rights" a struggle of its own, affected feminisms? What are the links between Kirchnerist populism and the current emerging popular nature of feminisms? Before addressing these issues, two clarifications should be made. First, we have seen in recent debates that in order to understand the rise and popularization of feminisms in the country, many of the most prominent readings appeal to the effects of a "fourth wave" of feminism

that travels the globe uniformly.<sup>28</sup> In this context, we consider it necessary to distinguish between two levels of analysis: on the one hand, the internationalist dimension proper to feminist ideology, and on the other, the singular conditions of possibility in each context that enable or hinder the processes of collective mobilization.<sup>29</sup> Without underestimating the hard work on international and regional fronts and networks, we consider that too much focus on the international effects of the feminist global ideology and struggle does not allow space to pay attention to the specific conditions that enable particular feminisms in each country and region. These conditions are what ultimately make possible the configuration of singular feminisms (popular, liberal, trans, communitarian, lesbian) many of which pose incompatible or opposing political horizons for future articulations. In this sense, it is crucial to address the terrain of inscription of feminist demands in each case, to understand why, for example, in Chile the *#NiUnaMenos* was linked to an organization which confronts private pension funds, or in Colombia and Paraguay, how the alliance was with the peasant and indigenous movements.

**SECONDLY, GIVEN THE RECENT** dissemination and polyvalence of the term "populism" – including "right-wing populism", "left-wing populism", "classic populism", "populism of the new millennium" – it is necessary to clarify some of the meanings that we consider crucial when it comes to understanding its effects on Argentinian feminisms. In line with Ernesto Laclau's work, we aim to emphasize that populism is a *mode of political identification* that constructs and gives meaning to "the people" as a political subject.<sup>30</sup> This does not mean that "the people" is an entirely fictional work of populism, but that as a political identity it is central to the understanding of populism – even though not all references to "the people" are necessarily populist. The "populist people" comes to represent those "from below", "subalterns", "poor and vulnerable" *vis-a-vis* "the powerful", "the establishment", "the oligarchy". But also, according to Laclau, this populist people is always malleable, imprecise and wandering as it can never coincide with itself. Thus, there is always an inherent tension in populist articulations to the extent that this form of political construction makes visible the porosity of the frontiers that divides the "people" from the "non-people". It is this same tension that is transferred to the community as a whole, to citizen practices and to subjective experiences. In this sense, populist articulations not only bring a new identity into being but also prompt a process of disidentification with the *status quo* – as defined in the work of Jacques Rancière – and, in this way, it displaces the grid of identifications, of the parts that count as part of the community.<sup>31</sup> The disruption of the populist people exert on the community order opens up the possibility of inclusion and new subjective experiences. This brings unthinkable consequences which manifest themselves in the proliferation of challenging claims on the distribution of places in society and on the conformation of the legitimate demos.<sup>32</sup> It is in relation to these unthinkable effects that we argue local feminisms were eventually altered. That is, for the feminisms' framework

of action, the disruption of the Kirchnerist people involved the dislocation and displacement of the surface for the inscription of their demands, as well as profound alterations to their traditional forms of identification.

### Displacement effects

Taking into account the analytical effects of these two previous clarifications – the importance of the contexts of singular inscription of demands, and the dimension of the radical and subjective inclusiveness of populism – we can now go on to explain how the growing legitimation of feminisms in Argentina should be understood by looking at the political bonds that Kirchnerism established with the human rights movement, and by tracing the displacements effects that derived from that close bond.

We consider that this initial link had unpredictable effects that extended to local feminist groups, which did not remain indifferent to the singular modulation of this new populist interpellation. Even though the new political discourse did not attempt to convoke feminists, nor did it have a feminist agenda in its origins, the structuring relationships of the political and social field were altered by this new form of articulation and partition of the community space. Thus, previous identity configurations were also modified by the changing dynamics of the field of representation. In this sense, what we argue is that the effects on feminisms did not respond to a direct interpellation of Kirchnerist discourse, but rather to a distorted appeal that worked and became successful, to a large extent, based on the contiguous relationship that linked feminisms to the human rights movement, in particular, to the *Madres y Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*. There lies part – not all – of the explanation of the *popular commotion* of feminisms. It was this same commotion that once again contributed, as in the 1980s, to questioning the frontiers that gave meaning to feminist politics, its alliances and interpellations, its distrust of state policies and its main forms of organization and mobilization. Hand in hand with human rights organizations, and under the populist footprint, feminisms inscribed their slogans and demands in the popular camp as never before.

