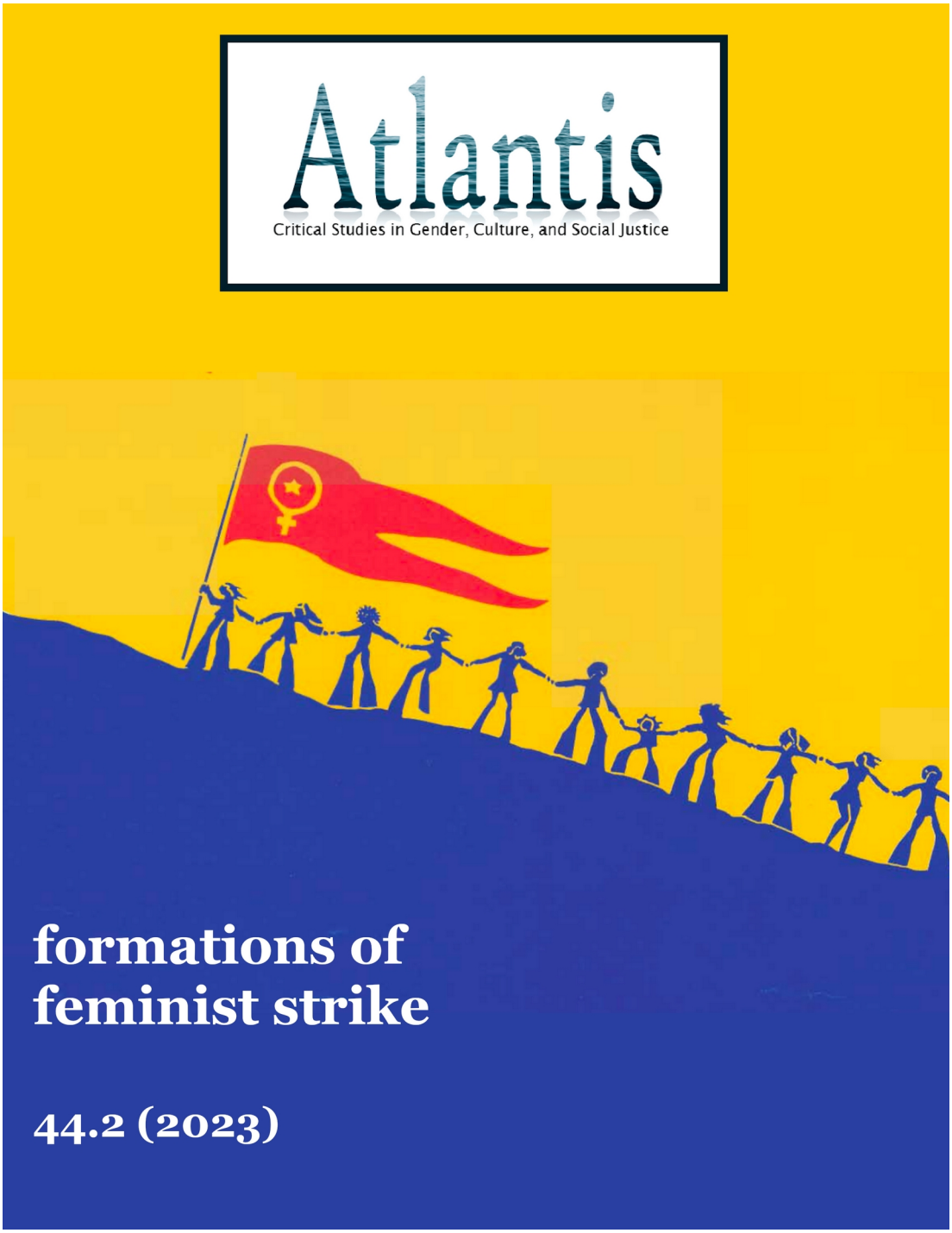

The cover image for this special issue represents a portion of an original poster expressing transnational feminist solidarity. The original is held at the NYU Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives in New York. The poster was created by artist Susan Shapiro in the United States in 1975 to celebrate the end of the Vietnam war, and is included as part of the DISA archive that focuses on the South African liberation struggle. The poster was issued by Inkworks, an activist press founded in Berkeley in 1974 that ran until 2016. Used with permission from the DISA Archive. https://disa.ukzn.ac.za/pos197500000430532065

The text on the original poster reads:
We Celebrate Women's Struggles, We Celebrate People's Victories
"The mountain is only so high... Our capacity is without limit."
The stars move; our will is unshakable! Inscription on the walls of a cell: Con Son Women's Prison, South Viet Nam (Liberated April 30 1975).

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Special Issue: Formations of Feminist Strike
Introduction

Formations of Feminist Strike: Connecting Diverse Practices, Contexts, and Geographies

by Senka Neuman Stanivukovic, Ksenia Robbe, Kylie Thomas

Abstract: This introduction to the special issue on Feminist Strike takes up the question of what remains marginalized and overlooked within dominant discourses on contemporary feminist protests. Drawing on experiences of and approaches to feminist refusal that involve questions of labour, we propose the ways in which conceptualizations of feminist strike can be employed as a lens to build a conversation between different practices, scales, and geographies, particularly across postcolonial and postsocialist contexts. Through a reading of Aliki Saragas's film *Strike a Rock* (2017) about the women living around the Marikana miners' settlement in the aftermath of a major strike and massacre, we explore how notions of feminist strike can be expanded by situating Black women's struggles in South Africa within a long tradition of women's resistance and showing how political resistance is bound to questions of reproductive work. To understand the intersection of postsocialist, post-conflict, and (pre-)Europeanization transformations, we consider the case of a large-scale strike and public demonstrations against the bankruptcy of the Croatian shipyard Uljanik that took place in 2018 and 2019. Our perspectives on the Marikana and the Uljanik strikes show how women in both places practise a politics of refusal and resistance against ruination, violence, and defeat. In the last section, we summarize the contents of the articles that comprise the special issue.

Keywords: feminist strike; Marikana; post-apartheid; postcolonial; postsocialist; reproductive labour; Strike a Rock; Uljanik

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Introduction

This special issue draws inspiration from feminist strikes that have taken place across the world over the last decade in response to the rise of authoritarianism and the erosion of rights relating to bodily integrity and reproductive justice. The essays collected here grew out of our discussions about what it would mean to bring together a variety of perspectives on feminist protest movements that use methods and strategies of strike from across the world, and particularly from postcolonial and postsocialist contexts.[1] We view feminist strike as a lens for focusing on the various ways in which oppression and exploitation intersect in postcolonial and postsocialist settings. Simultaneously, we embrace the intricacies found within contexts, spaces, and subjects referred to as "postcolonial" and "postsocialist" to uncover multifaceted resistance that exists beyond conventional definitions of work, strikes, and internationalism. This helps us to extend and nuance feminist strike as an analytical framework by exploring topics such as work as a form of exploitation of women, LGBTQI+ individuals, feminist strike as a citizenship claim, rhythms of striking, and women's internationalism in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Feminist strike presents itself as a global challenge to different forms of structural oppression and exploitation. Through a multiplicity of local and subterranean movements, the practice of feminist strike exposes the interlocking of colonial and gendered divisions of labour, racialized and gendered violence, and exploitation of land and resources. For instance, the 2015 Ni Una Menos strike in Argentina laid bare connections between femicide and laws restricting reproductive rights, and the entanglement between sexist and economic violence (Draper and Mason-Deese 2018; Gago and Mason-Deese 2019). The series of women's mobilizations that took place in Poland from 2016 to 2018, that came to be known as the Polish Women's Strike, and the 2017 women's strike in Italy, also expose these connections (Kubisa and Rakowska 2019; Rudan et al. 2018). The struggles of Moroccan seasonal workers in Spain reveal their double exploitation as racialized women and migrant workers from the Global South; they also render visible how the exploitation of women's reproductive work on the one hand, and resource extraction and land dispossession on the other, are linked (Filigrana 2020). Women's hunger strikes position a pained body at the centre of resistance against the biopolitical control of the state and other struggles against exploitation and oppression. At the same time, a hunger strike opens space for understanding the emergence of embodied forms of solidarity that entangles vulnerability and care with pain and discomfort. In their discussion of the 2016 hunger strike by the Montenegrin mothers against the government's decision to limit and withdraw social and childcare benefits for mothers, Smolović et al. (2020) demonstrate how bodies can be used to create solidarity and new ways of living together without erasing the differences between women and their struggles. They argue that striking mothers have made their bodies open to the hardship of others, allowing for alliances across different struggles that might not have formed otherwise (Smolović et al., 918).

Feminist mobilizations activate strike as a practice that exposes the limits of the so-called general strike, to account for the significance of reproductive struggles, the varied forms and performances of interruption and refusal, and the calls for alliances in resistance to different and unequal experiences of exploitation. This is why scholars have described March 8 International Women's Day as a practice that activates a strike as a means to assemble different protests and claims across time and space (Çağatay et al. 2022). Ewa Majewska sees feminist mobilizations as an attempt to establish counter-politics beyond the margins of a particular group or a single country (Majewska 2021, 57). Veronica Gago expresses the commitment to a feminist strike as a counter-power that works through assembling together "everything and everywhere" (2020, 243). As such, feminist strikes provide a critical lens through which to explore material and intangible connections between different bodies, conflicts and territories, and to assemble diverse politics and poetics of struggle, protest and liberation across space and time. Feminist strikes expose women's reproductive labour as the backbone of neoliberal exploitation and oppression (Gago and Mason-Deese 2019). By interconnecting different struggles, feminist strikes have shown how different forms of violence directed at women work through distinctions between formality and informality, employment and unemployment, paid and unpaid labour, productive and reproductive work, migrant work and work done by nationals. It recognizes and includes rights claims, lived experiences, and spaces inhabited by those who are made invisible by these binary distinctions.

During the twentieth century, countries of the Global South and the Global East experienced large-scale modernization processes, both state-led and in the form of anticolonial movements, part of which was women's empowerment as equal citizens and workers. At the same time, women's self-organized forms of resistance were often captured and co-opted by dominant movements during the struggle, and by state narratives and institutions in their aftermath. The continuities in the forms of violence to which women were subjected during and after political transitions are also often overlooked. The end of the Cold War and the global advance of the post-Fordist neoliberal economy altered the meanings of work, class and resistance, and presented a significant challenge to the radical potential of strikes. However, the last decade has seen the global re-emergence of strike as a feminist manifestation that combines a focus on productive and reproductive work, and a critique of gendered biopolitics and of political economy.

Since the mid-2010s, large and small-scale feminist strikes have been among the most powerful forms of protest in many places across the world. The broad mobilization generated by some of these strikes has been due to the strategy of interconnecting the questions of bodily integrity and control (in the contexts of domestic violence and femicide) to issues of economic exploitation (precarious labour, feminization and abuse of care work, lack of legal protection), racism and exploitation of migrant labour, as well as extractivism and environmental depletion. As the Call for the International Women's Strike on March 8, 2017, written by members of the Argentinian Ni Una Menos put it, "[feminist strike] disrupts the domestic space as confinement; it alters union discussions; it activates resistances in the sphere of production and popular economies; it radicalizes fights against extractivism and plunder; it breaks apart the industries of spectacle; it permeates artistic languages; and it contests finance's control over our daily lives. It explodes in our protests and in our beds. Nothing is separate from the feminist revolution" (Gago et al. 2018, 268).

The resonance of this strike, which took place in more than fifty countries across the world, and of other feminist strikes of the mid-2010s, was due to their transversality—the engagement and interrelation of many different agendas from situated and embodied feminist perspectives (McGlazer 2018). At a time when many states embraced authoritarian politics and asserted their legitimacy through campaigns to 'defend traditional values,' i.e., patriarchal norms, feminist activism that reached beyond rights perspectives and towards questions of systemic justice created a viable alternative to the politics of the state and state-aligned trade unions. In these new feminist practices informed by post- and decolonial critique and defined by calls for social equality, scholars such as Françoise Vergès argue that we might be seeing a return to, and reinvention of, anti-imperialist feminist movements of the mid-twentieth century that were depoliticized with the institutionalization of feminism during the 1980s and 1990s (2018).

The 2017 International Women's Strike created multiple connections and dialogues across the world that have generated further action and reverberated in academic-activist reflection (see, for example, Gago and Gutiérrez Aguilar 2020; Mayerchyk and Plakhotnik 2020; McGlazer 2018). This movement has redefined political mobilizations around work by connecting diverse struggles against exploitation and oppression across time and space. At the same time, there is a recognized need to cultivate dissensus when connecting these struggles (Gantt-Shafer, Wallis, and Miles 2019). Through this special issue we consider how the transversality of the feminist strike is reflected in struggles across different geographies. This special issue is an attempt to think through conceptions of feminist strike, to consider processes of feminist resistance that involve questions of labour, but do not use the framework of the international strike, and to see how existing theorizations might be extended through new juxtapositions.

Accordingly, articles in this collection address vernacular environments from which strikes emerge to explore how strikes continue to be an effective form of resistance against various forms of violence. At the same time, we examine how contradictions and tensions that emerge from situating the term *feminist strike* in postcolonial and the postsocialist settings further our grasp of terms such as *internationalism* or *transversal dialogue* (Koobak, Tlostanova, and Thapar-Björkert 2021). These contradictions involve the symbolism and debates surrounding March 8 in postsocialist settings, the fact that International Women's Day protests in the United States were historically dominated by white feminists, and how Western-centric interpretations of women's internationalism disregard the historical interactions between anticolonial and socialist feminists (de Haan 2023; Kis 2012; Moss and Maddrell 2017).

The articles included in the special issue foreground struggles that trouble the established links between the terms *global*, *feminist* and *strike*, and take up the question of what remains marginalized and overlooked within dominant discourses on contemporary feminist protests led by women. This collection addresses the massive demonstrations that have been widely recognized and discussed, and also includes analyses of protests that until now have been largely overlooked. The special issue includes the following: feminist analyses of diverse forms of resistance against state violence in Belarus, India, Iran, Liberia, and Zimbabwe; reflections on activism in times of war in Syria, and in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as anarcho-feminist protest in Poland during the postsocialist transition; and perspectives on feminist struggles in Italy. The authors draw attention to places where work has always been precarious and where class struggles intersect with other forms of resistance to oppression, such as in India, where class status remains bound to the caste system, or in South Africa, where, as we note in our analysis of post-apartheid feminist strike, industrial and domestic labour have been, and remain, strongly racialized.

Through the works assembled here, we aim to rethink the meaning of a feminist strike through the dissensus that arises from the encounter of different mobilizations that can be understood as a feminist strike. Furthermore, we are interested in mobilizations that are not necessarily connected and entangled in transversal alliances and solidarities. To understand what is made relational by a feminist strike and what stands outside of these relational encounters, we explore the specificities of situated experiences of feminist strikes across different geographies. In their research, Bonfiglioli and Ghodsee (2020) insist that contemporary transnational feminism needs to be built on a more robust reading of history that resists the erasure of coalitions of women in the Global South with socialist women's movements throughout the Cold War. Staying close to the contradictions and tensions formed by alliances that emerge from the strikes in practice helps us to avoid dehistoricizing the phenomena of feminist strikes.

In the section that follows, we illustrate and elaborate this approach through two case studies, asking: who can use a strike as a tool in their struggles? We explore the intersection of productive and reproductive work in the aftermath of the 2012 strike and massacre as taken up in the documentary film *Strike a Rock* (2017), made by South African director Aliki Saragas. We then situate the same question about gendering of work and protest in the context of the 2018 strike at the Croatian shipyard Uljanik. Accordingly, we use feminist strike as a lens to build a conversation between the daily struggles of women living in the settlement around Marikana as represented in the film, and the silenced women's reproductive and productive labour in the Uljanik shipyard. This conversation exposes how the "post" in these postcolonial and postsocialist experiences links current inequalities and exploitation of women's work and bodies with enduring structures of past oppression as well as resistance. In the case of Marikana, we reflect on how the film situates the exploitation of Black women's reproductive work within the frame of the enduring regime of racial capitalism. Uljanik shows continuities in the glorification of shipyard workers as an ideal of a masculine socialist man on the one hand, and resistances to economic (neo)liberalization of industry on the other. Whereas memories of socialist work open space for resistance to inequalities and exploitation, they also render work and struggles masculine. Also, feminist strike—and the conversations across different women's struggles that we build through it—helps us see the 'posts' beyond the ruination and rupture dichotomy. It shows how promises of economic and political transformations are conditioned by industrial degradation and negated by state violence. Our perspectives on the Marikana and the Uljanik strikes show how women in both places practise a politics of refusal and resistance in the face of ruination, violence, and defeat.

The Marikana Massacre through the Lens of Feminist Strike: Aliki Saragas' Strike a Rock

The question of the interrelation of productive and reproductive work, and of who can use strike as a tool, is one that is taken up in the documentary film *Strike A Rock* (2017) made by South African director Aliki Saragas in the aftermath of the 2012 Marikana Massacre. On August 16, 2012, thirty-four of the thousands of miners who were participating in a strike at Lonmin platinum mine in the Marikana area near Rustenburg, South Africa, were killed by the police. The police encircled the miners and opened fire, shooting at them with automatic rifles. No fewer than fourteen of the miners were shot in the back, while others were hunted down and shot at close range as they fled from the police. In the aftermath of the massacre, a commission of inquiry was held, and although it determined that the actions of the

police, the Lonmin Mining company, and state officials were to blame for the massacre, none of these parties were held to account. The commission failed to interrogate the systemic inequality in the mining industry and the living conditions in the area surrounding the mine, which led to the strike. In the three years that the commission sat, just one hour was allocated to Sikhala Sonke, the organization of the women of Marikana, to articulate their concerns. Although women live and work in Marikana, most accounts of the strike and massacre, including documentary films, have focused entirely on men.[2]

Strike a Rock represents the daily struggles of women living in the Nkaneng settlement near Marikana and their ways of political organizing after the massacre. It portrays the everyday living conditions on the mines and the care work performed by women in the absence of proper sanitation, housing, or possibility of waged employment. This focus is entwined with the depiction of women's political organizing as they form Sikhala Sonke to call the Lonmin mining company to account and protest ongoing violence in the aftermath of the massacre.

We argue that the politics and aesthetics of entwining the private and public, political and economic, productive and reproductive aspects of women's work constitutes the locus of a feminist strike. By applying this understanding of feminist strike as a lens for reading *Strike a Rock*, we can see how the mediation of women's struggles in this film rests on the entanglement of metaphorical and material aspects of strike. After all, the community of women depicted in the film does not go on strike, nor do they refer to their activism as feminist. However, everything they do—the carework and political work they perform—is represented as closely related to the Marikana strike, its causes and its consequences. The film connects the ongoing struggles of this community to the longer histories of women's struggle against apartheid and reframes our understanding of strike, both general and feminist, by focusing on the materiality of women's daily labour that sustains life in an informal settlement, thus rendering visible the types of work and working subjects that are 'struck out' by the narrow conceptions of labour and the political that have historically dominated how strikes are conceptualized.

The film's visual and verbal language relies to a great extent on historical allusions, through which it creates the sense of a continuity of women's labour and resistance during and after apartheid. The title of the film invokes a line from a famous anti-apartheid resistance song: "Now you have touched the women, you have struck a rock: you have dislodged a boulder; you will be crushed." The song was sung during the Women's March of August 9, 1956, when more than 20,000 women marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria to protest against the pass laws introduced by the apartheid state. During the 1970s and 1980s, the line "You have touched the women, you have struck a rock" (*wathint' abafazi, wathint' imbokodo*) became a slogan that was used during anti-apartheid protests as well as in protest literature, visual art, and theatre. The phrase was used in the widely circulated poster produced in 1981 by Judy Seidman, who formed part of the anti-apartheid art collective, Medu Ensemble, to commemorate the Women's March of 1956.

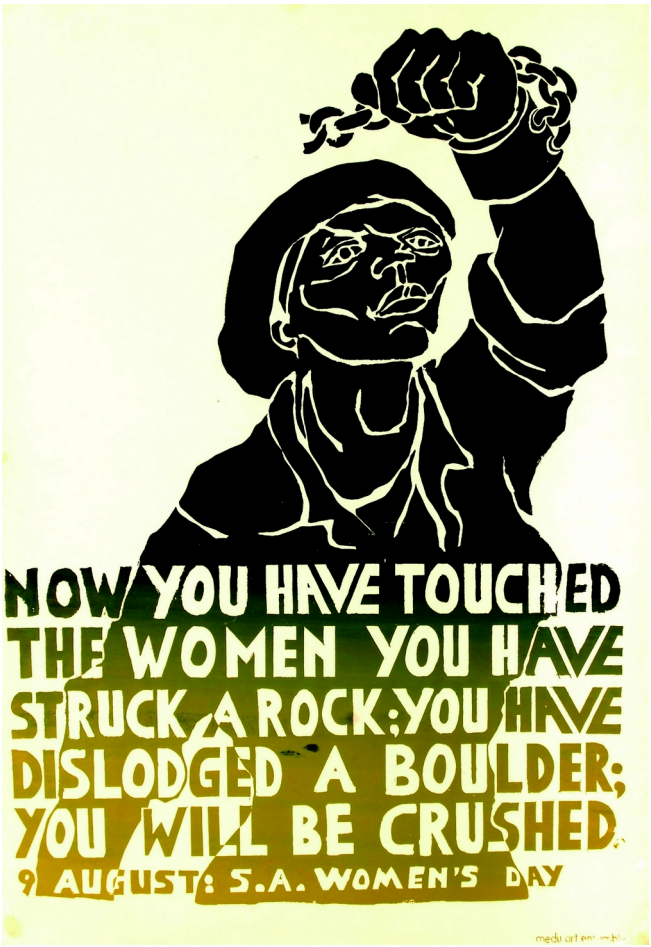

Figure 1: "Touched the Women." Silkscreen poster by J.A. Seidman with Medu Art Ensemble, Gaborone 1981. Original print in collection of MoMA, New York. Image courtesy of Judy Seidman.

"Strike a Rock" was also used as the title of a 1986 play directed by Phyllis Klotz in collaboration with Thobeka Maqhutyana, Nomvula Qosha and Poppy Tsira, that toured nationally and internationally. During the last decades of apartheid, the image of Black women raising their fists as a sign of protest became iconic, symbolizing the struggle against racial and capitalist oppression. With its origins in early twentieth-century socialist labour movements and its wide use in antifascist and anticolonial movements across the world, this gesture and image was perceived as connecting a variety of struggles against oppression locally and internationally.

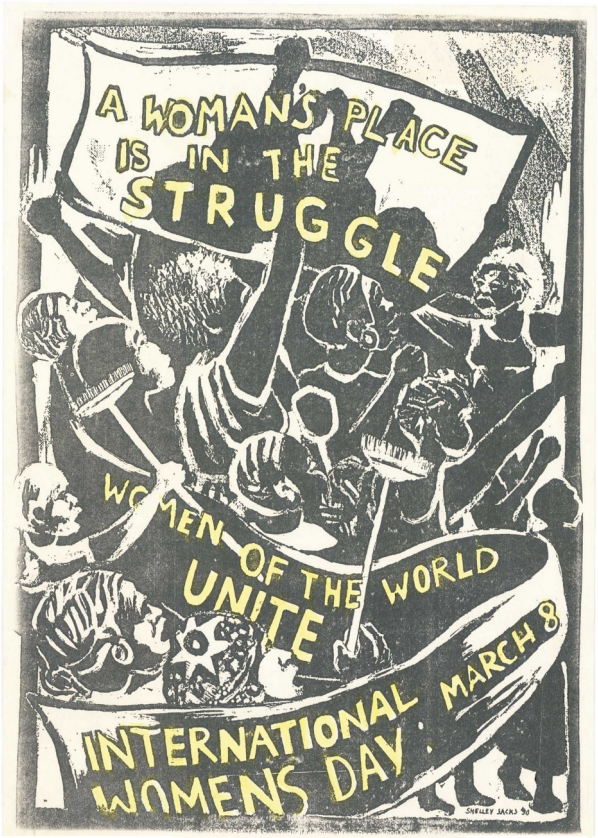

Figure 2: "Women of the world unite." Silkscreen poster by Shelley Sacks, South Africa, 1990. South African History Archive.

The image on the poster for the film Strike a Rock, featuring Thumeka Maqwangqana posing with her fist high in the air against the background of the mining complex, creates an immediate link to the iconography of women's political and labour struggles in South Africa. It situates the women of Marikana within a history of South African women's resistance against apartheid that involved a strong workers' movement and internationalist accents during the 1980s.

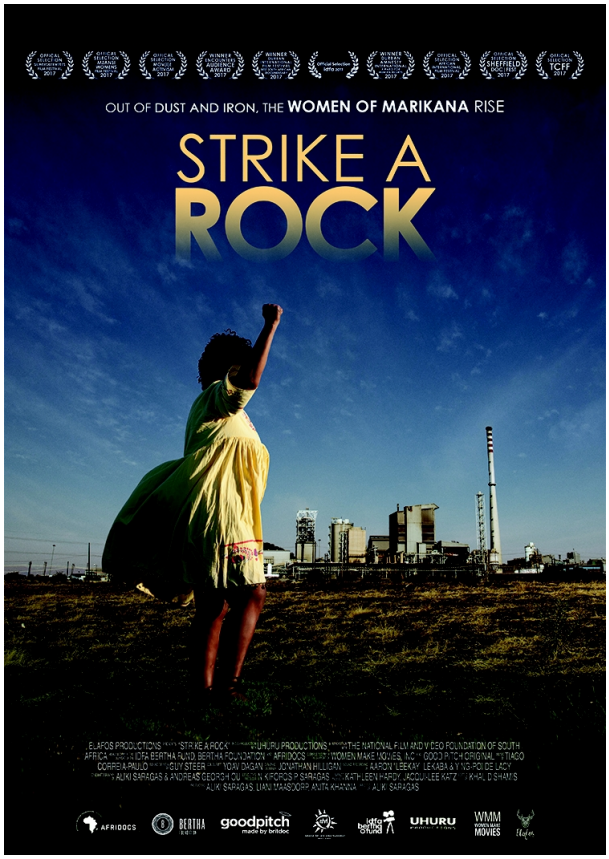

Figure 3: Poster for the film *Strike a Rock*. Director Aliki Saragas

Women living in Marikana, as we see in the film, and as Asanda Benya's (2015) anthropological research demonstrates, have been subjected to violence and marginalization in multiple ways, as informal workers, as migrants and speakers of languages other than the local seTswana (used in education and health care), and as unregistered partners of mineworkers. As Benya writes, "the exploitation of workers underground is seen by many women in Marikana as an extension of their marginalization, an attack on their dignity and contempt for their contribution to the country's economy, its 'growth and development,' hence they sympathize with workers when on strike and join in solidarity with them" (2015, 554).

Strike a Rock underscores the link between the struggles of men and women in the mining community, as it shows that it was the women who kept the strike alive after the massacre, by protesting against police violence

and attending the hearings of the commission of inquiry. The film intertwines the scenes in which women perform reproductive work (household tasks, childcare, taking care of each other) mostly in the absence of men, and productive labour (organizing to protest, negotiating with the Lonmin management, party politics) and shows how their lives are a constituent part of the mining economy. It includes long scenes that represent the effort of cleaning and washing in the absence of running water, or when roads are flooded in the shack settlement.

At the same time, the film zooms in on the labour of politics—women holding councils, attending court hearings, holding protests, negotiating, and includes footage of one of the protagonists, Primrose Sonti, commuting between Marikana and Cape Town where she serves as an MP for the political party, Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). The EFF was launched in response to the Marikana massacre and received support from those who hoped it would protect the interests of the poor. The film follows these hopes as it depicts women welcoming EFF party leaders who visit the mine, as well as their disappointment when the party uses Primrose Sonti as a token without providing a space for women's politics and without addressing the conditions under which the women continue to live.

The aesthetics of the film is particularly evocative in the scenes depicting women's physical and emotional labour of sustaining and taking care of members of their community. The representations of hard domestic work, such as women clearing their flooded homes after heavy rains, alongside views of the mine in the aftermath of the massacre, reveal how Black women's labour is central to South Africa's extractive economy. According to Helene Strauss, these scenes "expose a South African energy legacy that continues to rely on two types of extraction for its own survival, namely, first and most obviously, of mineral energy (in this case platinum), and, second, of the muscular and psychic energies harvested from labouring bodies in the realms of both production and social reproduction—women's bodies literally become the sources of their own energy as they hand-wash clothing in the absence of electricity infrastructure" (2020, 264-5).