**NOW, BEARING IN MIND** that no demand emerges unaffected from a populist articulatory relationship – their inclusion into a set of other demands will ultimately partially transform their meaning – we are interested in pointing out at least four of the implications that this articulation had in the field of human rights, in their meanings and contents, and by contiguous displacements, on feminisms. In the first place, and as we have shown elsewhere in greater detail, Kirchnerism triggered among human rights activists a highly intense process of political identification with the presidential figure that eventually altered the perception of human rights organizations on the role and place of the state.<sup>33</sup> From that moment on, in the eyes of human rights groups, the

state ceased to be the object of accusations and became a decisive ally in their struggle, and the state itself even became a legitimate place from which to act. Thus, the new government's impetus in matters of "truth, memory and justice" with respect to the crimes of the dictatorship was accompanied by an unprecedented participation of human rights groups in the decision-making processes and implementation of state policies. The creation and expansion of administrative areas and programs at the national level not only involved different human rights organizations but also positioned several of the most prominent activists in key places of political decision with a great load of exposure and public visibility. Now, in terms of the demands of feminisms and sexual diversity, the shifting perception of human rights organizations towards the state gave way to greater cred-

ibility and recognition by feminist activists of the government's inclusion in its agenda of some of their historical claims and their translation into law. We can mention, for instance, the Law on Gender Violence (26485), the Law on Integral Sexual Education (26.150), the law that allows retirement for housewives (Law 26970), the Law on Equal Marriage

(26.618), and the Law on Gender Identity (26746). Although the mobilization and support around these legal initiatives was very diverse among feminist activists, what is undisputable is that the creation and enactment of these laws was quite surprising to feminists and eventually allowed for new political identifications with the government – some feminist activists even accepted positions in the state.<sup>34</sup>

**A SECOND IMPLICATION** has to do with the fact that during Kirchnerism, the historical struggle of the human rights movement was intertwined with a new political project that, while drawing together various political forces, brought with it a strong Peronist footprint. That is to say, President Néstor Kirchner's interpellation brought human rights groups closer not only to his own figure, but also to a long-standing political ideology with which they had had little relationship until then. The political flags of historical Peronism<sup>35</sup> that reappeared with renewed intensity on the new president's political stage were articulated with his campaign against the impunity of the past and present. In this sense, in the new political language "inclusion, equality and social justice" were combined with the demands of "truth, memory and justice" related to state terrorism crimes.<sup>36</sup> With respect to feminist activism, this resignification of Peronism in the political imaginary of human rights and social movements had clear repercussions on the gradual collapse of the historical animosity between feminism and Peronism.<sup>37</sup> Under this new juncture, feminist historical demands found new avenues of convergence with Peronist feminine activism. On the one hand, feminism ceased to be a "foreign ideology", typical of women "who hate men", as Evita used to say, and many of their demands began to rise on Peronist and/or Kirchnerist fronts and groups. On

the other hand, new groups appeared that from the start were formed from a conjunction between a certain tradition of Peronism and feminism.<sup>38</sup>

A THIRD IMPLICATION is related to the Kirchnerist appeal to young people as new protagonists of democratic politics in the country. This had broad effects on the human rights movement, as well as on other social movements, as there was an important generational turnover that helped give organizations a renewed impulse. Returning to the idealized and valuable 70s generation, the Kirchnerist discourse gave young people a new role and protagonism in politics; a role that had progressively deteriorated during the post-democratic transition period. It is within this particular context that we have seen the emergence of “las hijas” [“the daughters”] as a new form of identification that expressed, once again, the close articulation between feminists and human rights activism. They introduced themselves saying: “Somos las Hijas de las Madres” [“We are the Daughters of the Mothers”], inscribing their claims in an intimate bond, such as a kinship filiation. It is a generational change in the long struggle of these human rights groups that guarantees the continuity of their demands, as well as their articulation with feminisms.

Finally, we would like to point out that the linkage of the human rights movement to Kirchnerism also contributed to altering the historical demands of these organizations. That is, claims for “truth, memory and justice” began to represent other popular demands not just concerned with the crimes of the dictatorship. As we have argued in the above section, the articulation of the struggle against impunity with the struggle against exclusion and social inequality deepened during the Kirchnerist years, contributing to the renewed location of the mission and place of human rights groups in Argentinian society. Their mission expanded to include social issues such as housing, health and education. So it is not surprising that human rights organizations got involved in the development of a range of different projects, such as community house building or university management.<sup>39</sup> In the case of feminisms, the expansion of their limited agenda towards demands considered historically as “non-strategic”<sup>40</sup> was only possible in the context of the collective mobilization that began after the 2001 crisis, but actually happened in 2003, by means of the articulation processes that took place during that year in the *Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres* [National Women’s Meeting]. That is to say, prior to this particular situation, it was only at the beginning of the 1980s that Argentine feminisms had the possibility of achieving similar articulation fronts, although on a much smaller scale. In this sense, we consider symptomatic the reappearance of the very word “popular” among its ranks. As we have pointed out in previous writings, “popular feminism” today is a category disputed by broad sectors showing the amplitude and intensity of this interpellation.<sup>41</sup> Unlike other feminist identity labels such

as “autonomous”, “academic”, “institutionalist”, “political”, “lesbian” – the use of “the popular” accounts for the heterogeneous experience of the current activisms – something similar happens with “community feminisms” and “slum feminisms”. That is to say, current feminist mobilizations display a very new feature: unlike the fierce disputes to define what corresponds to a “properly feminist agenda”, the communications and manifestos of the current mobilizations reflect an enormous permeability to multiple and dissimilar political and social demands.<sup>42</sup> The boundaries between what is “feminist” and what is not have changed in ways unimaginable a decade ago. It is precisely this new openness of political horizons that has begun to annoy certain feminisms that are attempting, once again, to demarcate their trajectories in restrictive terms.

### Final remarks

To conclude then, do these displacements – around the state, Peronism and a “popular” agenda – mean that feminism is populist in Argentina? Or that feminists are now Peronists? What implications does this growing popular base of feminisms have for feminist struggles? With no intention of answering these questions unequivocally or in an all-encompassing manner, we consider that feminism is today a mode of *popular identification*. That is to say, it has enabled multiple acts of identification that at the same time weakened its particular content; it has turned

it into a universal demand with hegemonic pretensions. In this respect, we aim to emphasize that feminism no longer represents a specific claim, such as the right to legal abortion, or a life without violence. Nor does it stand as an exclusive politics of “the woman”, or even “the women”. Today, feminism is open to heterogeneous demands and identities that are chained to an ever-broader mean-

ing that is inscribed in its name. What we attempted to point out in this paper is that this possibility was not only enabled by the trajectories of feminisms; it was also the result of a singular context of overdetermination marked by a populist discourse and identification that has been present in Argentina since 2003: the Kirchnerist people. The changes with respect to the horizons that were opened in that context are still in the making. It will be our task to point out the possibilities for a *feminist people*. ✕

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### references

- 1 #NiUnaMenos is a hashtag viralized on social media under which massive demonstrations were held in eighty cities in the country on June 3, 2015. These events emerged as a response to the violence against women and its most serious and visible consequence, femicide. It now stands as the name of a particular feminist front, the “Ni Una Menos movement”.
- 2 Human rights groups that emerged in the search for “disappeared” persons during the last military dictatorship in Argentina.
- 3 So named because of their characteristic use of colored campaign scarves: violet as the historic color of feminism; green as the color chosen by the *Campaña Nacional por el Derecho al Aborto Legal, Seguro y Gratuito* [National Campaign for Free, Safe and Legal Abortion Rights].
- 4 Graciela Di Marco, *El pueblo feminista. Movimientos Sociales y lucha de las mujeres en torno a la ciudadanía*, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2011).
- 5 See also Graciela Di Marco, “Social Movement Demands in Argentina and the Constitution of a “Feminist People”, in Alvarez, Rubin, Thayer, Baiocchi, Laó-Montes (eds.), *Beyond Civil Society: Activism, Participation, and Protest in Latin America*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).
- 6 During the years 2001–2002, the Argentinian economy collapsed, unleashing an unprecedented social, political and institutional crisis that ended with massive demonstrations on the streets, and the fall of the elected government.
- 7 *The movimiento piquetero* [piquetero movement] appeared on the Argentinian political scene during the second half of the 1990s, and its members are mainly unemployed people. Choosing to cut roads as the main tool of confrontation, these organizations have mobilized in diverse and massive demonstrations demanding the creation of jobs and unemployment benefits. Women have occupied a leading role in this movement because their overwhelming presence and active participation has been crucial, both in the origins of the piquetero movements and in their identity configuration. See Andrea Andújar, “Mujeres piqueteras: la repolitización de los espacios de resistencia en la Argentina (1996–2001)”, *Regional Scholarship Program*, CLACSO (2005).
- 8 The National Women’s Meetings have been organized regularly since 1986. They were promoted by the III World Conference on the Women’s Decade (UN, Nairobi, 1985) and inspired by the *Encuentros Feministas Latinoamericanos y del Caribe* [Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Meetings] that have been held since 1981. The interesting issue about these meetings is that, although the principles of their organization and functioning are clearly derived from feminist ideas, they have not been exclusively or mostly organized around feminist issues, at least until now. Since this year, in the last plenary meeting held in the city of La Plata, and after a decisive intervention of indigenous women’s organizations, it was decided to change the name of the meeting to *Encuentro Plurinacional de Mujeres, Trans, Travestis, Lesbianas y Bisexuales* [Plurinational Meeting of Women, Trans, Transvestites, Lesbians and Bisexuals].
- 9 Ernesto Laclau, *La razón populista*, (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005).
- 10 In his later work, Ernesto Laclau introduced the category of ‘empty signifier’ to refer to a signifier that loses its direct reference to a particular meaning. As he explains, societies produced empty signifiers in order to fulfil the impossible ideal of full closure. Political forces compete in order to present their particular objectives as those which can carry out the filling of the empty signifier. See Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (London: Verso, 1996) 36–46 and *On Populist Reason*, (London: Verso, 2005), chapter 4, 46.
- 11 Di Marco, *El pueblo feminista*, 296.
- 12 *Ibid*, 18–20.
- 13 8M refers to the historic March 8 as the international women’s day of working women. Since March 8, 2017, this date is commemorated as