The ending of the film represents the protagonists, Primrose and Thumeka, exhausted by the labour of struggling for survival and justice. Can they strike? Clearly, for those women who are not employed at the mine, or who are employed under the most precarious conditions, strike is not an available tool. But, as the film shows, all the work these women do is related to the Marikana strike to which they contributed through their reproductive labour and political effort. As such, the film can be considered a representation of a feminist strike through a radical critique of women's work and/as resistance in an extractive economy, rather than by withholding labour. This reading, however, necessitates a rethinking of both components of the term *feminist strike*. On the one hand, the women's work and activism here may not be regarded as feminist by themselves or the viewers. As director Aliki Saragas emphasizes, the film aims to show that "the idea of feminism can exist anywhere and in any circumstance. That it can exist and thrive in spaces of domesticity, where women are wives, mothers, sisters etc, in relation to a man. Feminism looks different in different contexts." (Medium 2018) On the other hand, the representations of women's activism and labour in this film gender our understanding of strike by reflecting on the types of work that make labour strikes possible.

This film expands notions of feminism and feminist strike by situating contemporary Black women's struggles in South Africa within a long tradition of women's resistance and shows how political resistance is bound to questions of reproductive work. By keeping its focus on a concrete situation and aesthetically framing it, *Strike a Rock* elucidates how the post-apartheid economy relies on devalued and invisibilized, yet essential, forms of labour.

Women of Uljanik through the Lens of Feminist Strike: Resisting Intersecting Labour Regimes in a Postsocialist Factory

In the Croatian collective consciousness, Uljanik shipyard exemplifies complex transformations from Yugoslav self-management to a market economy. The shipyard moved from being a symbol of Yugoslav industrial expansion to becoming an epitome of struggles against postsocialist deindustrialization, aggressive privatization, and systematic degradation. In the 2000s, Uljanik developed another set of contradictions as it was seen both as a symbol of the socialist era's decline and as a place where Europeanization efforts aimed at bringing economic and creative rejuvenation. These diverse representations of Uljanik bring together visions of the shipyard as a restructured hub for future growth, as a symbol of Pula's working-class history and multicultural identity, as well

as a marker of urban decay and workers' struggles against deindustrialization. As such, Uljanik complicates notions of transition and the binary division between the past socialist industrial expansion on the one hand, and attempts to overshadow challenges of deindustrialization with promises of a better European future on the other.

The 2018 strike organized by the Uljanik workers against the delay in their paychecks and the threatening bankruptcy of the shipyard has challenged transition narratives by revealing the complex interplay of socialism, postsocialism, and Europeanization. Through the repertoires of work stoppages, public marches, and petitions, workers organized in the Initiative for Defence of Uljanik have demanded for the return of workers' control over the shipyard's management as a way to address mistrust in the governance structures, wage uncertainties, and anxieties about the future of the shipyard.

The Uljanik strike demonstrated how emotional attachments to industrial work or the factory can resist privatization and Europeanization pressures, fostering alternative production modes and opening space for alternative futures to emerge. It has connected early forms of resistance to Yugoslav market liberalization reforms, periodic union protests, and pushes for employee shareholding models in the 1990s, to contemporary resistance against deindustrialization. Furthermore, the strike portrayed Europeanization as a continuation of the destruction of socialist industry, revealing that promises of a better European future were linked to infrastructural decay. Since Uljanik declared bankruptcy in 2019, the strike marked the shipyard's decline as a symbol of Yugoslav industrial success and workers' self-management during transition, a slow and continuous process outside the temporalities of collapsed socialism.

To further explore how the Uljanik strike makes visible complex temporal entanglements between (post)socialism and Europeanization, we need an analytical vocabulary that exposes entangled temporalities of oppression and diverse resistances at the intersection of citizenship and work struggles. A feminist strike provides us with such a vocabulary. It helps us work through these contradictions to uncover how work can be a system of oppression and marginalization across continuities between socialism and Europeanization, and at the same time, make resistance to oppression possible. A feminist strike redefines a strike as a continuous process and not just a single event. As such, it also enables us to see how postsocialism encompasses the intertwining of past legacies and potential futures and to understand postsocialist transformation beyond conventional narratives of evolution or revolution.

In the specific context of Uljanik, three core claims can be made. First, a feminist strike shows how socialist imaginaries of work can make resistance possible. Affective memories of socialist industrial labour and consequent attachments of workers to the factory or products of their labour unsettles the linear grasp of transformations (Petrović 2014). Protest narratives of the Uljanik strike show how memories of work and a factory under socialism provided a critical gaze that resists the normalization of discontents of Europeanization and related market economy transitions and refuses to allow these to be neutralized and normalized as remains of an inappropriate past (Bonfiglioli 2020). The Uljanik strike has transformed nostalgic memories of the past and uncertain promises of progress into a fight for a better present.

Nostalgia, in this context, becomes a productive force against the potentially damaging effects of progress, especially as articulated in Europeanization. Workers in the Uljanik context used nostalgia not as a defensive mechanism but as a way to resist labelling socialism as an uncomfortable past that must be overcome. They provided factual accounts of their experiences and emotional connections to their work, presenting it as a moral critique and an alternative to the devaluation of work in Uljanik.

More than reproducing state-building discourses that celebrated workers as heroes of socialist modernization and Yugoslav multiculturalism, the strike articulated lived experiences of work and the everyday under socialism and articulated affective attachments to the workplace as a moral critique of and an alternative to deevaluation of work and production in Uljanik (Matošević 2019). Additionally, references to workers' self-management challenge the idea of a linear transition from socialism to a European future. In the narratives of workers, self-management is not seen as something that is lost but as a continuation and transformation of the past in the present. Brunnbauer and Hodges have shown how the paradigm of workers' self-management in Uljanik was an open-ended process that has outlived the end of socialism (2019). From the moment that it was introduced, workers' ownership and self-management was defined by the tension between demands for profitability and efficiency on the one hand and the shipyard's value as a contributor to workers' and public wellbeing on the other. Subsequent claims that the shipyard is a public good that

works for the community and the city are rooted in contemporary workers' struggles for the factory as much as they are rooted in the memories of the socialist past.

Second, a strike as a process makes visible how work as a form of oppression that silences women is made possible through the continuities between socialism and Europeanization. By collapsing rhythms of eruptive and slow resistances, feminist strike as a process connects the gendering of the work, factory, and city and related silencing of women's struggles in the context of Uljanik. It shows how masculinized work in the factory is entangled with feminized reproductive work at home.

Continuities between the repertoire of workers' protest actions during socialism and in the 1990s and 2000s construct a strike as a masculine act and erase the role of women in these resistances. Rendering a strike masculine silences different practices of waiting, endurance, postponement or feelings of exhaustion and failure, and practices of withdrawal and mourning as parts of the protest repertoire. Differentiation between the strike repertoire and everyday resistances is gendered because the repertoires celebrate the roughness and physicality of workers as icons of industrialization, breadwinners, and heroic protectors of family and struggle for the factory as a broader social justice struggle. Figurations of masculine work and a masculinized factory as a space of struggle are juxtaposed with feminized homes and the city as objects of these struggles. Moreover, by bringing together different rhythms of strike, feminist strike exposes the gendered entanglement between work and citizenship where workers constitute themselves as citizens of Pula by building ships. It further exposes the gendered representations of a masculinized Uljanik as a shipyard that works for the feminized city of Pula. Ultimately, it also shows how the Uljanik strike is connected to, and silences, the strike of female workers, in, for instance, Pula's garment industry, or the roles women played in making the strike possible.

Third, the strike-process reinterprets socialist failure. Contrary to dominant narratives portraying the Uljanik strike as a collapse of the socialist model, a feminist strike shifts the focus to quieter politics of endurance and adaptation. Instead of viewing the strike as a desperate attempt to rescue a failing socialist relic, it prompts us to consider how to act in the face of defeat and how to rebuild what has been damaged. As in the case of the women living in Marikana in South Africa in the aftermath of the massacre at Lonmin Platinum mine, in Uljanik, feminist strike as a lens, foregrounds the mourning and coping strategies of workers and residents in the aftermath of the strike, emphasizing the transformation of struggles.

Following the end of the 2018 strike and subsequent bankruptcy of the factory, organized resistance refocused on coping with the defeat and the aftermath of failed protest ("Uljanik za bolje sutra" 2018–2019). The post-strike period was defined by both a sense of melancholia combined with feelings of urgency to make sense of what the potential stoppage of production means for the future workers and the city ("Solidarno s radnicima Uljanika" 2019). The struggle for waged labour and struggles for production have been transformed and rephrased as a way of learning to live in the ruins of the big shipyard.

In socialism, the trope of a woman who works promised empowerment and citizenship recognition, despite the challenges of strenuous labor and low pay or the ongoing exploitation of women's reproductive roles at home. Losing their jobs due to deindustrialization also meant a lost promise of empowerment and recognition. Women in the garment industry, especially, resisted reforms that devalued labour rights and led to factory closures. Bonfiglioli's (2020) research sheds light on how women in the Kamensko textile factories balanced both their productive and reproductive roles, struggling for recognition after the factory went bankrupt and eventually closed. Through public protests and a hunger strike, these women emphasized their contributions to the factory, while also working to reproduce the socialist and the postsocialist state-building projects by providing clothing for the partisans, workers, and the political elites. At the same time, many of these protests and strikes remained invisible and those that were publicly visible were never framed as a national problem in a way that is comparable to Uljanik. Feminist solidarities and problematization of deindustralization and devaluation of women's labour as a part of the feminist struggle was limited, mostly due to the split between the liberal and proletarian reading of feminism that continued from socialist to postsocialist times (Petras 2013).

Overview of the Articles

This special issue is being published within the context of the global backlash against feminism and LGBTQI+ rights, and in particular, an attack on the rights of transgender people, in a time of war in Ukraine, Gaza, and

Sudan, the overturning of Roe v. Wade in the United States, and the passing of the anti-homosexuality bill in Uganda. We write at a time when gender studies have—yet again—become a target of authoritarian and illiberal politics (Petö 2020) and from locations where feminist scholars have risen against neoliberalization of the university and harassment in academia, and in support of academic freedom (Lewis 2018; Meade et al. 2023; Täuber et al. 2022). The writings assembled here draw attention to feminist activism and protests initiated and led by women in some of the most repressive states in the world today, focusing on the intersection of feminist, political, and economic demands. The forms of feminist strike considered here emerge from everyday struggles for survival under global capitalism and expose the structural violence of authoritarian regimes.

Not all the strikes that are considered here are explicitly defined as feminist by those who take part in them, nor would all the protests that are the subject of analysis in this collection be defined as strikes in the narrow sense. Many of these forms of protest exceed the conventional definitions of feminism, strike, and resistance. Bringing these terms into a conversation through the framework of feminist strike casts light on the limitations of feminism when it is disconnected from questions of (racialized) labour, and on worker's movements that disregard the gendered nature of labour itself. The collection also problematizes various forms of resistance including everyday resistances and quite(er) defiance that extend and expand the established repertoires of labour strikes. The articles collected in this special issue allow us to see, through their focus on local iterations, the diversity and specificity of forms of feminist protest across the world.

Points of dissensus and controversies explored in this special issue further existing discussions on how a feminist strike challenges established conceptions of work, feminist struggles and protest. They also raise questions about the limits of an encompassing approach to a feminist strike "that entangles everything in the desire to change everything" and about how not to flatten diverse forms of resistance if they are assembled under the banner of feminist strike (Gago 2020). Contributions show various acts through which women have claimed political, cultural, and social rights, while challenging conventional views of reproductive and productive work, unions, gender roles, and politics. The articles are not always directly connected to the March 8 feminist strike, and they open space for problematization of controversies that emerge from, for instance, the connections of feminist mobilizations to established structures of power, or the limitations of strike as a rupture to grasp quieter politics or transformative efforts of feminist mobilizations.

Pamela Scully intersects the problem of strike with women's anti-war mobilizations in Liberia. She argues that women's mobilizations around the concept of a sex strike as a form of anti-war resistance offered a broader critique of gender-based violence, and a way of connecting violence against women in armed conflicts and in the domestic sphere. Lidia Salvatori's "From Italy with Rage: Feminists Striking in Uncertain Times" is an autoethnographic account of the feminist movement *Non Una di Meno* in Italy and focuses on the role of digital connectivity in the formation of a transnational women's movement. Rejoice Chipuriro's article considers strategies, motivations, and methods employed by the Women's Assembly of the Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai in the 2016 #BeatThePot protest in Zimbabwe, showcasing the strength of women organizing across race, age, occupation, religious beliefs, and political affiliations under the unifying symbolism of "bodies that strike."

In her contribution, Anagha S. focuses on work, land, and citizenship struggles in the 2015 Pombilai Orumai strike by women workers at the Kannan Devan tea plantation in Kerala, India. The author demonstrates that a sudden work stoppage involving more than 5,000 women workers led to wage increases, while also exposing union ties to the plantation owners and the negative effects of the developmental models of the Kerala state. Moumita Biswas's analysis of women's participation in the 2019 Shaheen Bagh protests in New Delhi against the discriminatory Citizenship Amendment Act highlights how economic exploitation is linked to the violence of intersecting patriarchies in the context of Hindutva nationalism.

Other contributions reveal connections between women's struggles for just work and other resistances by exploring protest practices beyond work stoppages and other forms of interruptions. Barbara Dynda examines protest practices of the Polish anarcho-feminist movement in the 1990s and 2000s. Dynda approaches the anarcho-feminist zines as an archive of grassroots feminist movements characterized by intersecting claims for reproductive, sexual, and environmental rights. The article explores the (dis)continuities between the early postso-

cialist practices that they mediate and feminist practices during socialism, as well as contemporary reproductive justice struggles in Poland.

In the article "Unveiling Feminist Strike: The Case of 'Woman, Life, Freedom' in Iran," Shirin Assa explores the transversal revolutionary potential of unveiling and hair-cutting by women in Iran in defiance of the imposition of the hijab and state control of both the public and private lives of women and girls. Writing in response to and in the wake of the murder of Jina Mahsa Amini at the hands of the morality police in Tehran on September 16, 2022, Assa provides insight into gender-based persecution and the ongoing protests in Iran. The Human Rights Activists News Agency in Iran notes that one of the key features of the "Woman, Life, Freedom" protests has been the participation of workers, with more than 150 strikes taking place in 53 cities across Iran between September and December 2022. During this same time period, 481 people were killed and approximately 20,000 people were arrested. Assa argues for understanding the protests in Iran as feminist strikes against what she terms, drawing on the work of Sergio González Rodríguez, "the femicide machine."

Olia Sosnovskaya's piece asks if a rupture is a meaningful concept at all and how we can understand continuities between disruptive protest practices on the one hand and everyday performances of care and healing on the other. The analysis is situated in the 2020–21 post-election uprising in Belarus.

Judith Naeff, in a conversation with Lebanese filmmaker, artist, and researcher Marwa Arsanios, engages with a feminist strike through radical feminist ecological resistance as practiced by autonomous women's movements in the conflict zones of Syrian Kurdistan, Turkish Kurdistan, Colombia, and Lebanon. Arsanios shows the limits of the disruptiveness of striking and proposes derailing as a transformative practice that refuses the existing status quo while also generating new social forms.

In her interview with Sasha Talaver, one of the activists of Feminist Antiwar Resistance, which was founded in Russia on February 25, 2022, one day after the invasion of Ukraine, Ksenia Robbe raises the question of the conditions that make feminist strike impossible and at the same time imperative. Talaver and Robbe's discussion engages with the metaphorical uses of the term *strike* and also surfaces the fact that there were 358 labour protests in Russia in 2022 alone, many of which took the form of strikes. Talaver's take on the role of strikes as a form of resistance to oppression mirrors the perspective we have aimed to convey throughout this special issue, which is inspired by the courage and tenacity of those who have participated in feminist strikes around the world. In response to Robbe's question about the future of strike as a method under conditions of authoritarianism and war, Talaver states, "I still think that strike is probably our main hope, to be honest."

Endnotes

1. On March 21 2022, Kylie Thomas and Ksenia Robbe convened a film screening and discussion of Aliki Saragas' *Strike A Rock*, a film that focuses on South African women's activism in the aftermath of the 2012 Marikana Massacre. We are grateful to Nomusa Makhubu, Patience Mususa and Helene Strauss for the perspectives they shared. This event formed part of the programme of the workshop "Poetics and Politics of Strike in the Post-socialist/Postcolonial Encounter" organized by Senka Neuman-Stanivukovic, Ksenia Robbe and Judith Naeff which took place at the University of Groningen and online on April 7- 8 2022. We would also like to thank everyone who contributed to the workshop, including our keynote speakers, Francisca de Haan, Liz Mason-Deese and Marwa Arsanios.

2. Among the most prominent documentaries that were produced in the aftermath of the massacre are *Miners Shot Down* (dir. by Rehad Desai, 2014) and *The Marikana Massacre: Through the Lens* (eNCA, 2013), neither of which focuses on the women of Marikana.

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#BeatThePot: Strategies and Discourses of Women's Protests in Zimbabwe

by Rejoice Chipuriro

Abstract: This paper focuses on strategies deployed by women and discourses of women's collective action in the #BeatThePot strike which took place alongside popular protests against Mugabe and the failures of ZANU-PF led government in Zimbabwe. Using Judith Butler's ideas on "bodies in alliance and the politics of the street," I theorize how women as gendered "bodies congregate, move, speak and strike together as they claim public space into political spaces" (2015, 70). I interrogate women's use of embodiment as a strategy involving the metaphor of both the "labouring mothering body" and as "bodies that strike," which demonstrates how women in Zimbabwe confronted violent political, economic, and socio-cultural limits imposed on their bodies. In this strike, women challenged the silencing of women's public political work and refused to be relegated to the invisible margins of domesticized and undervalued reproductive labour. Thus, through the #BeatThePot protest, I demonstrate how women in Zimbabwe have engaged in body work to a confront violent regime and how they have borne on their bodies violent reprisal through sexual attacks, abductions, incarcerations, torture, and even loss of life. The paper concludes that the feminized body is a site of violent struggle for autonomy and that through collective action women in Zimbabwe have sought to confront and transform the repressive state.

Keywords: feminist strike; gendered violence; protests; reproductive labour; Zimbabwe

Author: Rejoice Chipuriro is a post-doctoral researcher with interests in articulating the struggles of groups ascribed to the peripheries due to their race, class, or gender. Her works draws from these seldom-heard voices to challenge the prevailing status quo and invariably the inequalities that have detrimental impacts on the capabilities and well-being of marginalised groups. She is currently focusing on gendered and racialised violence within African food systems, research emerging from her PhD thesis where she worked with resettled elderly women farmers in Zimbabwe.

Introduction: Zimbabwean Women's Struggles for Justice from the First Chimurenga to #BeatThePot

As Fatou Sow argues, women of all backgrounds and across continents appreciate the need to enjoy more rights leading to their participation in various movements, campaigns, and projects (Sow 2021, 6). Written accounts of women's organizing and resistance to oppression in Zimbabwe historically include the First *Chimurenga/ Umvukelo* (resistance) of 1896–97 which Mbuya Nehanda and Queen Lozikeyi led as spiritual and military religious leaders in Mashonaland and Matabeleland, respectively.[1] Historian David Beach diminished Mbuya Nehanda's role in organizing the first *Chimurenga*, by claiming that she was unjustly accused of initiating the resistance and that it was somewhat more likely initiated by her co-accused, Sekuru Kaguvi, as a more influential male leader in the Eastern Salisbury District (1998). Mbuya Nehanda was tried for the murder of H.H. Pollard, an oppressive Native Commissioner, and hanged by the Rhodesian police in 1898 (Beach 1998). At her execution Mbuya Nehanda reportedly refused to convert to Christianity and claimed that her bones would rise again, and her words became the inspirational mobilizing point of the second *Chimurenga* uprising from 1964 to 1979 which led to Zimbabwe's independence (Chigumadzi 2018). The story of Queen Lozikeyi, a powerful wife of King Lobengula who

wielded political authority, ritual power, and military influence over the Ndebele nation, was largely ignored in Zimbabwe's national history (Clarke and Nyathi 2010, 64). Scholars have noted how Zimbabwe's history has largely been biased towards nationalist narratives that attempt to unify multiple ethnicities, races and struggles to form a monolithic narrative that glorifies the "founding fathers" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012,15).

Whilst women have deployed different strategies in their struggles against colonial rule and patriarchal oppression and state violence, this paper focuses on the post-2000 era as a turning point in the history of Zimbabwe, and which had important political impact on the Mugabe regime.[2] During this period, the country went through a hyperinflationary economy, which saw an increase in anti-ZANU-PF[3] protests and the emergence of its largest Opposition political party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) (Gaidzanwa, 2020). In this article I focus on a particular women's protest, #BeatThePot, which was organized by the MDC-Tsvangirai (MDC-T)[4] Women's Movement, and I draw data from online media, including newspaper reports on the incident. The paper starts with setting the context within which #BeatThePot protest took place to provide insight into the historical, social, and political drivers of the conflict. From a contextual analysis the discussion shifts into the forms of mobilizing that were deployed, before delving into the logics of the protest as articulated by participants in the strike. This leads into a discussion on the modes of organizing deployed by the MDC-T Women's Assembly in mobilizing women to participate in the protest, followed by an analysis of the social articulation and logic of the strike. The paper also explores the symbolism that women used to frame their political standpoint, the impact of the strike, and the controversies surrounding the MDC leader. The words "protest" and "strike" are used to distinguish between the action of protesting and strike as a metaphor in organizing the protest.

Context Setting: Crisis Under Mugabe's Rule

To appreciate the role played by Zimbabwean women's movements in advancing a transformative agenda it is important to delve into the historical and contextual settings within which these struggles emerge. Zimbabwe is located within the Southern Africa region, the countries of which share similar histories of settler colonial conquests and white minority rule. Women fought and resisted colonial rule in all its repressive forms alongside their male compatriots in the form of nationalist liberation movements.

ZANU-PF party won the first election at independence and its leader, Mugabe, adopted colonialist practices where racism, tribalism, sexism, and violence thrived, leading to atrocities such as *Gukurahundi* (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012). *Gukurahundi*, which means "the early rain that clears the chaff after harvest," was a genocidal campaign of violence targeting Ndebele people in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces from 1982 to 1987, when ZANU-PF and ZAPU signed the Unity Accord. This Unity Accord led to the erasure of ZAPU as an outright political opponent through its co-optation into ZANU-PF (Gaidzanwa 2020). The next main Opposition political party, MDC, only emerged in 1999. MDC's inception from the workers' movement Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) followed tumultuous economic woes of the 1990s, worsened under the World Bank's Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP), and Black Friday in 1997, when the Zimbabwean dollar crashed and never recovered. In 2000, the MDC defeated the ZANU-PF-led government after campaigning for a 'No' vote in the constitutional referendum, which intended to adopt a controversial policy of land appropriation without compensation (Moore 2014). This ZANU-PF loss led to a series of incidents of politically motivated violence, which has become the ruling party's legacy.

In the 2008 presidential elections, Mugabe lost to Tsvangirai in highly disputed election results which led to a run-off. In the pre-run-off period between March and June 2008, the military unleashed a war-like election campaign through *Operation Makavhotera papi* (Operation who did you vote for), and terrorized, tortured, abducted, and killed Opposition members (Masunungure 2011). Political activists, including civil society human rights actors, such as Jestina Mukoko, were forcibly abducted. Mukoko was only released following women's marches, and petitions by her formidable lawyer, Beatrice Mtetwa. Women civil society leaders approached the SADC and international community and finally also appealed to the ZANU-PF Women's League and female political leaders to intervene (Mukoko 2016). Several other women, ordinary citizens as well as political activists, were impacted by these military atrocities when their homes were burned down, and they were tortured,

arrested, sexually assaulted, abducted, and killed by state security agents and their ZANU-PF supporters.

Following the political impasse resulting from the June 2008 presidential election, Mugabe agreed to sign the Government of National Unity (GNU) agreement in February 2009. This allowed for the MDC-T, and its splinter party MDC-M, to be incorporated into government, with Tsvangirai instated as the prime minister (Masunungure 2011). This façade of unity only lasted until the next presidential election in July 2013 when both MDC factions were ousted from power-sharing with ZANU-PF. The country, which had enjoyed some relief from hyperinflation, shortages of food and basic commodities, found itself back in the economic doldrums. The post-GNU economic and political challenges led to further clashes and confrontations with Mugabe's government. Political activists and disgruntled masses protested the ruling party through performative acts of resistance, such as street and online/offline protests by different groups. These protests intensified in 2016 (Siziba, Mpofu, and Ndlovu 2021). Following state-controlled censorship against anti-Mugabe protests, a new trend of mobilizing through social media emerged, using hashtags. The most popular of these was the #ThisFlag movement, led by pastor Evan Mawarire. #ThisFlag garnered international support through breaking the mould of political party-linked protests, and harnessed the power of social media to mobilize mass stayaways at a time when political parties were weakening (Siziba, Mpofu, and Ndlovu 2021). Other popular protests were mobilized by the #Tajamuka youth movement, which mobilized unemployed young people and informal vendors. The MDC-T's Women's Assembly then mobilized women in Bulawayo to challenge Mugabe's rule through their own #BeatThePot protest, which they intended to take across the country.

Representations and Framing of Female Identity in Women's Claims for Political Rights

It is equally important to reflect on the socio-cultural context in which the Zimbabwean political and economic crisis unfolded. Zimbabwe's patriarchal society is structured through gendered hierarchies in which ostensible female inferiority frames women's claims for social, cultural, economic, and political rights (Sow 2021, 1). To demonstrate how gender intersects with politics, Hassim states that women, regardless of their race, class, ethnicity, are consistently defined as political outsiders or as second-class citizens (2002, 697). In Zimbabwe, disparaging comments by male political party leaders indicate how women's voices are positioned in politics. For example, in 2013, Mugabe dismissed the recommendations made by SADC mediator's South African Minister Lindiwe Zulu that the country's presidential elections should be postponed, describing her statements as a "street woman's stupid utterances" (News24 2013).

Women's political claims are often dismissed because of their inferred lower socio-economic status. Powerful patriarchal norms confine women to the kitchen, with its socially inferior status, which emanates from women's traditionally and socially prescribed gendered roles of making food (Inness 2001). Political parties have been no different in sidelining women and pushing them to the lower ranks, or into token positions, including ridiculing the hard fought for women's quota in Parliament as the "kitchen cabinet" (Mangena 2022).

In addition to active participation within political parties, women in Zimbabwe protested through civil society groups, including the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ), a national membership-based network of women's rights activists and women's organizations. Women also protested through various workers' unions which included the Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (ARTUZ), the Zimbabwe Nurses Association (Zina) and the National Vendors Union of Zimbabwe (NAVUZ) which represents street vendors, the majority of whom are women. Women also stood against ZANU-PF and all forms of repression through their professional capacities as human rights lawyers and scholars, by advocating and lobbying for justice, whilst others, as artists, voiced their resistance through music, theatre, fiction, and non-fiction writing. However, most forms of sustained resistance by women were through the Opposition MDC's political party mobilization. ZANU-PF Women's Leagues and Youth wings were drawn upon to strike against purported regime-change opponents or for propping up their male leaders' whims, such as, ZANU-PF's anti-sanctions protests, or they were bussed in to attend rallies without any coherent articulation of struggles aligned to their cause. ZANU Women's Leagues protests were unhampered by state security, neither were they arrested or harassed, as their participation defends, rather than opposes patriarchal power.

On the other hand, MDC women political activists have been harassed, arrested, tortured, and removed from the

streets and their personhood defamed in national newspapers, while others were raped and branded as "Tsvangirai's whores" (Thomas, Masinjila and Bere 2013, 527). To prevent women's collective action, women who oppose the state are labelled as "loose" or "prostitutes," and this is used to justify the forceful removal of them from public spaces by the police. The state has thus been largely implicated in criminalizing female agency (Mangena 2021, 90).

It was within this volatile political and hyperinflationary environment and in the context of Mugabe's desperate use of state violence to shrink democratic spaces, that the MDC-T Women's Assembly mobilized the #BeatThePot strike. In July 2016, Thokozani Khupe, deputy president of MDC-T, led approximately 2000 women who marched from the City Hall in Bulawayo wearing the red party regalia, whilst beating empty pots and pans, and carrying dolls on their backs to represent hungry children, calling for the resignation of President Mugabe on account of his failure to provide food, jobs, and democratic rule (Okay Africa, 2016).

New Modes of Organizing: the #BeatThePot Protest

MDC-T Women's Assembly presented what Hassim (2002, 693) defines as a "strong social movement" by articulating women's strategic and practical needs and successfully mobilizing over 2000 women to protest in defence of their interests. These protests were followed by nationwide strikes organised by the MDC-T president in alliance with civil society, student movements, and teachers' unions. MDC-T Women's Assembly mobilized technical support, which included activities such as advertising the event through newspapers not controlled by the state, preparing for the march according to Public Order and Security Act (POSA) requirements, and eventually engaging their lawyers to submit letters to the High Court which successfully challenged a Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) imposed ban on their march. Thokozani Khupe held press conferences and informed the public how the protest was part of a wider struggle for women's political participation and calls for justice through free and fair elections.

The mobilization of women in Bulawayo was strategic on several fronts, the first being that it is the city from where MDC-T's Deputy President Khupe, who was the face of the protest, originates. In a country where ethnic polarization persists in politics, it was a good strategy in that Khupe would amass a large number of supporters from her home area. The second strategic move is that Bulawayo is a city marred by the historical clash between ZIPRA and ZANLA forces linked to the former ZAPU and ZANU-PF nationalist parties which culminated in *Gukurahundi*, the violent military operation that took place under Mugabe's rule (Alexander 2021, 763). Many women suffered atrocities and endured physical and emotional trauma when they lost their loved ones in these political clashes (Thomas, Masinjila and Bere 2013, 527). Drawing on the deep-rooted memory of this injustice, and on the popularity of Khupe, a campaign against the Mugabe regime was successfully launched by women in Bulawayo, harnessing their power to protest political tyranny and economic demise.

Bulawayo as a city also offered an advantage for the MDC-T whose greater voter base was in cities due to the large populace of people who were laid off work as part of ESAP, collapsing industries under a hyperinflationary economy. The rallying point for #BeatThePot was that it was promoted as protesting hunger, following what Berazneva and Lee (2013, 34) postulate—that the urban poor are easily mobilised to join food riots as they are hardest hit by rising food costs and unemployment. Nyambi theorizes Zimbabweans' experiences of hunger post-2000 as a life-threatening form of violence which was more fearsome than xenophobia and translated as hungerphobia (Nyambi 2018). Hunger in Zimbabwe is thus conceptualized as a perpetual deadly vice embedded in the country's social and economic crisis. Food scarcity thus became easily politicized as a mobilizing force against the failed Mugabe regime by the MDC-T Women's Assembly, considering women's traditionally ascribed roles of provisioning and cooking food to nurture their families.

The use of social and print media outside of state control provided an effective tool through which to reach large numbers of technologically connected groups in urban areas. Protest movements have also taken advantage of the increased ease of access to mobile phones and internet connectivity to articulate political discourses and conscientize the public about social injustice. In this way, they have countered censoring by the state-controlled media such as newspapers, television, and radio, which in the past acted as barriers to communicating political interests opposed to the state.

Due to the high number of women mobilized, #BeatThePot offered a safer space for solidarity and protest where women could exercise their agency with reduced fear of abduction and torture. Prior to this protest, many women, such as journalists, prominent political activists, and civil society leaders, were targeted and abducted from their homes (Mukoko 2016). Similar cases of women activists being arrested and denied their rights to express themselves through protests were reported in Kenya (Thomas, Masinjila and Bere 2013, 525–28). Women's activism and political voice has thus far been decimated and silenced. It is only through continued defiance that women have persisted to protest in various, but smaller formations, as the draconian reactions by authoritarian regimes makes it difficult for women to publicly voice their dissent. However, #BeatThePot was successful in mobilizing protest which led to women's collective action on a large scale.

Whilst #BeatThePot did not unseat Mugabe, it was one of the campaigns that played a crucial role in promoting citizen agency, in addition to the other forms of collective resistance mounted by civil society and opposition political movements. Whilst this was incremental effort, arguments are that such fragmented protests and other hashtag movements such as #Tajamuka and #ThisFlag could have been more effective if they all joined forces. This notion of mobilizing beyond the women's movement is hinged on the idea that larger numbers in non-violent protests yield more impact in toppling authoritarian regimes as evidenced in studies conducted by Chenoweth and Stephen (2011). Another factor that impacted the outcome of #BeatThePot is that their symbolic use of kitchen utensils to 'strike' against Mugabe's authoritarian regime subverted dismissive tendencies by hierarchical political structures in Zimbabwe which package women's wings' political engagement as "kitchen" activities (Geisler 1995 cited in Mangena 2022).

Social Articulation of the Logic between Marginality and Protests

Women's articulations of why they participated in #BeatThePot show how the state failed in its mandate, leading to a political and economic crisis which made it difficult, if not impossible, for women to fulfil societal expectations about their obligations to their families and rendered them vulnerable to violence and abuse. The strike reflected how the relationship between the state and citizens influences their behaviour, including how they participate in civic and political affairs (Gaidzanwa 2020,25). As such, where governance and security structures are authoritarian, intolerant, or use violence as a tool for control, citizens also become confrontational as they resist repressive rule. The MDC-T Women's Assembly epitomized the popular women's rights' slogan of making the political personal (Man Ling Lee 2007, 163.). For example, state security has been used as an excuse to deprive citizens of their right to protest, upholding the autocratic nature of the regime in Zimbabwe (Jafari 2003, 6). In this regard, women sought to reassert their voices in the restricted space of Zimbabwean politics. The #BeatThePot protest was initially banned following a court application by the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) citing security threats as described by Kholwani Ngwenya, an MDC-T lawyer: "The argument by the police to ban the march was that they were not given adequate time to prepare, but the judge said the Constitution supercedes the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) on which the police were basing their argument" (Kholwani Ngwenya cited by Newsday Zimbabwe, 16 July 2016, Bulawayo).

POSA regulations stipulated that Zimbabweans must seek and be granted permission first by the ZRP to lawfully protest. The ZRP hardly permitted any Opposition parties to gather or march in protest, which contradicted Section 59 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, that grants citizens the right to demonstrate (Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights 2018). In this instance the lawyers of MDC successfully challenged the ZRP ban at the High Court.

Without counter resistance and challenging of the regime via the courts, many poor people in Zimbabwe, especially women, are often unable to express their democratic right to protest without facing state brutality at the hands of the ZRP and the military. State power exercised through the abuse of the judiciary and security forces impede rather than promote delivery of justice in Zimbabwe. Police brutality is aimed at silencing dissenting voices and intimidating political opponents. Women as activists and politicians are targeted in society and silenced both in the home and public spaces, as mentioned by one elderly woman who participated in the protest in Bulawayo in 2016: "We are hungry, we need money and food, our children are not employed so we are beating the pots. Maybe they will hear us, we have nothing to cook in them" (participant cited in Okay Africa 16 July 2016, Bulawayo).

The protester here expresses how women, as a politically marginalized group, resorted to striking empty pots as a means to be heard and to articulate their concerns. This elderly woman shared how she hoped that by striking the pots, women would make enough noise until the ruling elites in ZANU-PF addressed economic issues causing hunger. Her narration also shows how women simultaneously drew on and refused their gendered roles, moving from the confines of private homes, striking utensils to make noise over their concerns, in public spaces. Their cooking utensils became weapons or tools to strike at oppression and exclusion. Khupe, who carried a baby on her back whilst leading the strike, demonstrated how women are expected to fulfil their nurturing roles of caring for babies and feeding the family and, at the same time, need to protest against the state. By striking, women were using the space to voice their burdens and the impossibility of performing these gendered roles under the hyperinflationary economy. "These pots that we are beating are no longer cooking anything at home therefore we brought them to say we no longer have anything to cook. We are starving," said Thokozani Khupe in a radio interview (Nehanda Radio 2016)

It is part of feminist thought and practice that the "body is political" (Sow 2021, 7). The political symbolism embodied through motherhood is used extensively by women's movements in the Global South, including Pachamama (Mother Earth) in Peru, where protestors linked the female body to the Mother Earth nurturing life and feeding the nation (Cavagnaro and Shenton 2019, 6). These bodily representations of women acquired new meanings through protests, ones that politicized the gendered roles with which women are associated (Molyneux 1985, 228). In this instance, protestors used their roles as mothers to demand a politics of care which opposes patriarchal violence and corruption. Through incorporating values based on an ethics of care, women's movements mobilize to ensure the wellbeing of families and ultimately of the nation, as articulated by Emang Basadi, a movement from Botswana's slogan: "Vote a Woman! Suckle the Nation!" (Van Allen cited in Tripp 2003, 251).

Politics of care gained traction through ecofeminism's focus on women's nurturing roles as key elements to sustenance as opposed to the exploitative nature of capitalism and patriarchy. By centring care, women draw attention to an alternative politics of interdependence. It is important to note though that this way of thinking about women's political work can also reinforce inherently conservative ideas about gender and women's roles. Whilst the politicization of motherhood was deployed during #BeatThePot, it has not been universally adopted in other women's protests. Other women activists mobilizing in Zimbabwe have resisted being cast in limiting gendered roles, and this is at least part of the reason for the extremely violent response they have received (McFadden 2022).

Increased food costs, compounded by job losses since 2000 in Zimbabwe, left most urban dwellers vulnerable to hunger. The MDC-T Women's Assembly took this food crisis as a political opportunity to mobilize women against the hyperinflationary economy. In so doing, the organizers managed to turn the case of social and economic injustice into a "politically effective moral outrage" (Barrington Moore cited in Serulnikov 1994, 80). Through the #BeatThePot protest women in Bulawayo were able to politically challenge the state's inability to run an effective economic and social support system to prevent extreme hunger faced by citizens. Khupe describes the women's protest as a strategy of adding pressure to obtain democratic spaces within Zimbabwe's polity. In the radio interview cited above, Khupe said,

> What we are saying here is we are putting more fire on a pot that is already boiling. We want that pot to boil until Mugabe goes. That is why we are saying please Mugabe you have failed, please go so that our lives can go on well. Robert Mugabe and ZANU-PF must step aside and allow a government that will be ushered in through free, fair credible elections. (Nehanda Radio 2016)

Khupe's statement challenges Zimbabwean political party hierarchies which allocates women to docile women's leagues or women's movements, invariably locking them in marginal political 'kitchen' roles where they endorse and nourish male political careers (Mangena 2022). By drawing women out of their kitchens onto the street, Khupe used the public space to articulate women's private struggles and daily experiences of hunger. This showed how women are formidable actors within the political space, capable of expressing their agency in calling for change. In calling all women to add pressure to Mugabe's proverbial boiling pot, Khupe used relatable symbols that her political constituency could understand, challenging the position of women as docile 'kitchen' members in Zimbabwe's political party structures.

Women's organizing within their political parties sustains the pressure required to dismantle gendered oppression as women place demands on their own rights and contest the separation of concerns narrowly defined as political issues and those cast as social issues within national and party agendas (Connell 1998, 204). However, according to intersectional feminist standpoints, whilst women are marginalized in politics, not all women face oppression in the same way due to differences in race, age, ethnicity, marital status, occupation, class, and many other variables. This raises the question of how and why large numbers of women would come together in protest. The answer to that lies in movement leaders identifying what Molyneux defines as women's "practical gender interests" which ties women to nurturing duties often linked to food protests (1985, 233). The MDC-T Women's Assembly mobilized for its #BeatThePot protest by appealing to women's practical gender interests of ensuring sufficient food and good governance for economic stability, as Florence Nyika, MDC-T Bulawayo Women Assembly organising Secretary makes clear, "We intend to hold similar marches throughout the country for as long as the government is not showing commitment and sincerity to address hunger and poverty affecting women." (Nehanda Radio 2016)

Molyneux also postulates that feminist movements mobilize based on "strategic gender interests" which cut across economic class interests, such as the struggle against male violence and domination, as well as reproductive rights (1985, 232). Again, the protest #BeatThePot appealed to women's strategic gender needs when they successfully mobilized a collective political voice demanding an end to exclusionary politics, political violence, and misrule. To be effective, feminist strikes should cut across both practical gender needs, and strategic gender needs which pools together women from different races, ages, occupations, religious beliefs, and political affiliations. An early example is the Federation of South African Women (FedSAW), which united women across racial groups in opposition to apartheid in South Africa (Unterhalter 1983, 892).

Theorising the Symbols and Strategies of Protest

To analyze the role played by the state in instituting gendered and racialised violence in Zimbabwe it is important to centre narratives of women (Smith 2005, 2). The ZANU-PF party-state embraced a *Chimurenga* ideology rooted in African nationalism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012, 2). This fostering of African nationalism by the state encultured violence and militarism in a sexist patriarchal political culture (Gaidzanwa 2020, 25). Whilst women's participation was part of wider national protests, their entry point differed from that of men and was linked to their social position, which in turn was shaped by the sexual division of labour (Molyneux 1985, 228). In #BeatThePot, women of Bulawayo, armed with their empty pots and cooking utensils, denounced the economic and governance crisis. They sang revolutionary songs in protest, demanding that Mugabe's government step down to allow for free and fair elections for a democratic transition. These noisy beatings at the #BeatThePot strike can be compared to the notion of "noisy silence" coined by Jocelyn Alexander in her article about *Gukurahundi*, in which she contrasts the "collective, imaginative response to a failure to grant recognition to a violent past" (2021, 763). The women who took part in #BeatThePot showed agency as a collective when they interjected and made the necessary "noise" across the public and private spheres, making the personal political as they defied historical *Gukurahundi* silences.

Women carried babies or dolls whilst banging empty pots, conjuring a highly gendered image associated with women's identity as mothers which became the symbol of women's opposition and protest to the government (Okay Africa 2016). Thus, by laying claims to motherhood, women are "appropriating a 'useful past' from a diversity of African pre-colonial histories" (Adesina 2010, 16). Motherhood in this regard was deployed as the basis of political and moral authority for negotiating change in the context of political movements (Tripp 2003, 249). A similar deployment of motherhood as a political tool in negotiation has been used in other contexts, such as Kenya, where, for example, in February 1992, a group of elderly rural Kikuyu women who were mothers of political prisoners travelled to Nairobi and held a hunger strike demanding the release of their sons from prison. The women strategically deployed motherhood as a political identity which appealed to most Kenyans who were poor like themselves, and invoked protests based on principles of care and justice (Tibbetts 1994, 28).

The MDC-T Women's Assembly advertised the strike through media outlets including newspapers. The concluding statement of the newspaper article calling for strike quotes the famous South African women's movement chant, '*Wathinta abafazi, wathinta imbokodo!*'

(When you strike a woman, you strike a rock). This mobilizing chant symbolized the strength of a woman, equating it to that of a rock that can crush oppression in a state of resistance. This war-cry was made famous by a group of South African women when more than 20,000 women were mobilized by the leaders of four women's movements, including Lilian Ngoyi, the president of the ANC Women's League, to present their petition against inclusion of women in the pass laws to restrict their movements. (Nthongoa 2020). Thokozani Khupe, as the president of the MDC-T Women's Assembly mobilized women to march against state repression and like her predecessors, equated the strength of women in resistance to *imbokodo* (rock). In addition, #BeatThePot was a form of visual activism where women enacted in public space the pain and suffering of their domestic roles worsened by the hyperinflationary economy and exclusionary politics, which burdened their existence as wives, mothers, and citizens.

Thokozani Khupe's Contested Political Identity and MDC-T Struggles

Despite the sterling mobilizing power displayed by Thokozani Khupe as she brought the MDC-T Women's Assembly to strike against Mugabe's autocratic regime, she has remained a negatively tainted politician. To assess the impact of #BeatThePot protest it is important to locate Khupe's positioning within Zimbabwe's hostile politics. Khupe, like other women politicians asserting themselves in male dominated political spaces, are often portrayed as deviant bodies challenging male-centric power and dominance. As a result of this gendered bias in politics, most women politicians, including Khupe, experienced sexist harassment online and offline during the run-up to the July 2018 elections (Ncube and Gwatisira 2020). The gendered dimension of political participation is an important defining characteristic which intersects with ethnic, racialised, and class identities negatively impacting women's claims for social, cultural, economic, and political rights (Sow 2021, 1). In this regard, it is important to note how the controversies surrounding Khupe might have impacted the protest and why this is important for women's political participation overall.

Khupe oscillated from being appointed as one of three MDC-T deputy presidents and later rising to being its controversial president following Tsvangirai's death. Her rise to MDC-T's leadership was fraught with violent tensions in which she was assaulted and harassed by rival deputy Nelson Chamisa before the courts ruled in her favour (Bulawayo24, 2018). Chamisa and other former MDC factions regrouped and formed MDC Alliance to contest in the 2018 general elections (BBC News Africa 2018). However, Khupe was later instated as the leader of the Opposition in Parliament despite the MDC Alliance having more Opposition members in Parliament. Khupe subsequently received funds for the Opposition party following a court ruling in her favour, which caused her to fall out with MDC Alliance members who accused her of bedding Zimbabwe's President Mnangagwa to attain judicial and political backing to destroy the Opposition. Khupe was later embroiled in bitter wrangles when she led the MDC-T in recalling members of Parliament who had defected to follow Chamisa (Big Saturday Read, 2020) MDC-T's deputy president, Senator Douglas Mwonzora, succeeded Khupe as the president at the party's national elective congress despite claims of vote rigging raised by Khupe and some Bulawayo based party members (Voice of America Zimbabwe 2020).

This power wrangling has further split the Opposition, with Khupe shouldering the weight of the accusation of being a ZANU-PF mole, which has not gone without fierce push back from Khupe herself. Her political woes follow similar struggles faced by prominent ZANU-PF politician and former deputy president, Joice Mujuru, who was ironically toppled by her opponent, and ZANU-PF Women's League-imposed leader, Grace Mugabe (Mangena, 2022). All three women were accused of going beyond their mandates and attempting to do the impossible, that is, to take on the office of their political parties' presidency and ultimately eyeing the nation's number one position—a preserve of the male political party elites. This problematic male-centric nature of Zimbabwe's politics shows a repression of diverse voices and lack of political will to see meaningful engagement of women in the country's governance (Chigumadzi 2018).

Khupe's intersecting identities as a woman from the politically marginalized Matebeleland Province presented layered challenges against the male and Shona dominated politics. Scholarship on Zimbabwe's political landscape allude to the problematic politics in this context which seeks to silence politicians from Matebeleland (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012) and domesticate women, designating their labouring bodies to their 'place,' often designated as the kitchen (Mangena 2022). Those women

who dare to leave the confines of their ascribed docile positions to disrupt male political hegemony incur the wrath and violent pushback of state and non-state actors, which includes physical torture, arbitrary arrests, and public humiliation through defamation of character. It is a common trend to have such women labelled as whores, or witches, or gold diggers who are in politics to enrich themselves (Mangena 2021, Ncube 2020, Zigomo, 2022). The physical and online verbal violence and harassment targeted at women politicians aims at enforcing subservience to the patriarchal dominance of political power (Siziba, Mpofu, and Ndlovu 2021).

Controversies have shadowed Khupe's political career, and she has shouldered vile name-calling, where she has been named a whore, a sell-out who has betrayed the Ndebele nation by toeing the line of the Shona leadership (Bulawayo24 2018). She was even labelled as Mnangagwa's lover whilst being trolled on her twitter account as a power hungry 'gogo' (old woman), all intended to reduce her political influence and participation to that of a greedy, stupid, old, morally loose, power hungry, sell-out woman (Khupe 2022). Khupe's male colleagues are not equally subjected to these forms of character assassination. Scholars point out how political violence, defamation of character and power wrangling pushes women leaders out of mainstream politics, whilst relegating the majority of women into lowly roles such as praise singers in the women's wings of their political parties (Geisler 1995, 546).

Another challenge which haunts the leadership of women's movements embedded in political parties is that they have been accused of organizing grassroots women to demand women's quotas which do not empower most women, but advance their own careers in national politics (Connell 1998, 200). Khupe met a similar fate as she was accused of using her position and power to mobilize protests for personal gain, rather than advancing women's interests. She was defamed and physically attacked for falling prey to ZANU-PF machinations of co-optation (Voice of America Zimbabwe 2018).

Whilst women leaders have been accused of abusing their leadership power for personal gain, it is the culture of organizing structures in political parties that ranks members in a hierarchy such that men and women fight for ascendancy into different levels of power. It is by linking with political elites as power brokers that women's movements strategically access the political power required to keep momentum on women's strategic needs (Hassim 2002, 697). The downside of this tactic is risk of co-option and elitism which is exclusionary and does not radically transform power relations as required for structural change.

In the case of the MDC-T, internal leadership struggles overtook the organization and pushed out the women's agenda, and eventually the momentum gathered to push for democratic leadership fizzled out. These forms of political party power-wrangling for leadership posts discredits women's political work and agency in nation-building, including mobilizing work, such as that done under the banner of the #BeatThePot protest. Despite all the violent push back, women have continued to protest and assert their voices in the shrinking democratic spaces in Zimbabwe. Women's protests, such as #BeatThePot, offers counter-narratives to masculinized politics, and makes the important political work carried out by women in resistance movements in Zimbabwe visible.

Conclusion

African women's activism is often overshadowed by patriarchal nationalist movements, or grand narratives of western feminist protests, which perpetuates the imagery of African women as subservient victims of patriarchy devoid of agency. This paper highlights a radical democratic charge organized by the MDC-T Women's Assembly which challenges views of women's participation in politics as tokenistic, or as illogical impersonations of western feminist ideologies to carry out a foreign agenda. The paper situated historical struggles in Zimbabwe in relation to how the #BeatThePot protest deployed mobilizing strategies that cut across women's strategic and practical needs. Through embodying motherhood as a culturally powerful identity, women harnessed the power of their ascribed role as nurturers from which they articulated gendered struggles of hunger to provoke large-scale protests. Ordinary objects that women used for the strike, such as empty pots, cooking sticks, and dolls, acquired new meanings as powerful symbols to articulate women's struggles against economic, social, and political oppression and exclusion. The #BeatThePot protest demonstrated a strong women's movement which exposed the silenced gendered, ethnic political violence, and exclusion that have marred democratic processes in Zimbabwe. However, despite the efficiently mounted #BeatThePot protest, a culmination of internal and external power struggles within the MDC-T as a political party, overshadowed women's interests, whittling away the pressure needed to challenge unequal gendered power relations.

Endnotes

1. *Chimurenga* is term for resistance against colonial rule staged in two phases beginning with the 1896–97 Ndebele and Shona resistance against the British South Africa Company's administration of the territory. The Second *Chimurenga* began in July 1964 and ended in December 1979.

2. Robert Mugabe was elected President of Zimbabwe in 1980 and remained in office until 2017.

3. ZANU-PF means Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front and it was formed in 1963.

4. The Movement for Democratic Change–Tsvangirai (MDC–T) political party was named after Morgan Tsvangirai who was a founding member of the MDC and former secretary-general of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU). In 2005 when the MDC split into factions, MDC–T remained the major opposition political party.

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Odzyskać Noc: Revisiting the 1990-2000s Anarcho-feminist Protests in Poland as a Strike against Gender-based Violence

by Barbara Dynda

Abstract: The article analyzes the Polish anarcho-feminist idea of protest against gender-based violence during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Examining the oral history interviews with activists and grassroots cultural productions dating from the period of political transformation, such as zines, leaflets, and graphic images, the article focuses on various strategies and concepts of a feminist strike. These different historical sources emphasize multiple inspirations for the protest strategies employed by the analyzed collectives, including the tradition of women's strikes during the socialist era, youth demonstrations of the 1960s, and Anglo-American feminism. They also enable revisiting the emotional dynamics and meanings of violence that emerged from the anarcho-feminist archival materials and memories of individual activists.

Keywords: anarcho-feminism; Poland; political transformation; protest; violence; zine

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The idea of a strike as the means of inaugurating social revolution has always been at the centre of anarcho-feminist thought and action. From the anarchist theory of the general strike developed by Rosa Luxemburg (1906 [2021]) and via the idea of direct action proclaimed by Emma Goldman (1917 [2019]), anarcho-feminism situates political resistance within participation in mass activism including strikes, protests, demonstrations, and marches.

By examining the local anarcho-feminist idea of protest in Poland during political transition and social change, I focus on resistance to gender-based violence and link this to concepts and practices of a feminist strike.[1] Through an overview and analysis of anarcho-feminist zines and other underground cultural productions, I argue that feminist protests in the late 1990s and early 2000s employed various strategies of striking in the Polish public and counterpublic spaces. In doing so, I emphasize that the tactics of these protests drew inspiration from the tradition of youth demonstrations of the 1960s, women's strikes during the socialist era, and, above all, Anglo-American feminism. The latter was made possible due to the increased flow of feminist knowledge and the possibility of direct participation in transnational anarcho-feminist activism after the collapse of the socialist system in Poland in 1989.

Rethinking the geo-temporal dimension of protests against gender-based violence allows me to demonstrate feminist strategies associated with the strike as tools for mass suspension and sabotage of the political order post-1989. As Verónica Gago notes, "the strike becomes a specific apparatus for politicizing violence against wo-

men and feminized bodies" (2020, 24). Hence, following Gago, I analyze moments of public articulation of resistance as a method to render visible—and oppose—violent forms of exploitation by the state and other actors, which systematically "attempt to reduce our pain to the position of a victim" (Gago 2020, 24).

The Polish Anarcho-Feminist Movement[2]

The anarcho-feminist movement played a pivotal role in organizing demonstrations against gender-based violence during the Polish political transformation. The movement not only drew public attention to the problem of violence but also inspired, through the forms of happening that it used, later feminist demonstrations such as Manifa, organized annually since March 8, 2000, to mark International Women's Day (Ramme 2016). Unfortunately this history is often erased from both Polish feminist studies and research on anarchism, stemming from the complex relationship among anarcho-feminism, feminism, and anarchism in Poland. This problem is evident at the level of the divergent perspectives of researchers trying to situate anarcho-feminism in relation to these movements, for example, as separate to Polish anarchism and academic or non-governmental feminism (Ramme 2014, Ramme 2016), as part of anarchism (Trawińska 2013), or as post-anarchism (Majka 2012, Gąsiorowska 2012). For the purpose of this article, I follow Jennifer Ramme, who separates anarcho-feminist genealogy from the anarchist movement forming in the 1980s, and Polish institutionalized feminism (Ramme 2014). This is also the image of anarcho-feminism that emerges from oral history interviews conducted with feminist activists.[3] Alongside Ramme and other researchers (Fuszara 2005, Zawadzka 2012), my interviewees stressed the non-formalized structures of Polish anarcho-feminism and its roots in transnational anti-racist, anti-fascist, and punk movements, including, in particular, Riot Grrrl (Ramme 2014, Zwierkowska 2005, Chutnik 2013, Chutnik 2017).

Considering the time between 1995 and the mid-2000 as the most intensive period of the anarcho-feminist operation in the country, researchers and former activists agree that the first anarcho-feminist group established in Poland in 1995 was Kobiety przeciwko Dyskryminacji i Przemocy (Women Against Discrimination and Violence), transformed later into Emancypunx (Ramme 2014, Chutnik 2003). However, it is worth noting that there had been anarcho-feminist initiatives before 1995, such as the crust punk group Piekło Kobiet (Women's Hell), founded around 1993 and associated with the anarcho-feminist group Wiedźma (Witch) that was established three years later (Ramme 2014). Alongside Emancypunx and Wiedźma, an important role was played by the anarcho-lesbian Sister to Sister group, some of whose members had previously formed an eco-feminist group, Ekofemina. In addition, Radykalne Czirliderki (Radical Cheerleaders) were active in several Polish cities, along with others, such as Femina Front, Dziewczyny w Akcji (Girls in Action), and Liberta and Strzyga (Strigoi). The areas of the groups' activities were Warsaw, Wrocław, Poznań, the region of Podlasie (Białystok, Łuków, Biała Podlaska, Siedlce), and the north of the country (Elbląg, Szczecin, Grudziądz). Pointing to the end of the first decade of the 2000s as the time when their operations closed down, researchers note that this was influenced by the large labour migration of people belonging to the movement, their transition to non-governmental organisations, as well as activist burnout associated with the rise of right-wing trends in the country (Ramme 2014). All of these reasons were confirmed during my interviews, highlighting the importance of personal biographies in the formation and decline of social movements.

Moreover, taking into account the distinctiveness of the anarcho-feminist genealogy, practice, and theory, in relation to feminism and anarchism, this article includes a perspective on the movement's margins while focusing on their protests against gender-based violence. This means that I follow not only the memories of the leaders of the underground feminist groups and the cultural productions they created (zines, leaflets, pamphlets), but also the actions of activists who supported them and whose voices are not present as much in the archival materials. In this way, the article gathers various viewpoints within anarcho-feminism itself and aims to identify the ideological divisions and differences in activist stances by comparing diverse historical sources (written and visual materials, oral histories). My methodological choice, therefore, realizes bell hooks' suggestion to extract marginal knowledge in the midst of which a critical view of the centre and of feminist social relations are born (hooks 2015).