*International Women’s Strike*. This movement was created at the end of October 2016 and was promoted by women’s organizations from more than 50 countries. Since 2019, in Argentina, it is called *Paro Internacional Feminista y Plurinacional de Mujeres, Lesbianas, Travesti y Trans* [International Feminist and Plurinational Strike of Women, Lesbians, Transvestites and Trans].

- 14 We have analyzed some of the assumptions that informed Di Marco’s reading on the legalization of abortion as a “popular demand” in Natalia Martínez Prado, “¿Pueblo feminista? Algunas reflexiones en torno al devenir popular de los feminismos”, *Latinoamérica. Revista de Estudios Latinoamericanos*, 67(2018): 173–202.
- 15 Understanding, as Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau had argued, that the articulation logic establishes “a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice”. See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), 105.
- 16 Natalia Martínez Prado, *La política en disputa: Feministas argentinas en el Siglo XX*, (PhD diss., University of Córdoba, 2012); Natalia Martínez Prado “De la política como contaminación: “Las Políticas” y “las Puras” en los setentas” (paper presented at the *XI Jornadas Nacionales de Historia de las Mujeres, VI Congreso Iberoamericano de Estudios de Género*, San Juan, September, 20–22, 2012).
- 17 Among the most important ones, the *Comisión Pro Reforma del Ejercicio de la Patria Potestad* [Commission for the Reform of the Exercise of Parental Power], *Lugar de Mujer* [Women’s Place], the *Movimiento Feminista* [Feminist Movement] or the mythical *Multisectorial de la Mujer* [Multisectoral Women’s Movement]. See Néliida Archenti, *Situación de la mujer en la sociedad argentina: formas de organización en la capital federal*, (Buenos Aires: Fundación Friedrich Naumann, 1987); Inés Cano, “El movimiento feminista argentino en la década de 1970”, *Todo es historia*, 183, Año XVI (1982).
- 18 See *Mujeres pariendo historia. Cómo se gestó el Primer Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres. Reseña íntima y política de las integrantes de la Comisión Promotora*, eds. Maffia, Peker, Moreno, Morroni, Buenos Aires: Legislatura Porteña.
- 19 Mercedes Barros, “Los derechos humanos, entre luchas y disputas”, in *Política y desborde. Más allá de una democracia liberal*, ed. María Susana Bonetto and Fabiana Martínez (Villa María: Editorial Universitaria Villa María, 2012), 43–74; Mercedes Barros, “Democracia y Derechos Humanos: Dos formas de articulación política en Argentina”, *E-L@tina. Revista electrónica de estudios latinoamericanos*, 8 (2009): 3–18.
- 20 Mercedes Barros, Natalia Martínez, “‘Mejor no hablar de ciertas cosas’. Feminismo y Populismo”, in *Feminismos y populismos del siglo XXI. Frente al patriarcado y al orden neoliberal*, ed. Graciela Di Marco, Ana Fiol y Patricia K. N. Schwarz, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Teseo, 2019), 77–88.
- 21 See María del Carmen Feijoó, M. Gogna, “Las mujeres en la transición a la democracia”, in *Ciudadanía e Identidad: las mujeres en los movimientos sociales latinoamericanos*, ed. Elizabeth Jelin, (Genebra: Instituto de Investigaciones de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo Social, 1987), 129–188. Elizabeth Jelin, “La política de la memoria: el Movimiento de Derechos Humanos y la construcción democrática en la Argentina”, in *Juicio, Castigos y Memorias: Derechos Humanos y Justicia en la política Argentina*, ed. Carlos Acuña, Inés González Bombal, et. al, (Buenos Aires: Nueva Visión, 1995); Virginia Morales, *El nombre de las Madres. “Maternidad”, “vida” y “derechos humanos” en el discurso de las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, (Córdoba: Centro de Estudios Avanzados, Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, 2015); Mercedes Barros, “Los derechos humanos, entre luchas y disputas”.
- 22 One way of understanding the political dimension of this articulation between feminists and human rights groups is to examine the María Elena Oddone refusal of this alliance, a main referent of *Organización Feminista*