The Tradition of Women's Protests in Poland

Before discussing the anarcho-feminist protests of the 1990s and early 2000s, it is worth noting that the tradition of feminist and women's strikes in Poland dates back to earlier decades. For example, among the photographic archives of Polish street manifestations in the 1940s we can find a demonstration organized in 1947 by Związek Walki Zbrojnej (the Union of Armed Struggle) at which a women's bloc was present (Chutnik 2021). Regarding the same year, historians emphasize the importance of the strike by cotton mill workers from the I. K. Poznański factory in Łódź in September 1947 (Kenney 1993, Kenney 1999). Moreover, as Małgorzata Fidelis points out, the most important strike at the height of the Stalinist era was organized against meat and coal shortages by women's textile workers from Żyrardów in August 1951, including those from the Polish Socialist Party (Fidelis 2010). Women who worked in the textile factory in Łódź also protested against rising food price in the 1970s and 1980s, and in July 1981, they organized a hunger march in the main parts of the city which was echoed by smaller demonstrations across Poland (Chutnik 2021). These workers and other women in the Polish People's Republic protested against changes in the rationing system and shortages of food and other commodities, which contributed to the success of the Solidarność ("Solidarity") dissident movement and, as a consequence, to overthrowing the communist regime (Fidelis 2010).

Alongside the tradition of women workers' strikes in Poland, women's participation in Polish student and youth protests in the 1960s is also significant. This aspect is particularly underscored by Fidelis who emphasizes the non-violent tradition of youth rallies, marches, and sit-ins in March 1968 (Fidelis 2022). She describes how the singing, the writing of songs and satire, the recitation of poems, and the guitar playing were indispensable elements of these demonstrations, making them "more playful and informed by elements of global youth culture" (Fidelis 2022, 116). However, in contrast to the avoidance of violence in the case of the 1981 women workers' protest in Łódź, protestors at rallies in March 1968 were brutally beaten by a battalion of riot police and state militia. Female students became targets of physical attacks, which revealed "a strong antifeminist current in the conservative reactions to youth unrest" (Fidelis 2022, 114). Moreover, as Fidelis points out, male students exploited images of gender-based violence to intensify gender stereotypes of women as subjects particularly vulnerable to violence, and, as a consequence, to deny their political subjectivity (Fidelis 2022).

Unfortunately, the practice of utilizing verbal and physical violence toward protesting women did not end after 1989. Gender-based violence has been present in public, private, and counterpublic spaces, and perpetrated by the police as well as relatives or friends. Women's organizations, together with feminist grassroots movements, reported it and made efforts to combat various forms of violence (Grabowska 2011, Majewska 2005).[4] Anarcho-feminist collectives played a pivotal role in this process, a fact that is often erased from the collective memory of the political transformation due to the ephemeral nature of these collectives and the difficulty of gaining access to the cultural sources made by the movement, such as zines, leaflets, or pamphlets (Darska 2008, Iwanczewska 2019). Even though anarcho-feminist protests in public spaces differed in many respects from earlier ones organized by women, they also built upon the tradition of the 1960s youth demonstrations and women's strikes during the socialist era, to which I will refer later in this piece.

"Tough and Difficult Times": Police and Anarchism

The historical record of gender-based violence in the 1990s and early 2000s, especially sexual violence, can be found in the anarcho-feminist zines that consolidated the grassroots feminist movement in Poland after 1989. In addition to the topic of reproductive rights, sexual rights, and environmental issues, Polish anarcho-feminism focused, to a large extent, on fighting discrimination and gender-based violence at that time. Anarcho-feminist zines, as well as their more ephemeral extensions—posters, leaflets, or pamphlets—provided information about incidents of sexual violence that occurred in the country, about feminist anti-violence protests and marches, and about the possibility of getting help if one experienced sexual harassment or rape. The most prominent zines addressing these issues were *Wiedźma* (Witch) and *Emancypunx*, which, along with oral history interviews with activists who formed the Wiedźma and Emancypunx collectives, serve as case studies for this article. These zines dealt with the subject of sexual violence perpetrated in the 1990s and early 2000s in public spaces, particularly by the Polish police. Moreover, they also reported on rape and sexual harassment taking place in the countercultural spaces of anarchist and punk communities.

Wiedźma and *Emancypunx* regularly informed readers about sexual violence perpetrated by the police during the Polish political transformation and protested against it in their publications. For example, in the late 1990s, the Emancypunx group reported through its zines and leaflets on rapes in police hotels in Warsaw, which officers committed with impunity against women suffering from addiction to psychoactive substances, as well as women who were illegally trading at the Central Station (for example, *Emancypunx* 1999, *Emancypunx* n.d.(a)). The Wiedźma collective acted similarly, informing readers about rapes taking place in the country in the early 2000s on the pages of zines and with the help of posters or flyers. For example, in the fifth issue of *Wiedźma* from 2004, the group wrote about "rapes committed in front of passersby" at railway stations in Lubuskie province, as well as about the repeated victimization of rape survivors (being taunted by police officers or interrogated while naked) at police stations in the Lower Silesia province (*Wiedźma* 2004, 36). Both zines also reported on protests organized by Emancypunx and Wiedźma in response to sexual violence, such as in April 1998, when, in a demonstration against police brutality, *Emancypunx* "manifested its opposition to the frequent sexual abuse and rape committed by officers" (*Emancypunx* 1999, 17). Moreover, both *Emancypunx* and *Wiedźma* mobilized for feminist marches as a response to incidents of gender-based violence, although it is worth mentioning that these groups did not organize strikes together and did not collaborate in zine publishing.[5]

In addition to providing information regarding the crimes committed by the police, both groups raised awareness about the fact that violence against women also affects the underground scene, primarily the anarchist and punk communities. This is evidenced by the historical materials that I found during my archival queries at anarchist libraries and squats, as well as in the private archives of anarcho-feminists who were active in the Wiedźma and Emancypunx collectives.[6] For example, in a leaflet titled *RAPIST, WE GET YOU* (Figure 1), Emancypunx appealed to readers to break the conspiracy of silence surrounding sexual violence in the counterculture community. The group wrote that "[i]t is time to end [the] toleration of rape and sexism at concerts, squats, and wherever there are supposedly 'holy' punk[s] and libertarians. The general acceptance of violence has also broken into this environment (…)." (*Emancypunx* n.d.(b)) Emancypunx also manifested opposition in the fourth issue of its 1999 zine, on the last page of which it placed a graphic image with the title *Nothing justifies rape! Never!* (Figure 2). The naked body of a woman trying to escape male hands was accompanied by the text emphasizing that "[m]ore and more we hear about sexual violence against girls stuck in the punk movement. [We hear about] group rapes at concerts, [about] rapes at 'squats' and parties." (*Emancypunx* 1999, 24) Moreover, in the same issue of the zine, Alina Synakiewicz from the Femina Front group gave specific examples of such incidents, reporting in the text *GRUDZIĄDZ—REPORT* on rapes at punk concerts and underground pubs as well as sexual harassment at the feminist music festival *Noc Walpurgii* (Walpurgis Night) (*Emancypunx* 1999, 4). Although this festival was aimed at opposing gender-based violence and was part of feminist events associated with the *Odzyskać Noc* march, even there, punks and anarchists manifested male supremacy and perpetrated sexual violence.

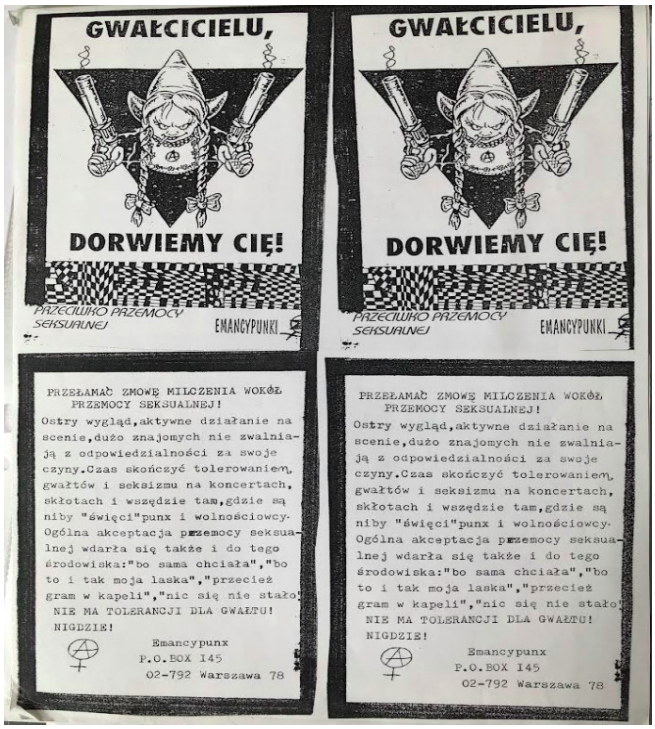

Figure 1: A leaflet titled RAPIST, WE GET YOU distributed by Emancypunx. Below the graphic image is a text that criticizes the practice of accepting sexual violence among Polish punk and anarchist circles. Above the text is the slogan "BREAK THE CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE AROUND SEXUAL VIOLENCE!" and at the very bottom of the flyer: "NO TOLERANCE FOR RAPE! ANYWHERE!"

Figure 2: The graphic image with the slogan at the top "Nothing justifies rape! Never!" appeared in the fourth issue of the *Emancypunx* zine. On the right of the graphic is a text in which the authors criticize the sexual violence that takes place at punk concerts and in anarchist squats. They also assert that rape is "an act of domination and a tool of power" and "has nothing to do with sexuality."

A broader dimension of the scale of violence of the 1990s and early 2000s reported in the aforementioned zines and pamphlets is revealed by oral history interviews with anarcho-feminists associated with Wiedźma and Emancypunx. As mentioned by Zwiera, currently a social worker at an education centre for girls, "Those were the years [the 1990s and early 2000s] when we were young girls. I heard about sexist behaviour and sexual violence at every turn; about sexual jokes or touching without the other person's consent, not to mention rape. After all, such situations occurred even at squats." (Zwiera 2021 interview)

Also in the same interview, Zwiera, who cooperated with both groups, emphasizes that after 1989 anarcho-feminist zines reported on gender-based violence, including domestic, economic, and, above all, sexual violence. As she further emphasizes in the 2021 interview, "The punk scene was not at all different from the mainstream. Discrimination and chauvinism prevailed there as well."

Claudia Snochowska-Gonzalez, who formed the Strzyga collective, collaborated with Emancypunx after 1989 and lived at the Rozbrat squat in Poznań in the 1990s, makes a similar comment. Now working as a feminist academic, she emphasizes in retrospect that her time living at Rozbrat was during the period when the anarchist milieu in Poland was extremely misogynistic and sexist. In the interview, Claudia recalls that the 1990s represented "tough and difficult times" (Snochowska-Gonzalez 2021 interview). She adds that being a feminist at that time was not easy—it was associated with derision, jokes, and complete misunderstanding, especially in the anarchist milieu associated with *Federacja Anarchistyczna* (Anarchist Federation). Violence towards women and sexual, emotional, and psychological transgressions occurred at Rozbrat. Claudia recalls that she was the only person at that time who raised the issue of gender equality at Rozbrat, which was met with great incomprehension by anarchists.

Analyzing the oral history interviews with Claudia and Zwiera, and anarcho-feminist archival sources dating from the period of political transformation, we can observe that during the 1990s and early 2000s in Poland, gender-based violence was present both in public institutionalized sites (railway stations, hotels, and police stations) and counterpublic spaces (anarchist squats, punk pubs, and concert halls). In addition to organizing strictly anti-violence demonstrations, one of the pivotal forms of protest against sexual and psychological violence was anarcho-feminist cultural productions such as zines, pamphlets, and posters that consolidated the grassroots feminist milieu. These political artifacts served as crucial tools for sharing information and making a statement (Darska 2008, Buchanan 2018). They were created through the emotional labour of the anarcho-feminist community, which aimed to support women facing violence.

What is Violence? Rape, Patriarchy, and Power in the Feminist Tradition

Reading zines, brochures, and posters made by Wiedźma and Emancypunx groups, as well as interviewing their former members, it seems that anarcho-feminist anti-violence protests and marches in Poland in the late 1990s and early 2000s were a response not only to specific incidents of sexual abuse but also to systemic violence against women. Emancypunx and Wiedźma defined violence as rooted in social, economic, and political structures—as a social institution and acts of aggression that maintain patriarchal domination. Both groups recognized rape as an extreme expression of violence against

women, which, as described in the leaflet *RAPIST, WE GET YOU* (*Emancypunx* n.d. (b)) distributed by Emancypunx during feminist protests, marches, concerts, and zine distribution, reads, "Rape—an act of violence / a social institution that perpetuates patriarchal domination / a phenomenon based on violence / a logical consequence of sexism / violence of the most perfidious nature (…) psychological intimidation of a woman (…) Rape — another humiliation / another act of aggression."

Although this leaflet was included as an opening text in the fourth issue of the *Emancypunx* zine from 1999, it brings to mind American feminist theories and manifestos of rape etiology from the 1970s, which assert that rape is used as a means of exerting physical, emotional, and psychological power (Brownmiller 1975, Connell & Wilson 1974, McPhail 2015). Both brochures and zines reframe rape as a political practice that aims to gain control over women. They recall Susan Brownmiller's argument that rape, as the most extreme and conscious practice of gender-based violence, is intended to intimidate, terrorize, and frighten women (Brownmiller 1975, 15).

Similar to Emancypunx, Wiedźma claims that violence toward women constitutes a system of patriarchal power and defines rape in the framework of the American anti-rape tradition of 1970s' feminism. This is possible to observe in the *Wiedźma* zine and in the more ephemeral materials, such as leaflets, labels, and brochures. For example, in the brochure *kwestie kobiece* (women's issues) (Figure 3) published with the financial support of *Fundacja im. Stefana Batorego* (Stefan Batory Foundation), the authors write, "Violence against women is a widespread and very frequent phenomenon. This term refers to beatings, rapes, verbal abuse or even creating an anti-women climate in society. (…) Women are stuck in relationships where they experience pain, humiliation, suffering, and more bruises. And this is because they are taught to sacrifice, submit and obey since childhood. (…) Rape is one of the most brutal expressions of male domination" (kwestie kobiece n.d., 6).

Emphasizing physical and psychological abuse toward women as a crucial tool of patriarchal power, the authors claim that violence is related to gender stereotypes that determine social and emotional socialization (girls are socialized to be self-sacrificing, obedient, and submissive). In addition to the issue of rape, they address the problem of violence against women more broadly, while underlining it as a social problem for all genders. This is especially evident in the opening text of the pamphlet where the editors state that domestic violence and sexual abuse affect the entire society, and therefore concern everyone regardless of gender, age, or sexuality. In the brochure, which resembles a glossary of terms, the group defines sexual abuse as "undesirable conduct that undermines the dignity of women and men" and domestic violence as "any type of physical, sexual or psychological violence that threatens the safety or well-being of any family member" (*kwestie kobiece* n.d., 2). As the authors further summarize, violence rooted in gender stereotypes affects all individuals.

Figure 3: The cover of the brochure *kwestie kobiece* published by the Wiedźma group with the financial support of *Fundacja im. Stefana Batorego*. The publication date of the booklet is unknown.

Odzyskać Noc: Feminist Inspirations to Occupy Polish Streets

These perspectives on gender-based violence presented on the pages of zines and brochures by Emancypunx and Wiedźma found expression in their methods of feminist protesting in the public space, especially during the *Odzyskać Noc* march. The nighttime feminist protest in Poland in the 1990s and early 2000s was organized for the first time by Emancypunx on April 29, 1998, in Warsaw. Outside the capital, the marches were held in Wrocław, among others, on the initiative of the collective Liberta and Sister to Sister as part of Amnesty International's 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign. Wiedźma first organized its march on October 4, 2002, in Siedlce with the financial support of the feminist foundation *Ośrodek Informacji Środowisk Kobiecych OŚKa* (Women's Environment Information Centre *OŚKa*).

Former anarcho-feminist activist and current worker of feminist and queer organizations Alina Synakiewicz points out regarding the *Odzyskać Noc* march organized by Emancypunx, "This was the first demonstration of its kind organized in Poland and was attended by several hundred men and women, who marched in the evening hours through the streets of Warsaw by the light of torches carried and to the accompaniment of whistles, rattles, and other instruments. The very idea of *Odzyskać Noc* march was started in the United States in the 1970s as a protest by women against rape and sexual violence on the streets" (Synakiewicz 2009, 82).

In the above quote from the chapter on violence against women in post-1989 Poland, Synakiewicz emphasizes the roots of the *Odzyskać Noc* march reaching back to the campaigns organized in the United States since the 1970s. Similar inspirations for the Siedlce protest are confirmed by Gosia Ławrynowicz, former member of Wiedźma. In her interview on the group's work of organizing anti-violence protests, including the *Odzyskać Noc* march, Gosia recounts both the US and Great Britain as the origins of the feminist tradition, in which women strike at night in response to sexual violence (Ławrynowicz 2022 interview).[7] Emphasizing the demand for women's rights to urban spaces, she notes that the march organized by Wiedźma constituted "a response to sexual violence and rape. [That was] a symbolic saying no [to gender-based violence] and showing that women need to feel safe on the streets" (Ławrynowicz 2022 interview).

Tying *Odzyskać Noc* into the broader transnational feminist tradition of anti-violence marches, it can be emphasized that the march insisted upon women's right "to access all city spaces, at any time, safely and confidently" (Kern 2020, 2054). This is evident in the note about the *Odzyskać Noc* march from April 29, 1998, made by the former member of Emancypunx's group, Sylwia Chutnik (known by the pseudonym Derwisz in anarcho-feminist circles), in *Ultrafiolet* (*Ultraviolet*). In this zine, published by the collective Strzyga from Poznań in which Claudia Snochowska-Gonzales was active, Sylwia summed up the protest by stating, "Finally, together we went out into the street and showed that we have the same right as men to walk around the city in the evening and not be afraid" (*Ultrafiolet* 1998, 3). This aspect was also emphasized in the text on the Anglo-American cultural context accompanying the *Odzyskać Noc* marches that was published in the fourth issue of *Emancypunx*. In "The History of Marches against Rape" (*Emancypunx* 1999, 22) describing the first protests organized in Austin, Texas, and Connecticut, as well as in Brighton, Manchester, and Leeds, authors emphasized the right of women to access city spaces at any time—both day and night. The graphic image below the article stressed that access to public spaces should be available without fear and with a sense of security. It depicted a woman carrying torches in the city centre at night with the caption in English "Women from all walks of life… should be able to enjoy all walks of life" (Figure 4). Thus, the texts and graphic images from anarcho-feminist zines suggest that Emancypunx and Wiedźma attempted to break with patriarchal domination in the form of the interlocking geographical and emotional network of social control in public spaces (Kern 2020). They did so through the *Odzyskać Noc* march's strategy of occupying streets and squares where gender-based violence took place in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Such an approach to protest, involving not only a refusal to act according to a social and legal contract, but also a foregrounding reclamation of public space, can be conceptualized as a strike-related strategy. As Gago points out, "The strike as a process weaves together the intensification of insubordination in multiple forms: different modes of protest and assembly; varying uses of the strike; occupations of diverse work and neighborhood spaces. […] The key to the feminist strike is disobedience." (Gago 2020, 23-34) The insubordination of Emancypunx and Wiedźma in the form of occupying Polish streets and squares where women experienced sexual harassment revealed and sabotaged emotional and

physical forms of exploitation (Gago 2020, 23). In doing so, the anarcho-feminist groups endeavoured to achieve what Gago calls "crossing borders and exceeding the limits of the possible" (2020, 23). Indeed, anti-violence protests in Poland after 1989 took place in multiple conjunctures, spaces (Siedlce, Wrocław, Warsaw) and years (the late 1990s and early 2000s). These enabled the extension of the feminist strike "with heterogeneous realities, with geographies that, although distant from one another, are connected by overlapping zones, struggles, and realities" (Gago 2020, 41-42).

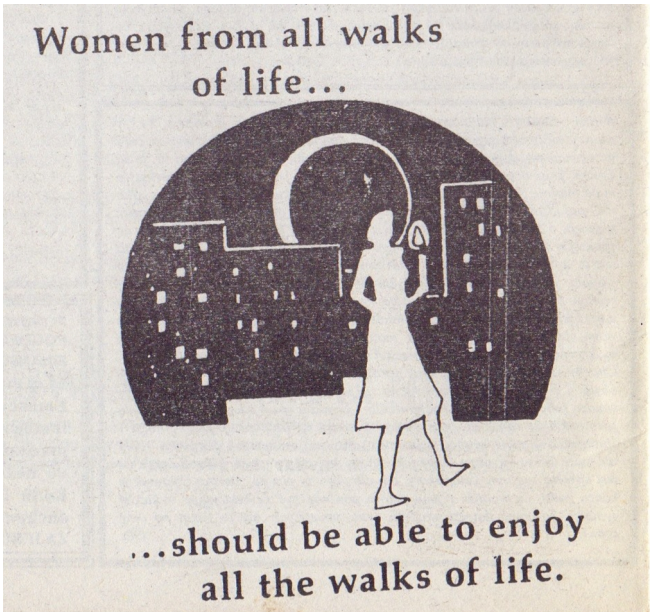

Figure 4: The graphic image appeared at the end of the article titled "The History of Marches against Rape," published in Emancypunx from 1999. Surrounding the graphic is the text, "Women from all walks of life… should be able to enjoy all walks of life."

The Geo-Temporality and Emotions of Feminist Protest

As mentioned above, activist, academic, poet and writer Sylwia Chutnik recounts in an interview about the Emancypunx group that during the *Odzyskać Noc* march in 1998, songs were sung, slogans chanted, and various performances were organized to emphasize how much the city's public space is permeated with the history of sexual abuse and fear of future possible rape (Chutnik 2021 interview). In the activist's private archive, I found historical materials about the protest, including song lyrics that were sung at Trzech Krzyży Square in Warsaw at that time, as well as on other squares and streets through which the march passed. The rhyming lyrics of the songs mainly emphasized male violence on the streets of Warsaw, and encouraged women to overcome fear while being in public spaces. For example, during the *Odzyskać Noc* march in 1998, the following lyrics were sung (Sylwia Chutnik's personal archive):

> Guys on the streets we do not want to be afraid
>
> The night belongs to us yes yes yes!! (…)
>
> We want to be free day and night
>
> We have had enough of male violence!!!
>
> Hey girl do not worry
>
> The street is not scary at night or day
>
> So go ahead without a shadow of fear
>
> Conquer the night and destroy duffers

Apart from asserting the desire to reclaim public spaces through the march, the lyrics pay attention to the importance of the temporal dimension of occupying the street. Their purpose was to manifest that women should not be subjected to social control governed by geo-temporal restrictions. Moreover, we could claim that the collective singing during the protest created an alternative feminist dimension of spatiality and temporality in the city (Butler 2015). By constructing "anarchist moments, or anarchist passages, when the legitimacy of a regime is called into question, but when no new regime has yet come to take its place" (Butler 2015, 75), the *Odzyskać Noc* march produced a new, non-violent and non-patriarchal spatial and temporal order. These moments negate the architecture of existing power manifested in domination and violence in the form of rape and sexual harassment in the city centre, railway stations and residential areas. The *Odzyskać Noc* protests articulated statements on who women are disobeying (rapists, sexual offenders), what they are striking against (gender-based violence), and how they imagine a different life (safe access to public space), which for Gago, demonstrates the radical dimension of the feminist strike (Gago 2020, 34).

The interview with Sylwia echoes Gago and Butler's thoughts on the geo-temporality generated during a feminist protest. As she notes, the lyrics of the song, such as those quoted above, were an important tool during the demonstration accompanied by happenings, torches, and live music (Chutnik 2021 interview). It built a sense of community, solidarity, and safety, based, as Sylwia emphasized, on positive emotions, standing in opposition to the militarized form of protesting practiced by the Polish *Federacja Anarchistyczna* at that time. She notes, in the context of the 1998 *Odzyskać Noc* march, "[This protest was] breaking the heavy and crude way of thinking about demonstrating as a macho-warfare and as a close order with serious slogans accompanying it. It was an attempt to break conventional thinking about political struggle and the fact that a protest must be serious and sad. For us, [a feminist demonstration] should have an element of fun and some humour. This convention was preserved" (Chutnik 2021 interview).

Archival zine materials also prove that such humorous and playful protesting was practised by members of Emancypunx during the *Odzyskać Noc* march in 1998. In the aforementioned zine Ultrafiolet, Sylwia emphasizes that this political event had an artistic and carnivalesque form. She writes, "[b]urning torches in the hands of the participants and music made the march a colourful carnival against sexual violence toward women" (*Ultrafiolet* 1998, 3). She says that live music (songs, drums, rattles) underscored the critical meaning of feminist protest that resisted patriarchal ways of demonstrating, which are characterized by Sylwia in terms of seriousness, sadness, crudity and heaviness. Moreover, this kind of approach to anti-violence demonstrations tended to rely on light and positive emotions reminiscent of joy and fun, although it also assumed the possibility of expressing emotions of rage and anger. The article entitled "The History of Marches again Rape" published in *Emancypunx* states, "[Anti-violence] marches are expected to bring together many women wanting to show their anger, express support, wanting to meet like-minded women. (...) the silence around rape is over. Its place is taken by rage when women demand, loudly and publicly, that something must be done about violence against women" (*Emancypunx* 1999, 22).

The above excerpt emphasizes that the task of feminist marches such as *Odzyskać Noc* was to build solidarity and community for women willing to overcome fear and silence. By analyzing the lyrics of the songs sung at anti-violence demonstrations, it can be argued that the protests mobilized women to replace internalized and individualized tools of social control—the emotions of fear and silence—with public, collective anger and rage. This is confirmed by Zwiera who states that at the time the *Odzyskać Noc* march was organized (1998 in Warsaw and 2002 in Siedlce), anger and rage dominated anarcho-feminist actions (Zwiera 2021 interview). Recalling her own activism and the activities of her colleagues from Emancypunx and Wiedźma, she emphasizes, "We were controversial and loud on the street at that time [during the *Odzyskać Noc* protests] (...) We were angry at the reality and, above all, at the fact that this [gender-based] violence is still happening; that so many years after regaining basic civil rights there is actually violence and inequality at every turn" (Zwiera 2021 interview).

As Zwiera states, observing gender-based violence and social inequality in a new democratic and independent Poland aroused anger in anarcho-feminist circles, the public and widespread expression of which was given by the *Odzyskać Noc* marches. She notes that anger mobilized political and community action, and served to demystify gender stereotypes attributed to this emotion. Stressing that anger and rage were treated by anarcho-feminists as correct and even desirable emotions during anti-violence protests, Zwiera says, "The anarcho-feminist milieu was demystifying rage. Rage was something desirable and a correct response to the unequal reality that was all around us. We wanted to be angry. We wanted to unmask the stereotype of the good girl who cannot get mad and cannot possibly get upset. We were rebelling against the stereotype that rage is reserved only for strong men. (...) In this sense, rage and anger were feminist to us" (2021 interview).

As Zwiera points out in our conversation, both anger and rage were important tools of resistance used by Wiedźma and Emancypunx. Mobilizing in public spaces during anti-violence strikes, they helped to protest against gender stereotypes and social inequality. Thus, based on feminist theories analyzing these emotions for activism, politics, and everyday actions (Lorde 1984 [2007], Ngai 2007), we can claim that the emotional intensity and communal energy associated with the *Odzyskać Noc* protests, as well as the broader dimension of Wiedźma and Emancypunx activities, helped build feminist solidarity and community. Moreover, these collectives channelled rage and anger into specific forms of political labour. These included not only activities related to organizing street protests but also those aimed at raising awareness about gender-based violence and provid-

ing information about legal aid through feminist pamphlets, zines, and flyers. And while all of these practices were described by archival sources and my interviewees as having Anglo-American origins, they can also be viewed through the perspective of the Polish tradition of feminist and youth strikes.

The Tradition of Aesthetics in *Odzyskać Noc*

As pointed out at the beginning of this article, women in Poland have been protesting against violence and unfavourable living and working conditions at least since the mid-twentieth century. Fighting for their concept of equal rights, they not only resisted the dominant narrative of gender equality imposed by socialist politics, but also subversively utilized this rhetoric, while, for example, protesting the loss of their jobs during the destalinization period of 1955-56 (Fidelis 2010). As Padraic Kenney points out, striking women during communist Poland were "fully aware of the power their protest as women might have" (Kenney 1999, 415). They utilized various structured and unstructured scenarios, including singing songs, pushing strollers, or even performing mass fainting. The new form of non-violent protest with the participation of women and children in Łódź in 1981 used the image of motherhood to express fundamental social demands and politicize them. This form of strike, unexpected by the communist regime, accompanied by other protests since the 1940s, exploited the figures perceived by the state as politically helpless (the mother and family) in order to magnify the violence of the state and undermine its masculinity (Kenney 1999).

A parallel idea of non-violent strike based on the unexpected, "unconventional, visual and theatrical forms of protests" (Ramme 2016, 259) accompanied anarcho-feminist street performances during *Odzyskać Noc*. This is evident when analyzing the private archives of Sylwia Chutnik which include her notes entitled "happenings." Considering the Warsaw march, among others, this document describes four happenings organized on April 29, 1998, which "happened by surprise for the people taking part in the demonstration" (Sylwia Chutnik's personal archive). The fourth happening, as Sylwia describes in the notes, "was actually a performance prepared by a theatre group. It was based on a true story of the rape and killing of a young girl in a military unit." Although more meticulously and artistically planned (through the inclusion of a theatre group, for example), in a similar way to the formula of women workers' strikes from the socialist period, the *Odzyskać Noc* march incorporated elements of audience surprise, used various props (here belonging more to the artistic rather than the everyday sphere), and subversively exploited the dominant narrative regarding gender stereotypes. Moreover, similar to the tradition of youth protests during the 1960s "Thaw" period in Poland associated with youth carnival and rebellion (Fidelis 2010, Fidelis 2014), it involved singing songs, playing instruments and acting out theatrical scenes. It introduced elements of theatre and carnival into politics as a way to "consciously diversify the ideological message" (Chutnik 2013, 9) and reach out to people from different social groups. As Emancypunx's activists explain in an interview with Anna Nacher for the Polish feminist newspaper *Zadra*, "… We can't chant demands with a stone face, we want to reach different people. We often use well-known cultural codes, reworking them, ridiculing them, and appropriating them for ourselves (…) we draw from the avant-garde theater, street theater, also carnivals, and festivals. Laughter and joy are an important component of our activity" (Nacher 2001, 17-18).

In addition to aspects of carnival, theatrics and laughter, the anti-violence protests of that period also included anger and rage. These emotions are especially brought out by anarcho-feminists who supported and co-worked with the movement. For example, Zwiera's memoirs highlight that feelings of anger and rage were prevalent as she fought against the unsafe urban landscapes of Polish cities during the marches. And although these emotions were also mentioned by Sylwia in our conversations, and, moreover, appear in other archival sources (zines, newspaper interviews, flyers), she stressed that the happenings of Emancypunx during *Odzyskać Noc* aesthetically referred to theatrical fun and humor. This kind of performative strike allowed the movement to achieve a strong media and public response to the problem of violence against women. In fact, as *Zadra* points out, "the action [*Odzyskać Noc*] resonated with the media, and excerpts of it were shown on the main edition of *Wiadomości* (News), among others" (Nacher 2001, 18). This harmonizes with the activists who, after describing the aesthetic and artistic dimensions of the march in the interview, state that the group's particular achievement "is the Odzyskać Noc march that leads the way [in their successful actions]" (Nacher 2001, 18).

The Feminist Legacy of Emancypunx and Wiedźma's Protests

The anarcho-feminists who were active in Wiedźma and Emancypunx emphasized the social, political, and economic roots of systemic gender-based violence. Through brochures, zine articles, and graphic images in the zines, such as "The rapist must face the consequences of his act!, Nothing justifies rape! Never!" or "RAPIST, WE GET YOU" (*Emancypunx* n.d. (a) (b)), among others, both collectives protested against the unsafe topography of Polish cities and attempts to restrict women's rights to public space during the political transformation. Through anti-violence demonstrations such as *Odzyskać Noc* marches, Wiedźma and Emancypunx thus reclaimed public spatiality and temporality, and reconstituted it into a feminist one for the duration of the protest.

Feminist protests opposing gender-based violence, as well as the social and cultural activities of Wiedźma, Emancypunx, and other anarcho-feminist collectives from the late 1990s and early 2000s, have constituted a feminist legacy that influences contemporary Polish feminist culture. Although both groups ended their operations sometime between 2000 and 2010,[8] I would like to speculate on a certain inheritance that remains today, in both institutional and grassroots feminism. From my perspective, the formula of the feminist strike developed by the movement—manifesting itself in disobedience, occupation of public spaces, and collective expression of emotions—continues to be used in contemporary feminist demonstrations. An example is *Czarne Protesty* (Black Protests) and related strikes—the protests opposing state restrictions on reproductive rights in Poland since 2016. Feminist collectives and social movements such as *Dziewuchy Dziewuchom* (Girls for Girls) and *Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet* (All-Poland Women's Strike) among others, continued the anarcho-feminist tradition of protesting characterized by strong emotional overtones and occupation of streets in Warsaw, Łódź, Wrocław, Białystok, and the Tri-City.[9] By organizing a general pro-choice strike using anarcho-feminist direct action, similar to Wiedźma and Emancypunx, since 2016 feminist collectives have demonstrated that there is no consensus in Poland on emotional and physical violence against women and feminized bodies. Recalling Gago once again, I would like to emphasize that Polish contemporary feminism can be analyzed in continuity with the anarcho-feminist activism of the past, in which strikes served as a feminist tool to politicize gender-based violence, massively suspending and thus sabotaging the violence of the state, the police, and the law.

Endnotes

1. In this article, I use the term "gender-based violence" more often than the term "violence against women" in order to avoid a binary—often transphobic—understanding of gender categories. This perspective is also related to the fact that my interviewees refer more frequently to "sexual violence," "domestic violence," or violence related to gender stereotypes, rather than explicitly to "violence against women." The article, hence, endeavours to reflect the perspective of my interlocutors and contemporary, intersectional recognition of the relationships between violence, sexuality, and race, also concerning trans and queer experiences (Loken & Hagen 2022). I understand gender-based violence as violence rooted in structural gender inequalities, of which sexual and domestic violence is a form (Kościańska 2014, Piotrowska & Synakiewicz 2011, Majewska 2005). However, I use the term "violence against women" more often when referencing feminist written discourse of the 1990s and early 2000s to maintain historical accuracy.

2. I also write about the origins of anarcho-feminism in Poland in my article on the visuality of reproductive rights (see Dynda 2022). In describing them, however, I focus on the production and distribution of Polish feminist zines. Similarly, in that text, I emphasize, following Ramme, the genealogy of anarcho-feminist activity in Poland, which is distinct from anarchism and institutional feminism.

3. For the purpose of my research on the anarcho-feminist and feminist movement in post-1989 Poland, since November 2020 I have conducted interviews with members of the following collectives, among others: Kobiety przeciwko Dyskryminacji i Przemocy (Women against Discrimination and Violence); Emancypunx; Sister to Sister; Wiedźma (Witch), Strzyga (Strigoi); Podżegaczki (Instigators); Wydawnictwo Bomba (Bomba Publishing House); Girls to the Front. I have also interviewed many individual librarians, activists, publishers, and artists who formed an underground feminist milieu in Poland both during the political transition period and today. I conduct the interviews based on the oral history method (Brown & Beam 2022, Bruner 1995, Thompson & Bornat 2021) and follow feminist research ethics developed by Elspeth Brown (2020), Ann Cvetkovich

(2003), Julietta Singh (2017) and bell hooks (2015), among others. Before each interview, I obtain my interviewees' informed and voluntary consent. I also authorize each of the published quotes and each piece of biographical information that could identify the interviewee. Of course, it is up to my interviewees to decide how they would like to be included in the article, whether under a name or pseudonym or not appearing at all.

4. Joanna Piotrowska and Alina Synakiewicz, editors of the report *Dość milczenia. Przemoc seksualna wobec kobiet i problem gwałtu w Polsce* (2011), cite the following organizations as key in countering gender-based violence in post-1989 Poland: Fundacja Feminoteka, Fundacja „Pomoc Kobietom i Dzieciom, Towarzystwo Interwencji Kryzysowej, Fundacja Autonomia, Fundacja Miejsce Kobiet, Stowarzyszenie „W Stronę Dziewcząt. They also list support telephones for people who have experienced violence (primarily the National Emergency Service for Victims of Family Violence „Niebieska Linia"). It is worth mentioning that the feminist movement in Poland during this period also engaged in many anti-violence campaigns (e.g., the 16 Days Against Gender Violence Campaign), cooperated with local governments, politicians, and lawyers (e.g., cooperation with municipal social welfare centres), and entered into coalitions at both the national (e.g., CEDAW) and international levels (e.g., WAVE).

5. Although Wiedźma and Emancypunx were active at similar times and highlighted the issue of sexual violence, these groups often came into conflict. On the other hand, some anarcho-feminists cooperated with both Wiedźma and Emancypunx. The history of the two groups is, therefore, nuanced and is a subject for a separate article addressing activist emotions, conflicts, and relationships.

6. Since November 2020, I have conducted archive queries at ADA Puławska Active Alternative House in Warsaw, Rozbrat Anarchist Library in Poznań, Autonomous Space for Initiatives in Warsaw, Women's Foundation eFKa in Krakow, the Lambda Archive in Warsaw, and personal archives of activists.

7. Both sources in the form of zines and oral history interviews point to Anglo-American inspiration for the *Odzyskać Noc* marches organized in Poland. In North America and the UK, the marches were initiated, for example, by the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group as part of Women's Liberation Movement in England (Mackay 2021) or by the Feminist Studio Workshop and the WAVAW (Women Against Violence Against Women) Rape Crisis Centre in North America (Kern 2020). However, as Finn Mackay points out, the roots of the protest seem to be European and connected to an international conference on male violence against women in Brussels in March 1976 (Mackay 2014).

8. Gosia Ławrynowicz indicates in the interview that Wiedźma ended its activities around 2003 (2022 interview). This coincides with my archival research according to which the last issue of *Wiedźma* zine was published in the summer of 2004. As for *Emancypunx*, source materials such as the group's archived website, zines, and flyers mention the mid-2000s' decade as the collective's last activity.

9. For the emotional overtones of these strikes, see, for example, an article by Elżbieta Korolczyk (2019) or Monika Frąckowiak-Sochańska and Marta Zawodna-Stephan (2022).

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The Poetics and Politics of Interruption in the 2020-21 Belarus Uprising

by Olia Sosnovskaya

Abstract: The paper addresses the notions of interruption and exhaustion in relation to the 2020–21 anti-governmental uprising in Belarus. It examines various forms of protesting, such as marches, neighbourhood gatherings and strikes from a feminist perspective. It focuses on the dynamics of visibility and opacity, social reproduction and politicization of mundane gestures, and on questioning the notion of revolutionary event and its temporalities.

Keywords: 2020-21 protest in Belarus; care strike; choreographies of protest; exhaustion; interruption; rhythms of resistance

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Introduction

This article focuses on the 2020–21 post-election uprising in Belarus against the authoritarian regime that has been in power since 1994. The national referendum of 2004—whose results are claimed to be falsified as well—legalized the unlimited reelection of the president, so the first and current president of Belarus, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, has now been in power for twenty-nine years. Though the period of his rule has been marked by regular protests, the scale and endurance of the 2020–21 uprising proved to be the largest in the country's contemporary history. Despite the continuous state repressions—with 1,476 political prisoners as of March 2023 (Viasna 2023) and several thousand politically motivated criminal cases, dozens of closed independent media and over 1250 closed NGOs (Lawtrend 2023)—the resistance is still ongoing. Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, which has been happening with the support of the Belarusian government and the use of Belarusian territory and infrastructure, most of the solidarity platforms and networks that originated during the protests have been transformed into an infrastructure of antiwar resistance, fighting state propaganda, assisting refugees, and sabotaging Russian troops on Belarusian territory.

The article addresses the 2020–21 protest in Belarus focusing in particular on the politics of movement, i.e., bodily movements or protest choreographies. The complexities of political agency, and specifically of women's political participation in eastern Europe has been extensively analyzed: from post-communist alienation from politics (Wolchik and Chiva 2021) to the problematics of translating Western gender discourse in post-Soviet contexts (Gapova 2016) to the issues of NGOization, the multiple modes of feminist activism and its intersectionality in postsocialist civil societies (Grabowska 2021). There has also been an ongoing discussion on whether the 2020–21 protest in Belarus could be called feminist (Paulovich 2021; Solomatina 2020). Analyzing women's engagement in this protest is not, in a strict sense, the subject of this article; rather, I examine the main strategies or choreographies of protest—the protest marches and strikes, along with other gestures of disrup-

tion—from a feminist perspective. This reading also aims to articulate how the specificities of those protest choreographies, their dynamics and temporalities—whether chosen or conditional—shift the notion of political action.

The focus on the choreographies of the protest in this research is conditioned not only by the unprecedented scale of these protest actions, or by the fact that, within the severely restricted public space, mass protest gatherings reshaped social relations. Since 1997 the government introduced very strict rules for organizing demonstrations, and it has been extremely difficult to hold a legal protest action. In 2011, after the so-called silent protests triggered by the country's economic stagnation, the amendment to the 1997 law on mass events was accepted, so that one would need to register a "joint mass presence of citizens" in public space not only for a collective action, but also for collective inaction (Kodeksyby 2021), i.e. any public gathering could be considered a protest. What is more crucial in the case of the 2020–21 uprising is that, amid the corruption of political institutes and legal systems, along with the state monopoly on media and public speech, bodily engagement seemed to be the major means of struggle, also guiding political imaginations regarding the strategies and prospects of resistance. Thus, the dynamic of the uprising, which often responded to the repressive actions of the government, most vividly manifested itself through the emergence and development of various forms of protest choreographies, particular collective gestures and forms of collective movement, both symbolic and physical.

Focusing on embodied protest gestures and movements allows us to approach the complexity of the political struggle. Among the most common choreographies were processions (protest marches, walks or solidarity chains), and various forms of disruption or refusal (strikes, labour unrest, withdrawals, walkouts, etc.). These practices bear two essential characteristics that I further develop as key concepts for this research: exhaustion and interruption. I believe that these characteristics are crucial for understanding the dynamics and potentialities of the 2020–21 post-election uprising in Belarus as they provide a different perspective on political action and temporality of revolutionary event. Within this action, not only political movement, but also stuttering and interruption of linear revolutionary time, often imagined as driving either to a definite failure or victory, becomes a political practice.

In my exploration of these issues, I begin by referring to the most common practice of disruption—a strike. During the 2020–21 protests strikes appeared to be the most widespread form of protest and the most endangering for the state. At the same time, strikes faced certain limits and impossibilities; as a consequence, they took different nonconventional forms (Artiukh 2020; Shparaga 2021). Furthermore, this article analyzes some particular choreographies of protest, such as marches, drawing on dance theory. In particular, I use the notion of *choreopolitics*—redistribution and reinvention of bodies and affects, which enables one to move politically, i.e., against prescribed power regimes (Lepecki 2013), and *movement exhaustion*, understood as an ontological critique of a political project of modernity as being based on constant and progressive movement (colonial expansion, economic growth, etc.) with its consequent regimes of oppression (Lepecki 2006). I proceed by considering how the characteristics of strikes and protest choreographies, whose dynamics fluctuate between disruption of power regimes and constitution of alternative networks of care or care strike (Lorey 2019; Shparaga 2021), and between the continuous movements of the marches and their exhaustion, are related to the specifics of an uprising in general. Finally, this article approaches interruption and exhaustion within the 2020–21 protests in Belarus as particular modes of thinking about political movements and revolutionary time, shifting from conventional patriarchal readings of revolutionary events as a series of spectacular and singular heroic acts, with a demand to establish a rapid and abrupt political change, towards a feminist reading of political agency as a set of horizontal, continuous, mundane, and often invisible practices.

Workers' Strikes and Their Limits

In previous years, the opposition in Belarus mostly called for a boycott of the elections and for street protests but mostly due to its conservatism and emphasis on direct confrontation with the regime it didn't manage to mobilize a great amount of support. In 2020–21, however, several factors led to quite a different scenario. One factor was the COVID-19 pandemic, which was ignored by the state and lead to the emergence of self-organized medical aid initiatives. Another factor was that teams of the new, alternative candidates united behind Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya in a joint election campaign urging people to vote. Furthermore, there was the creation of multiple self-organized civic initiatives and digital platforms aimed at revealing electoral fraud, as well as the effect of it being summer, when due to pandemic-related

travel restrictions many active citizens had to remain in the country. The new opposition's focus on legal mechanisms instead of physical confrontation with the regime, absence of a clear political program and focus on the general change of the repressive political system, and finally their encouragement for horizontal participation and self-organization allowed them to attract many diverse social groups (Shparaga 2021, 48).

Already, before the presidential elections of August 9, 2020, people started to protest numerous violations during the campaign and the detentions of the alternative candidates (first Siarhei Tsikhanouski and later Viktar Babaryka), so the first detentions of protestors started taking place. This growing social mobilization, self-organization, and outrage led thousands of people to gather at the voting stations in the evening of election day to observe the results, and later—after the first falsifications became evident—on the streets to protest all over the country. This was met by extreme police and state violence with over 6000 people being detained, at least 2 killed, and about 450 who were tortured in the first few days after the election (United Nations 2020). This, however, caused even greater public outrage. One of the most efficient tools of pressuring the state during the uprising was the mobilization of workers and employees, generally referred in public discourse as a strike. It started already on August 10 and peaked on August 13–14 (Artiukh 2020, 54). However there were only twelve occasions of proper strikes that involved partial shutdown of plant divisions, namely two departments of the chemical plant Hrodna Azot and at most of the mines of the Belaruskali potash company in Salihorsk (Artiukh 2020, 55).

Contemporary Belarusian legislation makes classical strikes almost impossible due to a lengthy bureaucratic procedure and the state's power to forbid them. Besides, official labour unions do not protect the workers, but represent the state and serve its interests. While independent unions did exist, they were experiencing pressure from the state and were not very popular among the workers. In 2020, however, many people left state-supported trade unions to become members of independent ones, or to form new ones, and a special online platform Labour Union Online was created to simplify that procedure. For instance, in 2020, 940 workers left the trade union of Hrodna Azot (with remaining 6321), so the amount of independent trade union members multiplied by 20 times; at Naftan oil refinery 2500 people left the state labour union; at some smaller factories, like Conte in Hrodna, all employees left the state labour union and created independent ones (Shparaga 2021, 218).

Trying to avoid the intensifying state repressions, during the 2020-21 uprising labour unrest took a variety of forms which Volodymyr Artiukh calls "an expression of workers' discontent in a wider range of forms, including spontaneous or organized demonstrations, walkouts, absenteeism, slowdown, riots, and work disruption" (2020, 52). That wave of labour unrest was the largest since Belarus's independence in 1991, by the geographic spread, the number of involved workers and companies or organizations, and the range of professional spheres (from industrial to educational, medical and cultural organizations). This degree of unrest was also quite surprising for the post-Soviet working class in general, and unprecedented for the political protests in the region (Artiukh 2020). The peculiarity of those strikes or acts of labour unrest lie also in the fact that the workers mostly posed political and not economic demands, which would be illegal if the strikes were officially organized by trade unions. Among these were the demand for prosecution of cases of police violence, calls for new fair elections, and Lukashenka's resignation. In some of the cases, they were joined by economic demands concerning low wages and poor working conditions (Artiukh 2020). Thus, strikes emerged as part of the broader protest movement whose agenda was vague and general enough to include diverse actors within them, and this very fact, according to Artiukh, also made such a scale of strikes possible (2020).

Those acts of labour unrest were often expressed through the similar choreographies as the general protest, such as marches or gatherings, happening both on the enterprise grounds or outside of them, including factories, offices, hospitals, universities, theatres, media, and other cultural institutions. Not all strikers were officially employed, so, for example, many contemporary artists were not officially affiliated with any institution, but they gathered outside the Palace of Art, the exhibition space of Belarusian Union of Artists on August 13 for the action "Don't Draw — Strike!" Workers also formed separate columns during general protests marches, like the workers of the Minsk Tractor Plant during the Sunday general march on August 14. Some employees refused to perform their duties in the institutions, but continued their activities by forming independent collectives, such as the "Free Choir" of which many participants used to work in the National Philharmonic, or "Kupalautsy" made up of former actors at the National Academy Theatre Janka

Kupala.[1] Other collective actions included open statements and appeals, collective dismissals, such as the case of miners who refused to leave the mines, and IT workers who gave substantial donations to the fired workers and free development of various software and platforms for the protest movement. Also around 300 employees of the National State TV and Radio Company resigned. Thus, instead of a complete disruption of work, the strike developed into multiple, constantly changing activities, which often happened in parallel, beyond, or in-between the primary production process.

This process of fast mobilization and organization of workers, alongside other participants of the 2020–21 uprising, could serve as a basis for future and more sustainable organizing, even despite the immediate and ongoing repressions (Artiukh 2020; Shparaga 2021). At the same time, due to the lack of a concrete and nuanced economic agenda and intertwinement of labour unrest with a general protest, there is an absence of structure and programming for an organized labour protest (Artiukh 2020, 58) that would provide security for the workers in case of state persecution or dismissal (Shparaga 2021, 219). This issue could already be seen in the failure of the general national strike announced by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya on October 26, 2020.

As Olga Shparaga writes, before 2020 there was a lack of horizontal networks and their institutionalization in Belarusian society, since there had been no place for political expression of various interests, and civil society was repressed (Shparaga 2021, 220). However, she believes that since the new scenarios of social development are possible from inside the active political processes, this could become an alternative to the frightening uncertainty of the possible political change (Shparaga 2021, 220).

Rhythms of Resistances

On August 6, 2020, before the election, one of the most memorable and inspiring gestures of anti-government resistance that operated as disruption took place. The final and largest pre-election rally of the presidential candidate Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and the united team of alternative candidates was scheduled in Minsk. But the authorities tried to block the event by organizing a last-minute concert. Opposition supporters started to gather anyway, when two sound engineers from the Minsk State Palace of Children and Youth, Uladzislau Sakalouski and Kiryl Halanau, who had to work on that day, interrupted the official concert by playing a song called "Peremen" ("Changes") and raising their arms in common protest gestures.[2] This gesture of refusal was perhaps particularly striking as it emerged from inside the system, out of a seemingly powerless position as state employees, and thus to some degree bore the similar potentiality of the upcoming wave of strikes. "Peremen," a late Soviet post-punk song (1986) by the band KINO, although never being explicitly political, had become a symbol of political transformation at this time, and consequently became one of the major protest anthems. That gesture made by the "DJs of Changes," as they were later called, is crucial in several ways.

First, it is important because rather than being a singular event of resistance, enacted by two male figures, this gesture continued and developed during a series of events and activities, which can't be inscribed into the logic of a singular heroic action. Soon after the event, this act of resistance was commemorated in the mural in a Minsk neighbourhood that further became one of the most active places for neighbourhood self-organization and got the unofficial name the Square of Changes.

The mural depicting the gesture was regularly removed and vandalized by state officials and each time re-created by local residents. On one such occasion, on November 11, 2020, unknown masked people, believed to be security forces in civilian clothes, kidnapped and beat to death Raman Bandarenka, a 31-year-old who attempted to protect the mural. His murderers are still not prosecuted, while the doctor and a journalist who published information regarding his condition were imprisoned. After Raman's death people started gathering at the Square of Changes and created a public memorial. In the following days, people mourned Raman's death by holding a minute of silence in the streets and inside institutions, and on November 15 a commemorating march took place, which ended with a crackdown on the Square of Changes and dismantling of the memorial. Journalists of the independent channel, Belsat Katsyaryna Andreyeva and Darya Chultsova, who created a video stream from the square, were imprisoned.

Addressing the gesture of disruption by the DJs of Changes can be done through a critique of approaches to political change, which in social sciences is often believed to be possible only after marginalized communities record and prove the harm in order to achieve assumed political or material gains. However, by doing so

and perpetuating narratives of pain they are seen as ruined and hopeless (Tuck, 2009). Thus, paradoxically, unprivileged communities must position themselves as powerless to make change, and thus this theory of change bears colonial logic (Tuck and Yang, 2014). The work of decolonial scholars Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2014) addresses the systems of racialized colonial violence towards indigenous communities that are imprinted into the systems of knowledge production within the Western academia.

However, I deal with a different context and framework: I am not researching indigenous communities and am not writing from a position of a colonized subject, even though the events described in this article are inscribed into the relations of imperialist domination between Russia and other post-Soviet states, which I briefly outline in the postscript. These are not settler-colonial relations. However, Tuck and Yang's writing on the theory of change and on the refusal of academic research which extracts indigenous knowledge and perpetuates pain narratives to represent subaltern subjects is crucial for my approach to writing about anti-governmental resistance in Belarus, during which the protestors faced unprecedented levels of police and state violence. I chose, therefore, not to focus on violence in order to acknowledge the agency of the protest movement not solely as a gesture of defense, and to approach political change critically. I am drawing on Judith Butler's (2015) proposition to think vulnerability and agency together as well as Tuck and Yang's (2014) idea of desire-centered research that "does not deny the experience of tragedy, trauma, and pain, but positions the knowing derived from such experiences as wise", thus acknowledging the complexity of lived experience (Tuck and Yang 2014, 231).

After the history of failed protests in contemporary Belarus, the popular opinion circulating in the media and on social networks assumed that the state system would change as soon as a sufficient number of people gathered in the streets. But instead of a triumphant rupture—the way in which a revolutionary event is often imagined—the political moment has been ongoing for several years. The rigged presidential elections on August 9, 2020, were followed by several days and nights of revolt and unprecedented police violence, and then by peaceful women's actions and multiple acts of labour unrest all over the country. These actions culminated in the first general protest march in Minsk on Sunday, August 16, 2020, which, however, did not mark the end or the victory of the protest, but established a new revolutionary rhythm that interrupted daily life and finally merged with it, for the months to come. A general march on Sundays, a women's march on Saturdays, a march of the retired people on Mondays, a march of the people with disabilities on Thursdays, and later, neighbourhood marches and various solidarity gestures on any day, along with the multiple decentralized solidarity support networks, acts of labour unrest, self-organized yard gatherings and so on. These events comprised the temporality of the *everyday*—the popular protest slogan that called people to gather for protesting daily. The regularity of protest was intended to resist the mundanity of social life in a time of political crisis, to disrupt not only the labour regimes, as one of the most efficient and direct ways to affect the state, but the daily life itself.

Choreographies of Marches

In Minsk one central spot became a significant site of the uprising, serving as a place of gathering or a point on the route of the protest marches, probably mostly due to its convenient location. This was the Minsk Hero City obelisk, erected in 1985 to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the victory in the Great Patriotic War or World War Two and Minsk residents' resistance during the Nazi occupation. With the official state ideology grounding in a heroic narrative of victory over fascism in World War Two, this memorial is a particularly important place, where official celebrations and military parades are regularly held. During 2020–21 uprising it became the site of anti-state resistance, of re-interpretation and re-appropriation of the historical legacies of resistance. After the protestors unfolded a huge red-white-red flag—an old opposition protest symbol—on the monument, the police and Special Forces started to encircle the memorial, protecting it from the people. This symbolic spatial confrontation is also meaningful in the context of the state and the protest's struggle over the discourse of fascism, of which both sides have been accusing each other—the state by copying the pro-Russian anti-Maidan rhetoric, labelling the uprising as nationalist, the protest by accusing the state of unlawfulness and brutality. Thus, the space of the monument was re-signified through the protesters' bodies and the choreographies of protest marches, and through their subversion of the common official choreography of military parades.

The concept of choreopolitics introduced by the dance scholar André Lepecki provides a useful lens for understanding these protest practices. Choreopolitics, he writes, "requires a redistribution and reinvention of bod-

ies, affects, and senses through which one may learn how to move politically, how to invent, activate, seek, or experiment with a movement whose only sense (meaning and direction) is the experimental exercise of freedom" (Lepecki 2013, 20). Lepecki opposes choreopolitics—a movement of dissent—to choreopolicing, a movement of conformity, of moving along, circulation that "produce[s] nothing other than a mere spectacle of its own consensual mobility" (2013, 19). He draws this distinction from Jacques Rancière's opposition between politics and the police. For Rancière the essence of the police is a certain way of "dividing up the sensible," of defining and ascribing particular modes of doing and perception to certain groups and places (2010, 36). The essence of politics lies in the manifestation of dissensus, in transforming the space of circulation into "a space for the appearance of a subject," in "re-figuring space" for what is to be done, seen, and named in the space (Rancière, 2010, 37). Thus, choreopolitical movement disrupts this continuous circulation of conformity. The political experience of collective movements and gatherings, their inventiveness, commitment, and repetition, indeed transformed social relations and led to the appearance of political subjects. Quite literally, this could be traced by looking at how the most common official choreography of state parades—the procession—was transformed into the protest choreography of the march. It could be also traced in how routine practices of queueing, walking, or stillness became protest gestures and how the labour and educational regimes were disrupted by strikes.