- Argentina [Argentinian Feminist Organization]. See María Elena Oddone, *La pasión por la libertad. Memorias de una feminista*, (Asunción: Ediciones Colihue, 2001). Another way is to look at the rejection by most feminists of the establishment of any link with the *Amas de Casa del País* [Housewives of the Country], another women's caucus that emerged during the eighties. These groups arose as a new form of protest against economic problems and hyperinflation in the Buenos Aires suburbs and they were known for calling a 24 hour "shopping strike" every week. Although they did not join any political party, nor did they identify themselves as feminists, they were one of the first groups to demand housewife's retirement, and they actually ended up supporting the demand for legal divorce, unclear parental power and policies related to abolition of violence against women. See Archenti, *Situación de la mujer en la sociedad argentina*. Now, in spite of this obvious affinity with feminist struggles, most feminists groups did not articulate or identify with the housewives' claims, some of them arguing that this was a movement that only had "women housewives as subjects and targets" which would limit "the perception of the global character of female oppression". Magui Bellotti, *El feminismo y el movimiento de mujeres. Una contribución al debate*. 1984–1989, (Buenos Aires: Centro de Documentación sobre la Mujer, 1989).
- 23 Mercedes Barros, "Los derechos humanos, entre luchas y disputas"; Mercedes Barros, "Democracia y Derechos Humanos".
  - 24 The name generally used to refer to the period of Carlos Menem's government (1989–1999) and also used to characterize the period in which neoliberal economic policies were implemented in the country.
  - 25 Gerardo Aboy Carlés, "Populismo y democracia en la Argentina contemporánea. Entre el hegemonismo y la refundación", *Estudios Sociales, Revista Universitaria Semestral*, Año XV, 1er semestre, (2005).
  - 26 Mercedes Barros, "Democracia y Derechos Humanos".
  - 27 Mercedes Barros, "Los derechos humanos, entre luchas y disputas".
  - 28 Specifically in Argentina, we refer to the approaches of Ana Natalucci and Julieta Rey "¿Una nueva oleada feminista? Agendas de género, repertorios de acción y colectivos de mujeres (Argentina, 2015–2018)", *Revista de Estudios Políticos y Estratégicos*, 6 (2), (2018):14–34; Gago, Gutiérrez Aguilar, et al., *8m constelación feminista ¿cuál es tu lucha? ¿cuál es tu huelga?* (Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón, 2018); Juntas y a la Izquierda, *Mujeres en revolución. La Nueva ola feminista mundial*, (Buenos Aires: La Montaña, 2017); Freire et al. *La cuarta ola feminista*, (Buenos Aires: Emilio Ulises Bosia, Mala Junta, Oleada, 2018). This perspective is also replicated in the U.S. reading of 99% feminism. See Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser, *Feminism for the 99%. A Manifesto* (New York: Verso, 2019).
  - 29 As for the internationalist dimension, as Clare Hemmings (2005) argues, we need to be skeptical about the "insistent narrative that sees the development of feminist thought as a relentless march towards progress or loss". In particular, we question the way in which the attributes of the "fourth wave" are presented as the result of overcoming previous waves. This sort of learning would imply a certain progressive complexity of the feminist subject, starting from the essential, unitary and homogeneous category – "woman" – towards its anti-essentialist and intersectional multiplication – "women" (cis, trans, lesbians, blacks, workers, immigrants...). This type of reading not only presupposes a rationality criterion in the relationship between agency and structure, as if international contexts offered opportunities to local feminisms. It also prevents the understanding of how the emergence of singular feminisms are actually conditioned and altered by local conflicts and political languages and traditions.
  - 30 Ernesto Laclau, *La Razón Populista*, (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005), 153.