The choice of the march as major protest choreography was rather pragmatic, conditioned by the relative safety of constant mobility, which made police crackdown more complicated. But soon, not just a march, but a walk as such, with its fluidity, endurance and dispersion, became one of the basic protest gestures. As Judith Butler writes, "sometimes to walk the street (…) poses a challenge to a certain regime, a minor performative disruption, enacted by a kind of motion, that is at once a movement, in that double sense, bodily and political" (2015, 139). One could be arrested before or after joining the protest, or just walking on the street not far from the site of the protest gathering, or even at a random time and place, so physical presence in a public space could be read as a political gesture. At the same time, some protestors, in particular women, started to disguise their protest by claiming that they just went for a walk. They followed the example of the famous 76-year-old activist Nina Baginskaya, who claimed this to avoid arrest, which of course didn't necessarily prevent one. Or later, when organized marches became too dangerous, women's marches were deliberately set up as walks, titled "Women's démarche," when protesting women walked along the central avenue alone or in couples, mixed with passersby and sometimes marking themselves by holding flowers. Thus, not limited by the dynamics of continuous movement of the marches, the ongoing political struggle trespassed into daily practices and movement of ordinary bodies, with their fragility and irregular rhythms.

There has been an ongoing effort to redefine the dominant understanding of political movement and agency as exceptional and heroic action of individual leaders or organized groups (Bayat 2010; Butler 2015; Hedva 2020; Majewska 2021) and to challenge the division between the public and private (Hedva, 2020; Terlinden, 2003) as a space of politics. Addressing the particularity of political struggles in the Middle East, Asef Bayat (2010) introduces the concept of social non-movements, that is, "collective actions of noncollective actors." The concept describes fragmented but similar activities and common practices of subaltern groups merged into daily life that can trigger social change, while not being part of organized resistance or extraordinary protest events that exceed the routine of daily life. Ewa Majewska (2021) analyses political mobilization in Poland, such as early Solidarność (1980–81) and recent feminist protests (#BlackProtest and the Women's Strike, from 2016 onward), using the notion of the "counterpublics of the common" that draws on theories of counterpublics and the common (2021, 10). She proposes to view these mobilizations as "weak resistance," that is, "the unheroic and common forms of protest and persistence that led to a redefinition of the most general notions of political agency in feminist and minoritarian ways" (2021, 13). These notions challenge the patriarchal, heroic, and exceptional modes of political agency in favour of the "experienced, embodied and contextualized collective agency" of marginalized groups or counterpublics, that overcomes the public/private divide and whose collective agency and resistance embraces not only organized structures but also lived experience with its chaotic and affective realms (Majewska, 2021). Reflecting on the chronic health condition that prevented her from joining BLM protests, Johanna Hedva develops "Sick Woman Theory" to challenge the notions of political agency and public/private divide, in particular addressing Hannah Arendt's definition of the political "as being any action that is performed in public," that would exclude from politics anyone who is "not physically able to get their bodies into

the street" (2020, 1). Hedva formulates the Sick Woman Theory as "an insistence that most modes of political protest are internalized, lived, embodied, suffering, and no doubt invisible" (2020) and, in the same text, refers to Judith Butler's 2014 lecture "Vulnerability and Resistance" which claims that bodies are defined by vulnerability as their intrinsic quality, and thus any resistance is continuously reliant on infrastructures of support and care (2020).

The study of 2020–21 protests in Belarus contributes to this framework by critically viewing the dynamics of political resistance that did not lead to a change of political regime, but did lead to a change of social relationships. This view focuses on the exercise of particular choreographies of political movement, within which exhaustion and vulnerability were not failures but crucial parts of the movement. As previously mentioned, soon after the practice of regular general marches was established, many marginalized groups, whose health condition or social position made them much more vulnerable in the face of police violence and less capable to escape, untied in order to set their own regular marches with shorter routes and specific points of gathering: a women's and LGBTQ march on Saturdays, a march of the retired people on Mondays and a march of the people with disabilities on Thursdays. These practices were not exceptional. Tatsiana Shchurko points out how grassroots organizing in post-Soviet histories, and in particular in the Belarusian uprising, was largely rooted in and mobilized by the long experience of multiple feminist grassroots initiatives built by women and queer people (Shchurko 2022, 36). Thus, the political mobilization of particularly vulnerable and marginalized groups under the conditions of authoritarianism was a significant practice within these protests, foregrounding exhaustion as a characteristic of political struggle.

Exhaustion, Interruption and Rethinking Revolutionary Time

The continuity and decentralized character of protest practices were intertwined with exhaustion. On one hand, the protesters responded to escalating repressions and the exhaustion of previous protest techniques by inventing new ones: street clashes were replaced by women's peaceful actions, general marches by decentralized irregular yard gatherings and marches, conventional strikes by acts of labour unrest. On the other hand, the exhaustion of continuous movement is a crucial quality of political struggle, allowing a questioning of the linear temporality of a revolutionary event. André Lepecki theorizes movement exhaustion in contemporary dance in terms of an ontological critique of the political project of modernity as "being-toward-movement," that is, the modern logic of constant progress, colonial expansion, economic growth, etc., with corresponding regimes of oppression (2006, 14).

I suggest that in relation to political movements and protest choreographies, exhaustion (in a double sense, both political and physical) allows us to critically address the revolutionary dynamics and temporality with its demand of rapid and abrupt political change. Lepecki suggests rethinking "action and mobility through the performance of still-acts, rather than continuous movement" (2006, 15). "Still-act," a concept suggested by anthropologist Nadia Seremetakis, describes a subject's productive and critical interruption of a historical flow. It thus interrupts not only motion but also the course of historical time, subverting its linear logic and revealing the meaningful lags and pauses (Lepecki 2006, 16).

The 2020–21 strikes, which didn't follow the conventional logic of withdrawal and interruption of labour regimes, and that had to adjust to the conditions of state repressions and the lack of experience of social organizing in a repressive state, took various shapes and often intertwined with other protest practices. This underscores the importance of thinking about the specificity of an uprising in relation to imaginaries of revolutionary time and event.

Precisely because a march has an end point, resistance continues alongside public manifestations, within self-organized infrastructures and employing mundane and intimate gestures. They are part of the politics of prefiguration, which subverts hierarchies in political action, and the idea of the future as its absolute horizon (Graziano, 2017). As Valeria Graziano writes, the specific performativity of prefiguration underscores how social reproduction, networks of care, processes of politicization of collective experiences and imaginations can persist beyond the event that generated them (2017). Bojana Cvejić states, "Care replaces militancy in that it features reproductive labour in the self-organized activities in which people maintain social life […] during protests (food, sleep, medical help, etc.), which is transformed in the aftermath of protests into a regular practice of self-organization" (2019, 48).

Such politicization of the everyday, along with the widespread networks of care, such as volunteer initiatives to support political prisoners and their families or neighbourhood self-organizing, shifts the dynamics of the 2020–21 protests from the conventional patriarchal reading of a revolutionary event as a series of spectacular heroic acts towards feminist practices—horizontal, continuous, mundane and often invisible. From the very start, the protest was decentralized, unlike the previous anti-governmental protests, when occupation of central squares was the main practice, as, for example, the 2017 protests against the so-called "social parasitism law" obliging the unemployed to pay a special tax to the state, as well as "Ploshcha [Square] 2010" and the 2006 "Jeans Revolution" protests after the rigged elections, and the 2011 silent protests triggered by the economic crisis (Lysenko and Desouza, 2015; Shchyttsova 2011; Sarna, 2011; Shparaga, 2021)). This time it was happening in multiple places, involving a variety of practices and not having a single leader. Since in the first post-election nights and days the Internet connection was blocked and the riot police pre-emptively encircled the city centre, people gathered in their neighbourhoods and near the election pools to communicate and organize. In most Belarusian cities today, residents are atomized and often neighbours do not even know each other. During the protests, however, they established new relationships, through regular gatherings to coordinate collective protest actions, discuss the political situation as well as everyday issues, arrange festive yard events as a form of protest, and provide mutual aid. This communication was also held through specially created local Telegram chats and channels.

The prefiguration of the anti-government protests in Belarus could be traced in how, for instance, one of the biggest solidarity funds, ByHelp, that collected money to support victims of state repressions, started their activity already during the 2017 protests. Another big fund, BYSOL, that mostly supported dismissed and persecuted workers was launched by the team who had previously organized at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, called ByCovid-19, to assist doctors who did not have sufficient medical equipment. After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 this initiative launched a fundraising campaign to help women in Ukraine who survived sexual violence. In fact, many self-organization platforms, from neighbourhood chats to fundraising campaigns or anti-propaganda informational platforms that originated during the 2020–21 uprising were transformed into platforms for anti-war resistance after the 2022 invasion.

Olga Shparaga writes that feminist practices of care and solidarity in protests united vulnerability and activism. She understands vulnerability as "both exposure to violence and a shared agentic act standing against it" (2022). Being exposed to violence and searching for ways to avoid it, through the fluidity of marches or merging daily life practices with protests, protesters established new networks of care, from mutual aid in prison cells to yard gatherings. As one of the tools of putting pressure on political prisoners, the state limited and then prohibited them from receiving parcels with food and personal belongings, while also limiting or completely depriving them of hygiene products, bed linen etc. that the detained would normally get in prisons. Thus, in acts of solidarity and mutual support, the prisoners would share any belongings they would get, not just food, but even toothbrushes or underwear. Yard gatherings did not look like protest actions or occupations, but rather took the form of celebrations, collective meals, concerts, and neighbours' meetings. However, their agenda and the grounds for the residents to gather were precisely their participation in the protest and the desire to keep resistance alive beyond regular street manifestations, through collective activity, both directly and indirectly political.

Shparaga (2022) relates these practices to the practice of care strike, which does not suggest a suspension of work, but rather makes care visible and thus creates new relationships (Lorey 2020, 194). Shparaga claims that "strike-and-protest-as-care" in the Belarusian protest meant a new form of political subjectification — an attempt to create new spaces of freedom, equality, and care inside the existing institutions and outside them (Shparaga 2021, 241). That feeling of care and certain responsibility for still existing institutions, such as universities, that on one hand were subjected to the state and thus not free and not functioning properly, and on the other hand remained a certain space of possibility thanks to some people who worked there, probably also conditioned the specificity of strikes which took place inside these domains, intertwined with the regimes of work and education, rather than completely withdrawing from them. Such logic had also been common for social organizing in Belarus in the previous years, when direct political activity was persecuted, so people got used to indirect participation in social and political life, mostly in civic organizations and cultural initiatives, independent parties and movements. In 2020–21 these be-

came crucial mediators of the revolutionary process in Belarus (Shparaga 2021, 221).

While state repressions condition the impossibility of proper organization and the exhaustion of classical forms of protest, such as strikes or public demonstrations, the dispersed and fluid forms of protesting and organizing, such as care strikes and other prefigurative practices of mutual support, became the main forms of protest. Though they might be emerging out of certain limitations, in fact they bring new potentialities and are able to establish a new revolutionary temporality that is more complex and enduring than a revolutionary break or suspension of strikes (Shparaga 2021, 241). As Isabell Lorey puts it, the present time of prefigurative political practices is not simply in-between or before, but is the profound and lasting temporal break, the break for rehearsing and exercising the future now "an event of […] enduring unfolding of affective connections, an 'affect virus' through which new socialites emerge" (2019, 38).

This complicated relationship to time and future characterizes post-socialism in general. Post-socialism could be seen as a failed promise of the future, constantly haunted by its past—socialism. However, I follow decolonial feminist thinkers Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora who address post-socialisms in the plural as a queer, non-linear time propelled by multiple political desires, imaginaries, and uncertainties, being non-unified and associated with multiple places, times, and possibilities (2018). This perspective challenges the neoliberal and imperialist view of postsocialist spaces and their struggles, including the 2020–21 uprising in Belarus, as a "standstill time-space, contaminated by the socialist past" in a constant and unresolvable need to catch up with progressive Western democracies (Schurko, 2022).

Conclusion

The major protest gestures and choreographies of the 2020–21 post-election uprising in Belarus—strikes and demonstrations—had to adjust to the conditions of the repressive state apparatus. They took forms of labour unrest and protest marches (and even walks), characterized by fluidity, irregularity, and incorporation of protest into daily activities. The necessity to rethink modes of political participation having to adjust to the repressive state apparatus has been common for social organizing in Belarus in previous years. I would state that 2020–21 uprising in Belarus highlighted that this fluidity of protest techniques is not a sign of weakness or defeat of the resistance, but rather, its significant quality which brings new possibilities and agency. It allows for a rethinking of political change, not just as a change of political regime, but through the establishing and transformation of social relationships, with all their potentially, instability, and fragility. The exhaustion of traditional forms of protest led to the emergence of new social relations and networks that sustained beyond the space and time of the uprising, shifting the dynamic of protest from its reading as a singular heroic event of disruption towards horizontal, often invisible and continuous feminist practices of care, that also established new, non-linear revolutionary temporality. Thus, reading the 2020–21 uprising in Belarus as a strike would mean seeing it not as a singular, linear event that merely disrupts the historical time or political regime, but rather as a care strike, that creates lasting and fluid support structures and is always interconnected with other struggles.

In that sense exhaustion and interruption as essential characteristics of the 2020–21 protest choreographies are crucial for understanding the dynamics and potentialities of the uprising as they provide a different perspective on political action and temporality. Within these protests, not only political movement, but also stuttering and the interruption of linearity of revolutionary time became, quoting Lepecki, an "ever evolving commitment," an "intersubjective action that moreover must be learned, rehearsed, nurtured, and above all experimented with, practiced, and experienced. Again and again, and again and again, and in every repetition, through every repetition, renewed." (2013, 15)

Highlighting exhaustion as a crucial characteristic of political movement is also linked to the notion of vulnerability and its relation to political agency (Shchurko, 2022; Stebur 2021). This perspective on political dissent can also potentially reconfigure relationships between different geographies and subaltern struggles, such as feminist strikes, anti-imperialist, anti-racist and anti-authoritarian struggles (Shchurko 2022). This also underscores that the 2020–21 post-election uprising in Belarus could not be seen isolated from other power regimes and resistances in the region, such as resistance to Russia's imperialism.

Postscript

This paper is part of the on-going research that started before the Russian 2022 invasion in Ukraine, which is taking place with the support of the Belarusian govern-

ment and the use of Belarusian territory and infrastructure. The war, which has been waged since 2014, after Russia's occupation of Donetsk and Luhansk in eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, is not just a Ukrainian issue, as Olexii Kuchansky (2022) puts it. It certainly shakes the whole region and beyond, and affects our perspectives on the recent political events, such as the 2020–21 uprising in Belarus, which is the focus of this article. Providing the detailed analysis of these effects requires its own research beyond the scope of this article, but it is clear that today we cannot address the post-elections uprising in Belarus without the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine, which further complicates the notion of political agency and highlights the effects of Russia's imperialist powers in the region, that could be traced back to the history of the USSR and the Russian Empire, which both Ukraine and Belarus were part of. Those policies take the shape of political and economic domination and support of pro-Russian parties and political movements in post-Soviet states (such as Armenia or Kazakhstan), or of direct and indirect military invasion and backing up separatist movements (as in South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Chechnya or eastern Ukraine). The imperialist and militarist politics of the Russian Federation has played a significant role in supporting the repressive political systems and suppressing anti-authoritarian movements in many post-socialist states, and Belarus is one of such cases.

On December 8, 1999 the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation signed the Union State Treaty (President of the Republic of Belarus 2023). Though currently the treaty mostly considers the establishment of the common economic space and claims preservation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the states, the details of its provisions and the road maps, which are still in development (President of the Republic of Belarus 2023), are not always made public, and some of them include drafts of joint legislation and governance. This raises concerns regarding Belarusian sovereignty and integrity, which might be lost to Russia, either in the case of a complete merging of the two states or as a result of total economic dependency, while only 37 percent of the Belarusian population support a union with Russia (Belaruspolls 2022). Those public concerns in Belarus resulted in protests against integration with Russia that erupted in Minsk and Polotsk in December 2019, after two more road maps had been signed (notably, no protests against integration happened in Russia). In 2022 Belarus was the largest debtor of Russia, its debt reached 8.5 billion USD (World Bank 2022). In mid-August 2020, after the post-elections protests, Lukashenka got a $1.5 billion loan from Russia (Shparaga 2021, 210). And since, after the start of the protests Belarusian citizens took over $1 billion from the banks, the Russian government has also supported Belarusian banking sector (Shparaga 2021, 211), thus directly supporting the Belarusian regime and helping it to remain in power despite mass public dissent.

The specific geographic position of Belarus between Russia and the EU has been a ground for political and economic speculation for the Belarusian government, that also gave the regime a certain stability (Shparaga 2021, 234). After the start of the war in eastern Ukraine, Lukashenka also supposed the position of a peacemaker, for example organizing the Minsk agreements on Donbass—an international summit with politicians from Germany, France, Russia, and Ukraine in February 2015. This position has been completely discredited by the regime's complicity in Russia's invasion.

Apart from economic dependency, there are also concerns regarding Russia's military interference. Belarus is a member of another treaty with Russia—the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), established on May 15, 1992, by the heads of Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and joined by Azerbaijan, Belarus and Georgia in 1993. Key Article 4 of the treaty states:

> If one of the States Parties is subjected to aggression by any state or group of states, then this will be considered as aggression against all States Parties to this Treaty. In the event of an act of aggression against any of the participating States, all other participating States will provide him with the necessary assistance, including military, and will also provide support at their disposal in exercising the right to collective defense in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter. (Collective Security Treaty Organization, n.d.)

Since the beginning of the post-election protests in 2020, there have been fears in Belarusian society of Russia's military intervention, that could happen either by sending additional police forces or its troops, justifying this by the CSTO Article 4. This actually happened on January 6, 2021, when Russian troops were sent to Kazakhstan as 'peacemakers' in response to the continuing anti-governmental protests. It could be that Russia

would enact a hybrid invasion scenario disguised as support for separatist movements, similar to the invasion of eastern Ukraine in 2014. On August 15, 2020 Belarusian authorities announced, "At the first request, Russia will provide comprehensive assistance to ensure the safety of Belarus in the event of external military threats"(Belta 2020). Given that Belarusian government claimed that the protests were initiated and supported by the foreign powers, and constantly speculated about the military threat posed by Poland and the Baltic states, it was clear that no actual "external military threat" have been necessary for it to call for Russia's military aid.

After the suppression of the uprising by the Belarusian government and the continuous state repressions, Russian troops entered the territory of Belarus under the guise of joint military training in February 2022 and attacked Ukraine from its territory. Until now some troops continue to be deployed, at times launching air missiles on Ukrainian territory. According to the independent sociological survey conducted by Chatham House between June 6 and June 17, 2023, Russia's invasion of Ukraine is not supported by the majority of the Belarusian population. Only 14 percent supports the invasion, and only 5 percent want the Belarusian army to join the war on Russia's side (Belaruspolls 2022). Moreover 43 percent are against a permanent Russian military presence in Belarus (Belaruspolls 2022).

In the current political situation, of suppressed revolution, state repressions, and political crises, any mass antiwar movement is hardly possible. However, since the start of the invasion there have been actions of protest and railroad sabotage, including the drone attack on a Russian military plane in February 2023. It is believed that this attack slowed down, at least to some extent, the invasion from the Belarusian territory and also led to a new wave of mass arrests. However most people from Belarus believe that today any change in the political regime in Belarus is not possible without Russia's defeat in the war in Ukraine.

Endnotes

1. Those theatre employees were dismissed after they supported director Pavel Latushka who was fired after the theater collective demanded to stop state violence. Later, Latushka joined the Coordination Council, a non-governmental body, to facilitate the democratic transfer of power.

2. Hands forming a heart, a fist and V shape were the symbols of the united team of alternative candidates—Dzmitry Babryka, Siarhei Tsikhanouski and Valery Tsepkala. The team also called people to wear white ribbons and/or white clothes as a sign of voting against the current government. This call was part of their campaign against falsified elections. After their action, Sakalouski and Halanau were arrested for ten days, beaten, and later, after being threatened with more severe accusations, they fled to Lithuania.

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Unveiling a Feminist Strike: The Case of "Woman, Life, Freedom" in Iran

by Shirin Assa

Abstract: In the wake of the death of Jina (Mahsa) Amini, a powerful image emerged: women in Iran defiantly casting aside their hijabs and rallying under the slogan of "Woman, Life, Freedom." This paper explores and reflects upon what I call, following Verónica Gago, a feminist strike in Iran that organizes disorderly and cross-sectoral withdrawals of women from structures that exploit and assault them and restores their bargaining power and agency. Through the analytical perspective of intersectionality, this paper inquires into how the political underpinnings of the gendered apparatus in the Islamic regime of Iran have propelled the imagination of a common body among the diverse array of women. Further, it scrutinizes how the #WomanLifeFreedom uprising unveils a feminist strike and what it entails. This paper aims to show how the feminist strike in Iran expands the notion of strike as a tool against the conditions of work and showcases its all-encompassing basis against living conditions and restrictions on freedom.

Keywords: femicide machine; feminist strike; Iran; unveiling; veiling; "Woman, Life, Freedom"

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Introduction

The #WomanLifeFreedom revolutionary uprising in Iran was sparked by the death of Jina (Mahsa) Amini on September 16, 2022. A 22-year-old Kurdish woman, Jina, died in the custody of the Guidance Patrol for not *properly* complying with the state-imposed mandatory veiling. People started to #SayHerName: #Mahsa_Amini #Jina_Amini, as pictures of her lifeless body lying on a hospital bed went viral. At her funeral, women chanted "Jin, Jiyan, Azadî" (Woman, Life, Freedom) and spontaneously removed their headscarves, which resonated with many in Iran. More women joined in taking off their hijabs, cutting their hair, and burning their headscarves in mourning and fury. This awakened gender consciousness and feelings in millions, as if by an electric shock, and soon morphed into force that brought masses of people into the streets to chant "Woman, Life, Freedom," attempting to topple the Islamic Republic regime of Iran.

Unveiling and chanting "Woman, Life, Freedom" have symbolized the ongoing resistance of women in Iran's current insurgency. Having centralized women's rights amidst all demands, their resistance has become the prominent oppositional force against one of the most authoritarian states, leaving it desperate to recover power. Pervasive, decentered, and situated, the ongoing insubordination of women is what I call a feminist strike in Iran, following Verónica Gago's concept of feminist strike. According to Gago, feminist strike organizes disorderly and cross-sectoral withdrawals of women from structures that exploit and assault them and restores their bargaining power and agency (Gago and Mason-Deese 2018).

The collective act of strike, as conceptualized by Verónica Gago, presents a potent response to the political violence aimed at negating women's agency (2018, 662). It extends beyond conventional notions of labor strikes, encompassing a wide array of actions that address the conditions of living, surpassing the confines of work. The feminist strike emerges as a transformative force, seeking to dismantle systems of sexist oppression and envisioning a new relationship between bodies, territories, and feminist internationalism. According to Gago, "a feminist strike […] creates a new notion of what it means to strike based on expanding what we recognize as work, and a feminist internationalism that creates a new notion of how we define the relationship between bodies and territories and the relations between one territory and another" (2020, vii).

The history of women's struggles reveals their political marginalization, despite multiple institutions extensively capitalizing on their bodies and labor (Federici 2021). This multifaceted subjugation is perpetuated through a complex array of apparatuses, which systematically normalize coercion and naturalize exploitation (Segato 2003). These converge and co-construct common precarity for women and materialize differently in their lives (Hill Collins and Bilge 2020).

A recent report based on the official statistics spanning 2021 to 2023 reveals that, on average, every four days, a woman in Iran tragically loses her life at the hands of men (Lotfi 2023). The primary perpetrators are husbands, followed by distant male family members, such as ex-husbands, brothers, fathers, and sons (Lotfi 2023). What is particularly striking is how the causes of these murders are attributed. The report identifies family conflicts as the primary reason in 87 cases, with honor killings accounting for 38 cases. Notably, 30 cases remain categorized as unidentified causes, while financial reasons are cited in 10 cases. This unsettling pattern primarily accounts for the depoliticization of these systematic murders by the state in official records, often viewed as instances and incidents. Against this backdrop, politicizing women's oppression and exploitation is the basis upon which a feminist notion of strike can be imagined.

Through the analytical perspective of intersectionality, this paper inquires into how the political underpinnings of the gendered apparatus in the Islamic regime of Iran have propelled the imagination of a common body among the diverse array of women. Further, it scrutinizes how the #WomanLifeFreedom uprising unveils a feminist strike and what it entails.

This paper provides an interpretive and analytical framework for understanding the defiant act of unveiling in Iran as a feminist strike that beckons a revolution in the name of Woman, Life, and Freedom. The first section discusses the intersectional struggles of women in Iran by invoking Sergio González Rodríguez's model of the "femicide machine" (2012), which directs attention to the political underpinnings of veiling and the entanglement of gendered public spaces, criminalization of women's autonomy, and exploitation of their care and reproductive labors. Second, the paper analyzes the roots and routes of a political consciousness that has come to mold Iran's feminist strike and thrust forward a revolutionary pathway for people.

The history of women's resistance to compulsory veiling in Iran dates back to Tāhira Qurrat al-Ayn, with a continuous struggle since 1848. This paper does not engage in the historiography of unveiling but instead emphasizes the political histories that centralize compulsory veiling as a juncture for the resistance of women in Iran. While this paper primarily centers on Kurdish women's movements, it is crucial to note that this focus does not seek to dominate the discourse on ethnic feminist movements or downplay the pivotal roles of other ethnic women's movements during the Woman Life Freedom uprising. Rather, the primary intention here is to examine the *intersectionality of women's struggles*, i.e., the links between multiple precarities. A thorough engagement with women's diverse positionality and experiences of violence and abuse also stays out of scope. The timely issue of transnational solidarity across the spectrum of Muslim women's agencies is a central focus of my forthcoming paper, warranting its own dedicated space.

The Building of the Femicide Machine in Iran

González Rodríguez (2012) identifies the brutal murders of women in Juárez, Mexico, to result from systemic violence fueled by intertwined economic and political structures. He employs the metaphor of a machine to depict "an apparatus that not only facilitated the murders of numerous women and girls but also established institutions that ensured impunity for these crimes and even legalized them" (2012, 7). While initially rooted in Juárez, González Rodríguez cautions that

similar femicide machines may be emerging worldwide (2012, 14).

A complex net of politics has always been growing against women's bodies and labor. Yet, the politicization of their struggle is never a given. Notably, women of the global south can hardly escape the intricately culturalized maze that confines them and that they must navigate before arriving at its deferred political core. As Spivak argues, "[b]etween patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third world woman' caught between tradition and modernization" (1994, 102).

This is illustrated by the state agendas on the Islamic veil across Europe, notably the recent ban on female students wearing abayas in France (Goksedef 2023). These agendas result from a history of radical measures against Muslim women and their communities.

However, perhaps the example par excellence would be Iran's case, which, in less than half a century, drastically shifted from compulsory laws on unveiling women (1936) to veiling them entirely (1979), solely as a result of a change in the state's regime. Therefore, the issue of veiling and the associated dilemmas in the East, West, or diasporas, appears subsidiary to the politics of modern nation-states and their relations (Bilge 2010; Rashid 2023). The essentialism of culture or the reduction of agency to "a (universal) property of (transcendental) individuals" renders both the struggles and resistance invisible (Bilge 2010, 24; Narayan 1998).

The act of unveiling women in Iran, a globally contentious expression of self-determination, represents an agency molded by historical possibilities (Asad 1996; Rostam-Kolayi and Matin-Asgari 2014). The politicization of women's bodies in contemporary Iran traces back to Reza Shah (1925–41) who aimed to modernize and homogenize the country through coercive practices, including the unveiling of women (Najmabadi 2016). The Islamization of Iran after the revolution (1978–79) similarly instrumentalized women's bodies, justifying extensive coercion as a response to the previous regime and Western influences. Women's rights were frequently curtailed during times of political crisis to reassert control and divert attention. The oppression of women was not an isolated issue but rather indicated a broader deterioration of human rights and living conditions.

The systematic victimization of women in Iran, which was significantly aggravated after the revolution, operates on three levels: (1) gendering public spaces, (2) criminalizing women, trans, queer, and non-binary peoples' autonomy, and (3) exploiting women's care and reproductive labor. The suspension of the Family Protection Act (FPA) marked the beginning of a series of assaults against women. This act was the legal legacy of previous generations of women's activists who had worked to shift women's rights and family laws from Shari'ah courts to family courts. This suspension occurred on February 26, 1979. Additionally, on March 3, 1979, women judges were removed from their positions. Notably, on March 6 of the same year, Ayatollah Khomeini issued a compulsory veiling decree. Collectively, these events set in motion Iran's femicide machine immediately after the revolution. These actions consolidated power within the Shi'i clergy, transforming public spaces into ideological checkpoints, perpetuating the cycle of gender oppression, and entrenched a complex and outright system of violence against women.

Gendering Public Spaces: The Launch of Gender Apartheid

On March 6, 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini issued a decree that marked the inception of Iran's gender apartheid. This decree mandated that women could not enter or work in government offices without wearing hijabs (Matin and Mohajer 2013; Moghissi 2016; Nategh 1986). Behind his fervent anti-Shah and anti-imperial rhetoric for independence, Khomeini aimed to regain the power of Shi'i clergy in the post-revolution turmoil. This move catalyzed the Islamization of the state, rallying a politically divided nation around patriarchal traditions and religiosity (Sadeghi-Boroujerdi 2023; Sedghi 2007; Paidar 1997). In doing this, the public spaces effectively turned into ideological checkpoints.

The gendering of public spaces had far-reaching consequences, obstructing women's participation in formal labor and perpetuating generational feminized poverty. Since the summer of 1980 (Tabasi 2019), women were compelled to surrender bodily autonomy in exchange for the right to work, but this exchange came at a cost as they were effectively removed from formal labor markets, exacerbating gender discrimination and financial disenfranchisement (Afshar 1997).

The manifestation of the rising Islamic ideology and its assaults on public space had its roots in early February

1979 and in the heart-wrenching burning of Shahre-No, traditionally Tehran's red-light district on the fringes of the city. Within its confines, approximately 1,500 women in Shahre-No were employed and worked as sex workers until the provocation of Islamic sentiments at the onset of the revolution set it on fire. During the rise of Islamic forces, these women faced the horrors of being burned, beaten, imprisoned, and even subjected to execution while others were coerced into (public) acts of repentance.

Furthermore, the impact of the gender apartheid regime extended beyond spatial dimension and discrimination against women. It touched the lives of LGBTQIA+, as the state imposed strict dress codes and enforced veiling while simultaneously offering state-sponsored gender reassignment surgery for trans people and prohibiting homosexuality for queers. This seeming contradiction was part of a broader strategy to reconstruct and re-arrange bodies within binaries of space, gender, and sexuality. Thus, it divided society into cisgender and heteronormative men versus others. It all served to reinforce the regime's grip on public morality and maintain control over the public imagination (Najmabadi 2011).

Amid mass executions of political dissidents in the 1980s, veiling became mandatory by law in 1983, with penalties introduced for noncompliance (Sedghi 2007). Under the successive leadership of Ali Khamenei (1989–), veiling remained a steadfast policy across different administrations (Randjbar-Daemi 2017). However, mandatory veiling's function as a basis for gender segregation evolved into an apartheid regime, particularly during the Iran–Iraq war (1980–88) and since the beginning of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani's presidency (1989–97) (Shahrokni 2020). Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's disputed presidency (2005–13) introduced the "Morality Police" (Gasht-e-Ershad), an update on the Islamic Revolution Committees (1979–91), ushering in a new era of policing public spaces and women's bodies (Afary 2009). His tenure witnessed a violent and widespread assault on women who had reemerged in social spaces following the expansion of civil society during his predecessor, Mohammadreza Khatami (1997–2004) (Alikarami 2019). As subsequent administrations faced aggressive economic decline, new surveillance methods such as facial recognition in private cars, social media monitoring, and fines were implemented, culminating in the Ebrahim Raisi administration (2021–). Mandatory veiling laws since 1983 have played a pivotal role in controlling women's political activism and participation in civil society, often serving as legal grounds for their mistreatment, imprisonment, intimidation, and acts of violence against them (Sadeghi-Boroujerdi 2023). Conversely, mandatory veiling has also become a point of juncture for women's resistance, encompassing struggles for self-determination among ethnic, migrant, and religious minorities and individuals across the gender spectrum. As such, veiling in Iran materializes women's oppression.

Criminalizing Women, Trans, Queer, and Nonbinary Peoples' Autonomy: The Legalization of Heteropatriarchy

During the "White Revolution" led by Mohammadreza Shah in 1963, the Family Protection Act (FPA) was introduced as part of the modernization project, aiming to integrate Western norms into Iranian society. Initially proposed in 1967 and revised in 1975, this law faced opposition from clerics who were already against women's suffrage (Randjbar-Daemi 2022). The act sought to transfer family matters, such as marriage, divorce, and custody, from Shari'ah courts to newly established family protection courts, which would limit clerical power and impose restrictions on marriage age and polygamy (Paidar 1997; Aghajanian 1991). However, as long as the legislative politics accommodate the state's politics, they remain embedded in class, gender, and racial/ethnic structures (Davis 1983; Crenshaw 2018; Sedghi 2007). FPA revoked exclusive men's rights in family matters, although its implementation largely favored urban and economically privileged women, remaining a top-down initiative (Hoodfar and Assadpour 2000; Sanasarian 1982).

Following the revolution, the FPA was suspended. On March 1, 1979, Iran's syndicate of female jurists wrote a letter to the emerging government. Although they had initially planned to further women's rights, encompassing economic and political dimensions, their letter primarily underscored the general importance of improving women's condition of living (Hosseinkhah 2018) without mentioning their agenda for the future or alluding to the suspension of the FPA a few days prior. In response to their letter, Ayatollah Khomeini promptly revoked women's right to serve as judges (Sedghi 2007). With men assuming complete control over the legal sphere and gender politics, the prospects for women's rights began to decline significantly (Afary 2009; Moghissi 2016). More than a mere retaliation, the suspension was, in fact, the reconquest of the private do-

main by Shi'i clergy. The new Islamic family legislation, signed into law in October 1979, reinstated unilateral men's rights while further eroding women's personal rights and social entitlements (Alikarami 2019; Afary 2009). This included the repeal of abortion rights, prohibition of contraception, lowering the marriage age for women to 9, and delegating various rights such as work, travel, custody, divorce, and marriage to husbands and male family members (Moghissi 2016).

The Qesās Law (1980–83), also known as the Bill of Retribution, was a highly contentious legal tactic to Islamize the post-revolution state (Alikarami 2019). Khomeini declared that the bill adheres to the writ of the Quran and hence is God's law, giving a warning to its many opponents ("The Consequences" 1981). This law reduced the legal worth of a woman to half that of a man. Further, it restricted women's legal rights by devaluing their testimony which served deadly in cases involving death sentences, such as adultery (Sedghi 2007). The Qesās Law not only affected inheritance and wealth distribution but also introduced severe punishments, such as lashings and stoning, for transgressors who refused to adhere to the state-imposed dress code (Poya 2010; Sedghi 2007). The law was an unequal system where killing a man was considered a capital crime while killing a woman was considered a less serious offense that could be compensated by paying blood money to descendants and legal guardians (Afshar 1997). The Qesās Law has been used to criminalize dissent, agency, and autonomy, mainly targeting women and religious, ethnic, and gender/sexuality marginalized groups.

The legalization of patriarchy in Iran has drastically reinforced heteronormativity. In November 2021, Ebrahim Raisi enacted the Bill of Protection of the Family and the Rejuvenation of the Population, which incentivizes childbearing through financial support packages (Sadeghi-Boroujerdi 2023). This has led to increased child marriages due to rising poverty rates. Contraception has been forcefully removed from the market. Abortion is illegal and carries severe punishments for individuals and places that enable or facilitate it, making it either too expensive or fatal. The reconstitution of legal spheres has resulted in impunity for violence against women, queer, and trans individuals, even in extreme cases such as femicide, rape, and child (sexual) abuse. The law has promoted and perpetuated a widespread culture of precarity. At the intersection of Islamic family legislation and the Qesās Law, men serve as the state administrators in the family by constraining women to domestic spaces and acting as their guardians (Alikarami 2019). The extreme disparity between men's and women's rights has turned families into battlegrounds, intensifying the oppression faced by women, and LGBTQIA+ people (Hajnasiri et al. 2016; Saffari et al. 2017; Moghissi 2016; Afary 2009). The legalization of heteropatriarchy has not only regulated victims' positions but also made it nearly impossible for them to hold aggressors accountable, exacerbating the cycle of violence and oppression (Alikarami 2019). In this context, in the words of Sedghi: "Law is politics by another name" (2007, 135).

Exploiting Care and Reproductive Labor: A Case of Domestic Slavery

Building upon Rita Segato's perspective, Gago emphasizes examining women's precarity as political crimes rather than mere cultural conditions or sexually motivated acts (2018, 661). These crimes are the direct consequences of the state's systematic order (Segato 2003). This approach seeks to understand commonalities amidst differences. She writes this is "to understand something that speaks to all of us [...]. Because something of that geography is replicated […]. It is the composition of a common body that produces a type of resonance and result: a politics that makes the body of one woman the body of all" (Gago and Mason-Deese 2018, 661). Consequently, femicidal crimes intertwine public and private spaces, intersecting different forms of exploitation, violence, and economic disenfranchisement (Gago and Mason-Deese 2018; Federici 2021).

The Islamic regime in Iran has implemented various state-sponsored measures to increase fertility rates and regulate reproduction, considering it inextricable for its economic and political power. Traditional gender roles and heteronormative ideals of the family have been propagated through the dominance of Shi'i–Islamic values, particularly in the educational system, relegating women to the roles of wives, mothers, and homemakers while erasing homosexuality (Naeimi and Kjaran 2022). The concern over expanding the Shi'i population has been present among clerics even before the revolution, but it gained significant political attention in Iran after 2000 (Hoodfar and Assadpour 2000; Sadeghi-Boroujerdi 2023). Motherhood, as a romantically feminized teleology, has long been respected in Iranian society. However, since the Iran–Iraq war, motherhood has become a preoccupation for Iran's leaders and is particularly valued when it contributes to ideological allies for the state or the growth of the Shi'i population (Afshar

1997). Consequently, women's labor has been recognized primarily for the services they provide to men, God, and the state and their bodies are regulated for value extraction, "compatible with capitalist social relations prevailing in Iran" (Sadeghi-Boroujerdi 2023, 8).

Having been advocated as *raison d'être* and divine duty, social reproduction and care labor remained unpaid. Even with a shortage of male labor after the war, women's labor contribution was unwanted and marginalized (Afshar 1997). Gender segregation in workplaces pushed women to the margins of labor sectors (Bahramitash and Esfahani 2011). Despite their high participation in agricultural sectors, women's work remained invisible, and official attempts were made to minimize their participation in formal economic sectors (Moghadam 2009). Whereas the number of educated women has risen exponentially since the revolution, their social and legal restrictions led to defeminizing economic sectors and, in turn, heavily feminize informal and domestic labor units, as well as care labor professions in general, such as teaching or nursing (Farvardin 2020).

At the intersection of capitalist and patriarchal social relations, the exploitation of women's labor has an economic and psychological aspect to it (hooks 2015). In capitalist patriarchy, women's economic empowerment is class continuous and reinforces the exploitation of underprivileged groups. The low-paid or unpaid nature of women's work assigns a lower value to their labor, dehumanizing and endangering them within the system (hooks 2015). While the lack of job opportunities facilitates the exploitation of women's sexuality and labor, it is crucial to shift attention to the broader context in which the economic exploitation of women emegerges.

The institutionalization of poverty in Iran, influenced by increasing class and gender conflicts, has made poverty a common experience among various groups of women. The "feminization of poverty," or the impoverishment of women, disproportionately affects ethnic minorities, migrant women, and nonbinary individuals in Iran (Ehrenreich and Stallard 1982). These groups engage in extremely low-paid and often degrading work, enduring precarious working conditions (AleAhmad 2023; Karamouzian et al. 2016; Hoodfar 2004). Poverty is widespread among women and is a common source of precarity, pushing rural women to migrate to larger cities and work as caregivers in middle and upper-class families. Their labor is poorly paid, menial, and often perpetuates "ethnicized forms of structural violence" (Sadeghi-Boroujerdi 2023, 8). In response to the economic hardships women face in Iran, different groups have examined the impact of their social and legal rights and the effects of marriage and divorce on their impoverishment. This struggle against poverty has fostered solidarity among women from various ideological, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds (Bahramitash 2014).

The political underpinning of veiling in Iran delineates a femicide machine within the authoritative Islamic regime. Mandatory veiling serves as the starting point for the subsequent control over women's bodies, agency, the exploitation of feminized labor, and the perpetuation of violence and feminized poverty. The mandatory act of veiling and the control over women's bodies function as crucial components within Iran's femicide machine, employed as an axis for the state's radicalization.

Figure 1:† Graffiti stating: "Femicide by The Law of God, State, And Father." Shared on: https://bidarzani.com/30718/

Feminist Strike: Woman, Life, Freedom

The systematic victimization of women has constituted a common body among women in Iran, and Jina's (Mahsa's) death has animated this body. The uprising of Woman, Life, Freedom has transformed everyday social life into the time and the place for unwavering protests, occurring in universities, offices, public events, bazaars, cafés, restaurants, streets, and public transportation. Powerful images have emerged of individuals defiantly setting their scarves on fire, symbolizing courage and resistance. The chant "We Are All Mahsa, Come on and Fight" echoes through the streets as the writing on the wall reads, "Courage Can be Propagated."

Elderly veiled and unveiled women fearlessly confront counter-insurgency forces, reclaiming public spaces and generating feelings of safety and care. Their presence serves as a reminder of intergenerational solidarity and an extension of the home. The display of the schoolgirls' defiance and the government's violent response has been an emotionally devastating sight, exposing the failure of state propaganda. Funeral sermons have shifted their focus to the chant of "Woman, Life, Freedom," inspiring individuals to fight for justice rather than succumb to victimhood. The streets have witnessed protests echoing with the collective voice of women saying, "Cannons, Tanks, and Guns Won't Work Anymore, Tell My Mother She Doesn't Have a Daughter." Women from all walks of life, veiled and unveiled, stand side by side, celebrating solidarity, love, and joy, reclaiming their bodies and rejecting shame. Graffiti on walls proudly proclaims, "No Matter How Much You Try to Harm Me, I Will Not be Wounded; I Will Keep Sprouting."

The state's relentless crackdown on women's bodies and lands has exposed the gruesome reality of the femicide machine. Women have been targeted with direct shots to their genitals, heads, necks, and faces, resulting in loss of life and eyesight (Parent and Habibiazad 2023; Amnesty International 2022; Ghorbani 2022; Wintour and Foumani 2022). Among the victims are children who witnessed their mother's death and mothers who mourn their children (Wintour 2023; Dehghanpisheh 2022; BBC 2022). Bodies of women have been found, slaughtered during the protests, including nurses and doctors who provided secret assistance (Safi 2022; Daneshgari 2023). Women have been brutally beaten, pushed from buildings, unlawfully arrested, and faced mental and physical torture in detention centers and prisons. Reports indicate widespread sexual molestation and rape (Qiblawi et al. 2022). Chemical attacks, primarily targeting girls' schools, have been employed to spread fear (Parent 2023a). Veiling laws have been reinforced through severe sanctions, summoning individuals to comply and reinforce them.

Most recently, the Iranian state has pushed for drastic punitive measures to control women's large-scale noncompliance with the state's dress code. The proposed Bill to Support the Family by Promoting the Culture of Chastity and Hijab, currently under review in the Iranian parliament, seeks to legalize the detention and incarceration of women, impose substantial financial penalties on them and the establishments they frequent, and threaten closures. Underaged girls face potential passport confiscation and denial of their rights to education and work. In defiance, protesters question, "You kill, you arrest, you beat; what would you do with the regeneration (of resistance)?" This oft-quoted verse encapsulates the determination and the significant involvement of Generation Z in this uprising and the reminder of transgenerational and continuous resistance (Shams and Gott 2023; Tohidi 2023; Zarbighalehhammami and Abbasi 2023).

Women in Iran continue to organize informally and persist in forming solidarity coalitions, exchanging small gestures of support and encouragement in public spaces. By amplifying previously unheard voices, they establish grassroots and interpersonal networks rooted in intersectional sisterhood and resonances. Asef Bayat conceptualizes women's activism in Islamic authoritarian states as a "non-movement" distinct from traditional organizational and networking methods, as well as mobilization tactics such as street marches, picketing, strikes, or disruptions, yet it effectively expands their range of choices (2007, 160). Compared to other strikes, the feminist strike has achieved greater success in maintaining daily life and orchestrating widespread acts of sabotage (Bayat 2023; Jafari 2023; Tohidi 2023). One particularly striking moment in this uprising is the outright declaration of support for the feminist movement by men, especially those from working-class, ethnic, and different religious backgrounds (Tohidi 2023; Zarbighalehhammami and Abbasi 2023). These men challenge and reject the state-imposed gender stereotypes, reclaiming their autonomy against their portrayal as having no control over their sexual desires. This is exemplified by the chant in which men address morally corrupt authorities, especially male figures in power, saying: "You Are Lewd, You Are Dissolute," while women's voices complement it saying: "I Am A Free Woman." This signifies that the feminist strike has also formed diagonal and unexpected coalitions. Thus, the movement extends beyond isolated circumstances, connecting various fields, lands, and marginalized groups. Among the slogans, there are: "Kurdistan, The Graveyard of Fascists," "From Zahedan to Tehran, I Sacrifice Myself for Iran," "Bread, Labor, Freedom, Council Government," and "Kurdistan, a Role Model for Iran." These attest to the lateral coalitions and the shared understanding of intersectional resistance.

Refusing to be mere victims, women in Iran assert their agency and position a "relational essence" (Zack 2005, 8) between themselves, which not only brings educated, poor, devout and veiling women together, but also transcends hegemonic values, showcasing how commonalit-

ies bridge differences (Hancock 2016; Yuval-Davis 1997). Openly defying state authorities and the patriarchal legal order, women express contempt for norms advocated as divine law. They reject prescribed roles, connecting their waged and unwaged labors to make them visible, meaningful, and non-hierarchal. Feminist strike laterally connects homemakers, workers, migrants, rural women, students, professionals, and activists from diverse backgrounds. Beyond their individual predicaments, they confront precarity in various fields. As connections form daily, a broader resistance emerges, envisioning mass sabotage. This growing counter-power holds the potential to halt the femicide machine that sustains the Islamic regime, becoming the harbinger of a revolution. Borrowing from Gago, the Woman, Life, Freedom feminist strike in Iran, similar to other international feminist strikes, namely #NiUnaMenos, "showed the potential of an action that allowed us to go from mourning to taking our rage to the streets. […] We came together based on our doing, and in our multiplicity we became accessible as a common ground"(2020, 10).

Figure 2.† The slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom" written by a Baluch woman. Shared on: https://x.com/Mehrnaz_Mjt/status/1587653396768600064?s=20

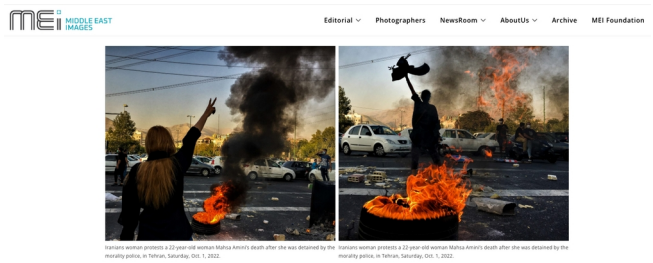

Figure 3.† The act of defiance by women in Tehran during the 2022 uprising. Shared on: Middle East Images

Figure 4.† Two Kurdish girls, dressed in their chosen ethnic attire, symbolizing "Woman, Life, Freedom" in the protest in the city of Mahabad, on November 18, 2022. Shared by: https://x.com/NatalieAmiri/status/1593678929801379842?s=20

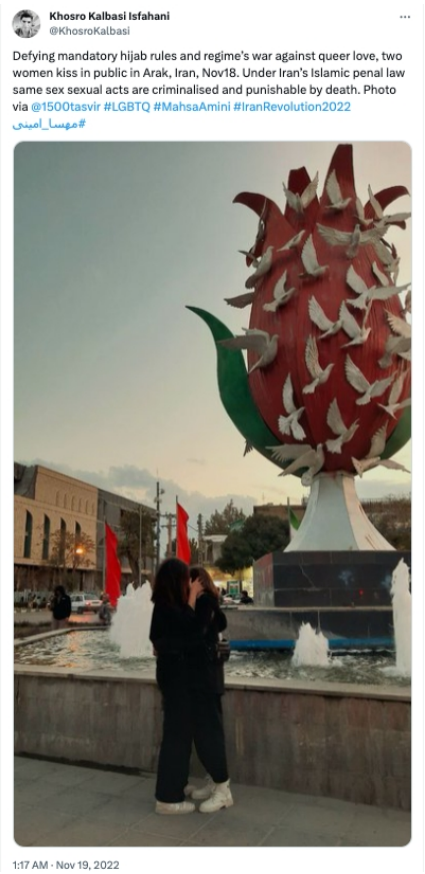

Figure 5.† Resistance against compulsory hijab regulations and the government's crackdown on LGBTQ+ relationships, two women publicly share a kiss in Arak, Iran, in November 2020. Shared on: https://www.iranintl.com/en/202211185879

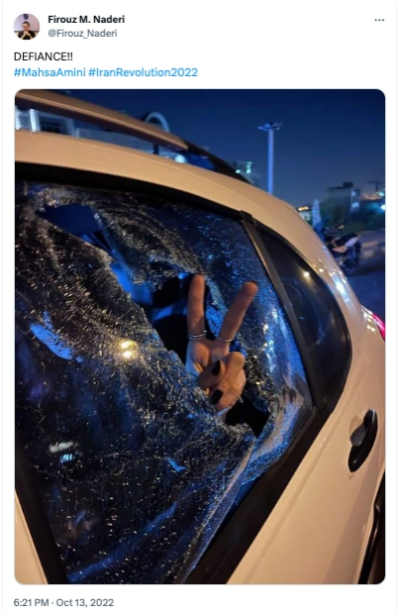

Figure 6.† "No Matter How Much You Try to Harm Me, I Will Not be Wounded; I Will Keep Sprouting." Shared on: https://9gag.com/gag/aGEwrQw?utm_source=copy_link&utm_medium=post_share

Figure 7.† Amidst a series of chemical attacks on girls' schools, a student defiantly holds a sign reading, "'Woman, Life, Freedom' Until My Last Breath." March 4, 2023. Shared on: https://x.com/1500tasvir_en/status/1632061803063640064?s=20

Figure 8.† Several university students entering Al Zahra University without mandatory hijab, Tehran, April 2023. Shared on: https://x.com/1500tasvir_en/status/1645410408453292034?s=20

Unveiling the Process

Jina was a young Kurdish woman from Saqqez who was killed in Tehran by the Islamic state's police for not *properly* wearing her hijab. What distinguishes Jina's death from other femicides and the countless killings and executions of Kurds and ethnic minorities in Iran is the profound politicization surrounding her untimely demise. Politicization was made possible by a dialectical process intertwining the longstanding political subjectivity of women in Rojhalat and the intersectional feminist practices within Iran.

Jina's body and death converge with the history of systematic gender and ethnic oppression in Iran. The ethnic oppression of Rojhilat, the Kurdish region in Iran, dates back to the time of Reza Shah and persisted under the Islamic Republic regime, despite differences in their political systems (Cronin 2010; 1997; Cabi 2020). According to Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, Kurdish oppression is based on three pillars: the unification of diverse territories of Iran, the centralization and industrialization of the country, and the homogenization of Iran under the Islamic state (2023). It is important to note that the Kurdish people have a long history of resistance shaped by their transnational struggles for self-determination against totalitarian states in Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran. While it is not possible to delve into the entire history of Kurdish resistance in this limited space, it is pertinent to address the resistance of Kurdish women as it relates to the provenance of "Jin, Jiyan, Azadî" and the development of solidarity beyond Bakur, Başur, Rojava, and Rojhilat.

Kurdish women did not have the same opportunities as Kurdish men. While for both Kurdish men and women entry into the political realm in Iran was hindered, men took a detour by using their mobility and going to big cities, universities, and work sectors (Karimi 2023). On the other hand, Kurdish women vehemently organized various local, ethnic, political, and gender-based movements, gaining a significant presence in Rojhalat (Qubādī 2015). The Komala, a far-left Kurdish political organization, played a significant role in fostering political awakening among Kurdish women and their political subjectification, as Karimi argues (2022; 2023). Although the first feminist party in Kurdistan dates back to the 1960s, it was the grassroot organizations led by Kurdish women that transformed cities like Sanandaj, Marivan, and Saqqez into centers of women's political engagement (Qubādī 2015; Ghoreishi 2018). The Aichi cemetery, where Jina's funeral took place, is located near these cities. In sharp contrast to what seems a sudden reaction of local women to Jina's death, the unveiling and chanting of "Jin, Jiyan, Azadî" at the Aichi cemetery throws into sharp relief the spontaneous organizational capacity of Kurdish women rooted in their histories of political agency in Rojhalat and Kurdistan.

The genesis of the slogan "Jin, Jiyan, Azadî," as historicized by Rostampour, finds its roots in its earlier form, "Jin, Jiyan," emerging from the struggles of women within the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) during the late 1980s (2023a). The guerrilla women within the party faced societal pressure to discontinue their involvement, driven by the belief that women should not participate in combat roles. In response, these women demanded immediate action to address this issue and challenge prevailing patriarchal norms within their ethnic community (Rostampour 2023a.). This slogan evolved to become a source of inspiration for Abdullah Öcalan, the charismatic leader of the PKK. Through conversations with co-founder Sakîne Cansiz and other women within the movement, Öcalan conceptualized an inextricable link between the aspirations of Kurdish liberation and women's liberation. In this background, "Jin, Jiyan" evolves into "Jin, Jiyan, Azadî," casting light on the mutual dependency of gender equality and ethnic liberation in Kurdistan (Rostampour 2023a).

In the late 1990s, the Peace Mothers and later the Saturday Mothers adopted "Jin, Jiyan, Azadî." Drawing inspiration from the Argentinian Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, the Peace Mothers united against the Turkish government's kidnapping and forced disappearance of their children, bringing together Kurdish women in Bakur and Rojava. This resistance led "Jin, Jiyan, Azadî" to be embraced on International Women's Day in Turkey since 2006 and in Syria from 2012 onwards (Rostampour 2023a).

In 2014, "Jin, Jiyan, Azadî" became the prominent slogan in the fight against ISIS, showcasing the courage and power of Kurdish women against brutal and oppressive states in Kobanî, Rojava. Furthermore, at the funerals of political prisoners, such as Heidar Ghorbani in 2021, "Jin, Jiyan, Azadî" echoed in Rojhalat. Kurdish women rejected the state's dress code, wore Kurdish clothes, positioned themselves at the forefront of the demonstrations, and led the crowd (Ghoreishi 2023). In short, "Jin, Jiyan, Azadî" encapsulates the trajectory of Kurdish women, transforming from intersectional victims to

transnational warriors, and the inevitable relations between women's rights, conditions of living, and scope of freedom.

Following the announcement of the decree on veiling in 1979, women from various groups protested for six days in large numbers. These women organized the first demonstration against freedom restrictions, driven by the political awakening of the revolution (Matin and Mohajer 2013; Hosseinkhah 2018). However, their protests lacked solidarity and support from religious nationalists, secularists, liberals, leftists, and intellectual groups, who regarded the women's movement as derivative, divisive, unimportant, and secondary. This lack of support and political neutrality towards the suppression of women worked in favor of Islamist groups, leading to violence and the slogan, "Either Headscarf or a Smack on The Head" (Meskoob 2001; Sedghi 2007).

Due to the abrupt announcement of the decree and the lack of prior preparation, there was insufficient time for organizational efforts to extend beyond Tehran, thus limiting the incorporation of other demographics of women across Iran. The ramifications of the forced unveiling during Reza Shah's reign on conservative families were also overlooked. These included girls' withdrawal from schools, secret and overnight trips of veiling women to use public baths, migration to Iraq in some cases, and memories of physical assault and public humiliation, to name a few. These experiences consolidated anti-Shah sentiments and propelled many women to embrace veiling as their disapproval of the Pahlavi regime, ultimately enabling its co-optation by the religious ideology in power (Chehabi 1993).

While veiling was not a mutual predicament for Kurdish women since Rojhalat is dominantly Sunni and their ethnic hair cover is a small piece of cloth called "lachek" (Ghoreishi 2023), they organized a demonstration on March 11, 1979 and immediately called out the anti-democratic nature of the decree (Qubādī 2015). In solidarity with the women's protest in Tehran, women in Sanadaj, amongst them leftist men and people from Saqqez, chanted, "Neither Headscarf Nor a Smack in The Head, (but) Death to This Dictatorship" (Qubādī 2015, 170). It is worth noting that this protest received limited support in Rojhalat, as it occurred just days before the Kurdish population's hope for the new government began to wane. Nonetheless, their intersectional efforts and feminist solidarity, particularly in connection with the protests in Tehran and other major cities, proved instrumental in delaying the enforcement of mandatory hijab legislation for a period of two years.