  - 31 Jacques Rancière, *El desacuerdo. Política y Filosofía* (Buenos Aires: Nueva Visión, 1996).
  - 32 Sebastián Barros, "Despejando la espesura. La distinción entre identificaciones populares y articulaciones políticas populistas", in Aboy Carlés, Barros and Melo, *Las brechas del pueblo. Reflexiones sobre identidades populares y populismo*, (Los Polvorines: Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento, UNDAV ediciones, Universidad Nacional de Avellaneda, 2013), 41–64.
  - 33 On August 21, 2003, as a decision promoted by the President, the Senate of the Nation approved the annulment of the "Punto Final" and "Obediencia Debida" laws [Final point and Due Obedience] which were the main legal obstacles to the reopening of the trials for crimes against humanity in Argentina. This marked a turning-point in the search for truth, memory and justice in the democratic era. See Mercedes Barros and Virginia Morales, "Derechos humanos y post kirchnerismo: resonancias de una década y esbozo de un nuevo panorama político", *Estudios Sociales Contemporáneos*, 14, 7 (2016): 104–124.
  - 34 See Milagros Belgrano Rawson, "Ley de matrimonio igualitario y aborto en Argentina: notas sobre una revolución incompleta", *Estudios Feministas*, 20,1(2012): 173–188; Paula Biglieri, "Emancipaciones. Acerca de la aprobación de la ley del matrimonio igualitario en Argentina", *Íconos. Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 46 (2013): 145–160; Anahí Farji Neer, "La identidad de género como derecho humano. Análisis del tránsito de un concepto en los discursos del Estado de la ciudad de Buenos Aires (período 2003–2010)", *Revista Punto Género* 3 (2013): 123–145.
  - 35 We refer to the political movement that emerged in Argentina in the mid-1940s around the figure of Juan Domingo Peron and that has remained since then as one of the most important political forces in the country.
  - 36 For a thorough analysis, see Mercedes Barros and Virginia Morales, "Derechos humanos y post kirchnerismo".
  - 37 About this animosity, see Natalia Martínez Prado, "'Mujeres de otra raza': la irrupción del peronismo en el activismo femenino/feminista", *Revista Identidades*, 3, 2 (2012): 26–55.
  - 38 As for the first group, the *Movimiento Evita* [Evita's Movement], *La Cámpora* [The Cámpora], and *La Jauretche* [The Jauretche], among others that emerged during Néstor Kirchner's mandate, organized their respective gender commissions during this period. On the second group, *Mala Junta* (Frente Grande) [The Bad Board (Great Front)], *Mumalá* (Libres del Sur) [Mumalá (Free from the South)] and *La Corriente Política y Social La Colectiva* [The Collective Political and Social Current], are collectives that since their emergence have been recognized as part of the most progressive or left-wing trend of Peronism and feminism.
  - 39 See Mercedes Barros and Virginia Morales, "Derechos humanos y post kirchnerismo".
  - 40 Here, we refer to the distinction between "practical" and "strategic" interests in the terminology of Maxine Molineaux which had great influence in Latin American feminisms. Maxine Molineaux, "Mobilization without Emancipation? Women's Interests, the State, and Revolution in Nicaragua", *Feminist Studies* 11. 2 (1985): 227–254. For an analysis of this categorization in the light of current discussions about the centrality of the demand for abortion rights among some Argentine feminisms, see Natalia Martínez Prado, "¿Pueblo feminista?".
  - 41 Natalia Martínez Prado, "El feminismo popular y sus cuerpos", (paper presented at the *XIII Jornadas Nacionales de Historia de las Mujeres, VIII Congreso Iberoamericano de Estudios de Género*, Buenos Aires, July 24– 27, 2017).
  - 42 This type of dispute has historically taken place between autonomous feminists and left-wing parties, especially during the process of defining the closing documents of the workshops at the National Women's Meetings. The endless debates tend to be about whether or not to include demands linked to foreign debt, wage cuts, worker layoffs, and political articulation with Latin American workers' struggles, among others.