It is crucial to contextualize this moment within the larger Kurdish struggle for self-determination which was intentionally portrayed as an attempt to achieve separatism from Iran, even though it served as a pretext for the government to open fire on a politically organized ethnic population. While the horrific events of the 1979 Bloody Nawroz in Sine (Sanandaj) are etched into the collective memory of generations of Kurds in Rojhalat, their mass boycott of the referendum for the Islamic Republic and withdrawal of their support surely remain ingrained in the memory of the nascent state (Cabi 2020). This tragic history has led to unremitting state-sponsored violence against the people and land of Rojhalat since 1979. As a consequence of the ethnic suppression, Kurdish women's struggles have been marginalized, with their solidarity and resistance often expected to primarily align with ethnic struggles above gender precarity.

While the One Million Signature Campaign in 2006 aimed to repeal discriminatory laws and involved various groups of women, it had limitations in its scope and impact. This brings to light the need for a broader perspective that takes into account the history of Islamic nationalism and its implications for women at the ethnic, religious, and sexual peripheries in Iran. This campaign involved various groups of women and aimed to collect one million signatures with a grassroots approach. However, the campaign became divided as some of its advocates sought redemption through legal reforms, placed faith in the state and top-down reforms, and directed their attention to the political center of power. All campaign advocates were eventually detained and incarcerated.

The campaign's merits are widely discussed by Afary (2009), Alikarami (2019), and Rivetti (2020), amongst others. Rostampour critically views that the campaign disproportionately consisted of Persian and middle-class women and was limited to the concerns of educated women in urban areas. According to Rostampour, this narrow perspective rendered the campaign irrelevant due to its alignment with Shi'i and nationalist discourses. The One Million Signature Campaign, had it not been banned, could only succeed in centralizing a minor demographic of women before coming close to delivering on its reforms for gender equality. Therefore, Rostampour associates it with "féminisme réformateur centraliste" (centralist reformist feminism), and high-

lights that the proposed reforms could reinforce hierarchical and hegemonic social structures. Consequently, this approach falls short of achieving the political objective of feminism (2023b). The One Million Signature Campaign should have examined the history of Islamic nationalism for the substantial demographic of women at the ethnic, religious, and sexual peripheries. Had they done so, they might have understood how essential it was for women's struggles in Iran to undo its nationalist deeds.

In 2014, Masoumeh (Masih) Alinejad launched the #MyStealthyFreedom campaign from the diaspora. This campaign popularized the act of unveiling as a form of women's civil disobedience and emphasized the secretive nature of women's pursuit of freedom in Iran. However, the campaign drew criticism for its Orientalist imagery and alignment with neoliberal discourses in the West (Seddighi and Tafakori 2016). In 2017, the campaign took a new direction with the introduction of #WhiteWednesdays, encouraging both women and men to protest mandatory veiling by wearing white scarves or clothing. This weekly practice made women's resistance visible, welcomed male participation in the fight against women's oppression, and turned resistance into a regular practice (Shirazi 2019). On December 27, 2017, on Revolution Street (Khiyaban-E-Enghelab), one of the most crowded streets in Tehran, 31-year-old Vida Movahed stood alone on a utility box. She held her headscarf on a stick in silence. People were captivated by her courageous act and called her the Girl of Revolution Street. Her iconic act promoted other women to do the same, and together they have become the Girls of Revolution Street.

The most longstanding grassroots feminist practice in Iran since 1979 happened to be largely neglected for its feminist implications, with only a few notable exceptions (Khosravi Ooryad 2022; Behkish 2022). For several decades, the Mothers and Families of Khavaran (often referred to as Mothers of Khavaran) have played a pivotal role in Iran through their grassroots feminist practices. Inspired by the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, they comprised mothers and families of political dissidents who disappeared or were executed by the Islamic regime in the 1980s (*Guardian* 2012; Muhāğir and Davis 2020).

The Mothers of Khavaran gathered at Khavaran, traditionally a burial ground near Tehran for religious minorities, which had been repurposed to bury unidentified bodies of their family members. They deliberately formed a political collective for #Justice-Seeking. As such, Mothers of Khavaran have established a network that transcends generations, including other mourning mothers like Mothers of Laleh Park and Mothers of Aban, who lost their children during Iranian protests between 2017 and 2022. Together, they form the Iranian Justice-Seeking Mothers and have gained unprecedented political significance amongst the people in Iran and massively contributed to their political awakening (Behkish 2022). By relying on grief, empathy, and intimacy as resources for political activism, they displayed the resilience of feminist practice and an informal and intimate organizational possibility. The justice-seeking mothers #دادخواهی. are the epitome of the non-hierarchical and counter-hegemonic feminist collective in Iran that forge solidarities beyond social, national, ideological, religious, and gender borders, connecting one's loss "away from and in relation to others in the world" (Hancock 2016, 126). Moreover, Khosravi Ooryad calls attention to how they reclaimed the role of mothers as political agents and family relations from the patriarchal discourse (2022).

The roots and routes of these feminist movements unveil the processual coalescence of political subjectivities amongst women in Iran. This trajectory not only maps the transnational coalitions of women but also activates the intersectionality of their struggles across generations. By bringing domestic into public and public to domestic, they subvert the hierarchies of labor and waging. Building upon and away from their predicaments, they decentralize and connect in an often indirect and unexpected way. Meanwhile, they are establishing a foundation to articulate the meaning of feminism in Iran, navigating the ambiguities surrounding its usage and claims of ownership. Drawing on Gago, the resistance describes the geography of fear and risk to make sense of their abuse and the pervasiveness of violence. The fear that does not relegate them to victims but instead empowers them to strategize. Therefore, "[i]t is translated into a sensitive map of the exploitation experienced in connection to one another and into formations of other ways of thinking about territory and, in particular, about the body as a territory (body-territory)" (Gago 2018, 663).

Figure 9.† Women's Syndicate of Marivan 1980s. Shared by: https://x.com/Sh_Mouselchi/status/1250513012399669250?s=20

Figure 10.† Mothers and families of Khavaran at Khavaran burial ground. Found as: Courtesy photo: https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-montazeri-comes-back-to-haunt-1988-mass-killings/27975961.html

"Jin, Jiyan, Azadî"

The Woman, Life, Freedom movement reveals the intricate interplay of political and societal dynamics that perpetuate the subordination of women. Within the authoritarian Islamic regime of Iran lies a deeply entrenched and systematic apparatus of violence against women—a femicide machine. This machine employs women's bodies and mandatory veiling as its gears and pins, regulating the state's radicalization. It enforces gendered public spaces, criminalizes women's autonomy, and exploits their care and reproductive labor, thereby perpetuating a cycle of violence and feminized poverty.

This paper underscores the evolution of women's protests and resilience throughout Iran's tumultuous history. Women have steadfastly pursued political change, playing pivotal roles in key moments—from the 1979 revolution to the student protests of 1999, and the 2009 Green Movement. The world watched in horror as Neda Agha Soltan bled to death in one of the world's most peaceful protests. Figures like Gohar Eshghi, an "ordinary" elderly woman, emerged as one of the most powerful voices in the justice-seeking movement against the state's atrocious repression of the protestors. Subsequent insurgencies since 2017, sparked primarily by economic grievances and price hikes, or the 2020 anti-government protests following the downing of Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752, were strongly advocated by women such as Sepideh Qolian, Fatemeh Sepehri, and Bahareh Hedayat, among many. From solitary confinement to hunger strikes, these fearless women have displayed the strength of their voice, bodies, and conviction, to the world and the state.

Building on these collective memories of resilience and suppression, the politicization of Jina Amini's state murder not only marked a turning point— propelling a full-fledged feminist uprising from the ashes left behind by the femicide machine— but also unveiled the intersection of many injustices that extend beyond the realm of gender. Even after a year has elapsed, the strike endures. It persists in disrupting the entrenched hegemonies of heteropatriarchy and poses a formidable challenge for the state, all the while reshaping the ongoing struggle for women's rights in Iran reaching far beyond its borders.

In the wake of Jina's death at the hands of the morality police, the government has taken extensive measures to suppress women's defiance (Amnesty International 2023). After more than four decades of enduring systematic discrimination, violence against women, queer, non-binary, and trans individuals, and the weaponization of public moral against them, the proposed bill for unveiling punishments has compelled United Nations experts to contemplate the notion of gender apartheid in Iran (OHCHR 2023).

Women in Iran firmly reject the role of passive victims (Parent 2023b), shaping their resistance into a feminist strike in its recent phase. The feminist strike in Iran brings together women from diverse backgrounds and social positions, surpassing hegemonic values and forging a decentralized collective. Through their joint en-

deavors, they challenge prescribed gender roles, confront the perils of precariousness across various domains, and envision a mass mobilization capable of sabotaging the femicide machine, ultimately ushering in revolutionary change. Their activism and unwavering resilience epitomize the continuous coalescence of political subjectivities, both within Iran and across transnational coalitions, as they bridge differences and activate intersectionality within their struggles. The recent case of Armita Garavand‡ (#ArmitaGaravand), a 16-year-old girl who is currently in a coma after being assaulted for not wearing a hijab on public transportation, bears a striking resemblance to that of Jina Amini (Wintour and Parent 2023). These women's activism and resilience are levelled at the femicide machine. While their resistance serves as an inspiration and a beacon of hope for a nation, their strike calls on feminist solidarities, not least from the international body of Muslim women.

In the words of W. E. B. Du Bois, a strike is "a wide basis against the conditions of work," and the feminist strike in Iran showcases its all-encompassing basis against the conditions of living and the restrictions on freedom (1976, 67). In this light, the resounding slogan of "Jin, Jiyan, Azadî" acquires its profound significance, encapsulating the essence of their struggle.

Figure 11.† Women, public space, and daily life. The writing on the wall reads: "Woman, Life, Freedom." Shared by: https://x.com/lila2052/status/1645423004245979138?s=20

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Endnotes

† Amidst the current events in Iran's uprising, images shared online often obscure people's faces and the identity of the photographers due to security concerns. The images included in this article are all screenshots of images that have been circulated online through social media to raise awareness about the protests.

‡ As this paper undergoes its final proofreading before publication, it commemorates the solemn 40-day period since Armita Garavand's passing. Throughout her coma, Armita remained under the strict surveillance of the Islamic Republic regime in the hospital, meticulously controlling details and news surrounding her condition and her death to suppress potential uprisings. Her family endured incarceration and threats to remain silent. The striking parallel between the tragic inception and conclusion of this paper serves as a poignant reminder: Even as the femicide machine operates in Iran, resistance perseveres.

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Reflection

The Politics of "Pombilai Orumai": The 2015 Kanan Devan Strike in Kerala, India

by Anagha S.

Abstract: Colonial hegemony was retained in the South Indian plantations of Kanan Devan Hills Plantations Limited, where the workers belonged to marginalized classes. The landless employees were given housing facilities, and this compelled them to remain there for generations despite poor wages. These uneducated and geographically secluded people found it difficult to come out of the plantation labyrinth, and the labour acts or land legislation acts were of not much help. In 2015, around 5,000 women workers called "Pombilai Orumai" led a successful strike for a wage increase. The most remarkable aspect of this was the disassociation with political parties and trade unions and the solidarity of women workers despite all odds.

Keywords: colonialism; plantations; trade unions; wages; women's strike

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Kanan Devan Hills Plantation Limited (KDHP), a tea plantation company located in the Munnar hills in the South Indian state of Kerala, was established during British rule in India. This article traces the trajectory of an unparalleled women's strike that took place at this plantation and considers its social significance.

Tea plantations in India are a product of colonialism, and the workers, most of whom belong to the Dalit castes (most marginalized groups) from the neighbouring states, constitute their working population. A major part of the labour workforce in these plantations comprises women workers who are engaged in tea picking, whereas men tend to be employed in other types of work on the estate. The middlemen who acted as recruiters of workers and supervisors on the estates are known as "Kanganies." Until India gained independence in 1947, most of these managerial positions were held by Europeans. This colonial legacy prevailed in the hills and the hegemony over the working class remained even after the formation of the state of Kerala in 1956 (Raman 2010, 164).

Figure 1: Women working in the tea plantations of Munnar. Image courtesy of R.K. Sreejith

Generally, workers were paid on a daily basis and they were eligible for an annual bonus, plus incentives. The planters provided housing facilities on the tea plantations until a worker reached retirement age (Muthiah 1993, 323). Most of the time, the landless labourers

could not purchase land within their active years of employment, and their family members would be obliged to take up the same low-paid jobs in order to retain their access to housing. The low level of education among the workers also compelled them to adhere to what could be termed "ancestral jobs" and made it impossible for them to move out of the plantation enclave. The geographical seclusion, as well as the lack of educational facilities in the hills, acted as a hindrance in the acquisition of knowledge. The plantation enclave was the labyrinth from which the working community found it difficult to escape. A tremendous change in the plantation sector was brought about by the Plantation Labour Act of 1951, and this remains the basis of all major legislation in the sector, though many of the laws are not strictly followed. Another critical aspect of the plantations was that they were unaffected by the historic Land Legislation Act of Kerala (1963) (Baak 1997, 253). They were exempted from the land-ceiling limit which restricts the amount of land owned by one person, as well as from the restrictions on monoculture.

Trade unions in the hills emerged only after India's independence, and women's participation in the unions was minimal. People from the plains had the upper hand in the male-dominated trade unions, despite the fact that Dalit migrant workers constituted the majority of workers. In these trade unions, women's involvement was limited to participation at lower levels, and none of the supervisorial or managerial posts was held by them. These unions had a considerable impact on the political economy of the plantations in the years after independence. The leaders of these labour unions acted as middlemen between the planters and the workers. Despite the presence of three major trade unions in the area, namely Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), All Indian Trade Union Congress (AITUC), and Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), respectively under the Communist Party of India (Marxist), Communist Party of India and the Indian National Congress, the disparities prevailed in the plantation sector.

In September 2015, more than five thousand women workers of the Kanan Devan tea plantations started a protest in front of the company's sales point in the town of Munnar. It was led by a group of determined women, who came to be known as "Pombilai Orumai," which means women united. The strike was spontaneous and they were demanding increases in wages and bonuses. They strongly opposed the nexus between the company and the trade unions leaders (Raj 2022, 157). This workers' strike in Munnar was instrumental in successfully bringing the company's operations to a halt. The strikers demanded a wage of Rs. 500 per day (approximately 6 US dollars), which was low in comparison with other informal workers in the state, and an increase of 20 percent for their annual bonus.

The most important aspect of this women-led strike was the distance they kept from the established trade unions associated with the political parties (Thampi 2015, 9). The efforts of the trade unions and mainstream political parties to intervene in the struggle did not succeed. It is of great significance that this happened in a state where the traditional political Left and trade unions had a firm hold over workers. Kerala's history as the first democratically elected Communist government in the world, in 1957, and its contributions to working-class struggles are notable in this context.

Figure 2: Pombilai Orumai strike. Image courtesy of Prasad Ambattu

The general notion among the workers was that the unions had close connections with the planters and were negotiating with them in many respects, rather than considering the well-being of the worker community. The Pombilai Orumai strike brought about some significant changes in the wage structure of plantations in Munnar. The strikers were successful in increasing the basic wages from Rs232 to Rs301 and won their demand for the 20 percent bonus. During the first phase of the strike, the government intervened and agreed to a meeting with the Plantation Labour Committee (PLC), including the representatives of the trade unions, the government and the company. But this attempt to negotiate failed, and the women workers started to protest again for their rights, which they successfully attained.

The most important facet of the Pombilai Orumai strike was that it showed possibilities for the working class to come out of their categorical exclusion without any organizational framework. Though the increase in wages was not significant, the strike was instrumental in bringing about a change in the plantation sector, which the traditional political parties and trade unions failed to achieve. The movement also proved that the unity of women could challenge the power structure of trade unions and come to the forefront of a strike. The protest also raised questions about the celebrated Kerala model of development and the state's high rates of social development indicators. Through this protest and strike, the state's negligence towards the Dalit marginalized migrant worker community was exposed, along with its underlying patriarchal values.

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Feminist Strike: Liberia

by Pamela Scully

Abstract: This paper examines the notion of feminist strike in reference to women peacemakers in Liberia. It argues that women's actions to bring an end to the war both instantiates normative notions of the feminist strike and expands them. Drawing on literature which points to a long history of Liberian women organizing as women with special roles and responsibilities in society, the paper invites us to adopt a broad understanding of the feminist strike. It also suggests that women's mobilization around the concept of a sex strike to force the end of war in the early 2000s, was a powerful and savvy move which criticised sexual violence in wartime, leveraged international attention, and also highlighted, if implicitly, the issue of sexual rights in marriage.

Keywords: African feminism; Liberia; resistance; sex strike; sexual violence; war

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Veronica Gago and Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar argue that we can think of the emergence of the feminist strike as a particular form of protest that transforms the notion of "riot" and creates a new type of "political technology of social struggle" (2020). I am particularly interested in what this notion of a new political technology means for societies where much of the population is illiterate and where heterogenous concepts of politics coexist. What constitutes "feminist strike" is of course time and place specific. If we are to think about this concept across borders, being open to a capacious understanding of the term becomes necessary. A broad notion of the term 'feminist strike' encompasses women acting together according to principles defined in part by local understandings of gender and gender roles, and collectively refusing to perform their usual duties in order to protest against how they are treated, as well as to make larger claims about the need for justice. This reading allows for multiple interpretations of feminism and 'feminist' and also allows that some women's agency might never be fully captured by the term feminist (Campillo 2019).

It is with these provocations in mind that I interrogate women's protests in Liberia, particularly around the end of the civil war in the early 2000s. Liberia is a state on the west coast of Africa with a complex colonial history linked to the United States.[1] Liberia officially became a country in 1847, with the capital, Monrovia, named in honour of American president James Monroe. Until 1980 descendants of people tracing their lineages back to the USA, known as Americo-Liberians, ruled the country while relegating indigenous Liberians, who still make up the vast majority of the population, to second if not third-class citizenship status. Culturally, Americo-Liberians looked to the US for inspiration including encouraging women's education to some extent. One of Liberia's most famous women, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, president and Nobel Peace Prize recipient, exemplifies the possibilities for elite women. She attended an elite school in the capital, received an MA from Harvard, and was a minister in successive administrations. But for most Liberian women, local trade and agriculture remain their predominant occupations.

The world of the Liberian elites crumbled in 1980 with the coup orchestrated by Staff Sargent Samuel Doe who was Mandingo, not Americo-Liberian. For the next twenty-three years more or less, Liberia was ravaged by brutality and instability, including two civil wars, which were still raging in the early 2000s. By 2002, about 200,000 people had died, and the war was marked by incredible brutality, including the extensive use of child soldiers and sexual torture. Liberian warlord Charles Taylor, who was president at that time, is now in prison for his part in the blood diamonds trade and crimes against humanity committed during the civil war in Sierra Leone.

Women engaged in a number of collective actions during the war, including, in 2001, through the Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET), trying to get leaders of Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone to meet in Morocco to find conditions for peace. Leaders also organized collaborations between different religious women's communities across the Christian and Muslim divide through the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) (Gbowee 2011).

In early 2003, women were at the end of their tether. Women of various faith communities came together to try to force an end to the war (Fuest 2009). A key leader was Leymah Gbowee, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 for her efforts. On April 1, 2003, women of different faiths gathered at the fish market in the capital of Monrovia to call for peace. They chose that venue as President Charles Taylor's cavalcade passed it daily. The women assembled wearing white, the sign of peace, to demand that male leaders end the war. In a society where only some 56 percent of the population was literate, wearing white, the sign of pre-war Christian traditions as well as peace, and showing solidarity through the power of female bodies sitting together, helped telegraph the importance of the movement to everyone.

As part of that protest, Gbowee led women in a sex strike in which women committed to not having sex with their partners until peace came. As Gbowee writes in her autobiography, the group broadcast this decision over the radio saying that "because men were involved in the fighting and women weren't, we were encouraging women to withhold sex as a way to persuade their partners to end the war. The message was that while the fighting continued, no one was innocent—not doing anything to stop it made you guilty" (Gbowee 2011). According to Gbowee, women in the rural areas were more organized and framed their strike in religious terms saying that "they wouldn't have sex until we saw God's face for peace." The strike lasted for some months and though Gbowee says it did not bring an end to the war, it was highly successful in focusing media attention on the war and the women's peace movement.

Later in April 2003, the women met with Taylor and argued for the need for peace. The women's movement continued to pressure Taylor as well as other warlords by disrupting air traffic by laying down on the runways and occupying the parking lot of the capitol (Moran 2012). Their pervasive presence and persistence helped lead to the peace talks in Accra, Ghana in July 2003. Again, frustrated at the slow pace of discussions, Gbowee and other women occupied the building and refused to leave until the warlords concluded negotiations. When such work did not get results, Gbowee threatened to take off her clothes. The chief mediator, the Ghanaian president, then came out to negotiate with the women, who agreed to leave as long as the peace talks actually started making progress. On August 11, the peace deal was concluded. And finally, after an interim government, and an election, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf became president of Liberia, the first elected woman president in Africa in January 2006, and served two terms (Scully 2016).

There are multiple registers in which one can interpret the women's peace movement in Liberia and the way women mobilized. Firstly, it can be read as a classic case of women's organizing work across religious and economic contexts through appeal to shared values and outrage. Secondly, the principle that women are viable organizers for peace draws validity from a notion of the special power and identity of women as mothers rather than warriors which women have used strategically for political mobilization (Van Allen 2008; Whetstone 2013). As various authors have shown, Liberian women's activism must be read within the context of gender roles in indigenous Liberian societies, many of which have strong traditions of female leadership either in secret societies, or, in some cases, as chiefs. Mary Moran argues that Liberian women's willingness to engage in forms of collective action owes something to the importance of the dual sex political system in West Africa (Moran 1989). Men and women occupy very specific places in society with attendant expectations on the roles that they perform and represent: thus, Moran argues that the peace movement instantiates the fact that Liberian women do not see men as able to represent them politically

and are eager and willing to represent women as a collective (Moran 1989).

I think another register of Liberian women's resistance affirms the kind of political theatre outlined by Gago and Gutiérrez Aguilar (2020). The nature of protests, including the sex strike and Gbowee's threat to disrobe, are also part of particular forms of women's resistance across the continent with long histories, though refashioned in new contexts, in which women show their displeasure towards men who violate norms or behave beyond the pale. This includes various forms of collective action such as "sitting on a man" (Van Allen 1972). Strikes by women have a history of being used against men as a collective—for example if men did not fulfill duties expected of men as a group, such as clearing a market, then the women would refuse to cook. Women going naked also was, and is, a way of shaming men, with it being particularly insulting if done by a post-menopausal women who are accorded status as elders (Ebila and Tripp 2020; Diabate 2022). Thus, we can understand the strike in Liberia as part of a long and wide history of activism by women as women. I argue that it can also be seen as a feminist strike in a specific sense: law in Liberia, both before the war and after, does not recognize marital rape. The Liberian senate refused to include marital rape as part of the passing of the new rape law which came into effect early in 2006. It is expected, at least legally, that if a man wants sex his wife has to agree to it. Also, while exact figures are in doubt, sexual violence was a key feature of the Liberian civil wars. Singling out sex as a bargaining tool for peace was an insightful and incisive intervention: it laid a case for women's autonomy, and it tied the intimate and personal to the political. Focusing on sex as something to be negotiated resonated in the larger Liberian cultural landscape as well as in the specificity of the war.

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The Shaheen Bagh Strike: Muslim Women and Political Protest in Contemporary India

by Moumita Biswas

Abstract: The Shaheen Bagh protest in New Delhi highlighted the changing dynamics of Muslim women's participation in socio-political movements in India. This paper argues how Muslim women proved themselves to be concerned citizens while protesting against the Citizenship Amendment Act (2019) and other forms of social discrimination. The paper analyses the Shaheen Bagh protest from an intersectional perspective to understand how Muslim women voiced their political opinions negotiating with gender and religion-based discrimination; they had to fight the multiple forms of patriarchy of Indian society while protesting against hypermasculine Hindutva politics. The Shaheen Bagh protest can be called a feminist strike of Third World women for the rights of their religious community in a particular socio-political context.

Keywords: feminist strike; intersectional feminism; multiple patriarchies; Shaheen Bagh

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What is the Shaheen Bagh protest?

The women's protest in the Shaheen Bagh of New Delhi, which began in 2019, represented the changing dynamics of women's participation in socio-political movements in India. The movement was initiated by students in New Delhi against the long-debated Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019 (CAA). The act aimed to provide citizenship to non-Muslim migrants and refugees in India, but at the same time it was seen as a tool to deprive Muslims in India of citizenship. The community members of Shaheen Bagh, a predominantly Muslim neighbourhood in New Delhi joined the protest from December 15, 2019, onwards (Salam 2020, 28).

In the Shaheen Bagh strike, women responded to different issues threatening the integrity of democratic values enshrined in the constitution. The participants of the movement were demonstrating against the discriminatory Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). This controversial bill discriminates against people for their religion, thus opposing both the right to equality and the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of religion specified in Article 15(1) of the Indian constitution. The protesters at Shaheen Bagh also opposed the institutionalised casteism of the university administration, by paying tribute to Dalit student activist, Rohith Vemula (Wire 2019). They responded to socio-economic discrimination by highlighting the alarming rates of farmer suicide and farmer agitation in response to controversial amendments in the farm laws (Krishnan 2022). Their homage to the martyrs of the Pulwama attack of 2019, in the form of artwork, conveyed that Muslim women are patriotic citizens demanding justice for the martyrs of the Indian state (Salam 2020, 37). They demanded the rights of the Muslim community, agitated against social discrimination, and dismissed the stereotypical image of anti-national Muslims.

Women took a central role in Shaheen Bagh. Their slogans included *Hum Dekhenge* (We Will See), *Hum*

Kagaaz Nahi Dikhaenge (We Will Not Show Our Documents), and *Inquilaab Zindabad* (Hail Revolution). In many ways, the movement celebrated "the idea of India" and was an assertion of overcoming the psychology of fear perpetrated by Hindutva politics (Salam 2020, 16). The women of Shaheen Bagh were fighting against the fear of being the minority in a time of majoritarian politics and patriarchy that emanates from hyper-masculine nationalism (Salam 2020, 59). In addition to Muslim women, many sympathetic people joined the protest. The national flag was hoisted on the 71st Republic Day by a group of older women, and the preamble to the constitution was read in English, Hindi, and Urdu to represent and support the pluralistic ethos of India (Salam 2020, 37). The movement showed how the majoritarian politics of Hindutva ideology threatened the integrity of the Indian nation-state, and as concerned citizens, Muslim women took responsibility to protect the inclusive values enshrined in the constitution.

The Political Voice of Muslim Women in India

The movement of Shaheen Bagh was politically motivated, but it had certain important aspects in terms of women's representation in the socio-political realm. It was one of those key moments in Indian politics when women from marginal communities came to the forefront and challenged the state's role in the marginalisation of their community. Such an assertion opposed the Indian state and challenged society's predominant view of Muslim women as backwards in terms of political representation.

Indian society is comprised of multiple patriarchies (Sangari 1995, 3287). For Muslim women, patriarchal oppression comes from religious, ethnic, and linguistic communities, and they are oppressed by the state for being Muslim and for being women. Indian society is divided on issues like caste, class, and gender, where upper-caste/class Hindu men or Brahmins dominate the society (Chakravarti 2018, 33). Lower caste and minority women are located at the bottom of the social hierarchy, and their voices are silenced in many ways. Therefore, the oppression of Muslim women must be understood from an intersectional perspective, as they are oppressed for their religious identity as well as gender identity in a society governed by the Brahmanical patriarchy. The Indian state has adopted personal laws which are based on religious practices; these laws regulate issues such as the family, inheritance, marriage, maintenance, and adoption. Personal laws are practised as a measure to preserve the pluralistic ethos in the country, but this concept of preserving heterogeneity in the form of maintaining personal laws has not been supported by all political factions (Sangari 1995, 3289). For example, the Hindutva ideology has never supported the continuation of personal laws, which began as a strategy of governance in the colonial period (Lateef 1994, 39).

The majoritarian Hindutva politics argues that a uniform civil code is needed to safeguard the interests of women from the minority community and emphasizes how majority communities have equal rights ensured by the Indian Constitution, but Muslim women are deprived of those rights. Instead, Muslim women are forced to follow regressive personal laws. Certain personal laws for the Muslim community indeed prefer the values of Sharia customs, depriving women of many rights ensured by the secular constitution, but the question of a uniform civil code remains a debatable topic because the uniform civil code tends to prefer a majoritarian voice, even at the cost of oppressing the minority (Sangari 1995, 3296). Therefore, the image of the Indian state trying to save Muslim women from debilitating community customs appears to be an opportunistic one. As a result, Muslim women must negotiate between different kinds of power structures and layers of patriarchal oppression within and outside of their community.

The majoritarian Hindutva politics controls the minority community by exercising power over the minority women. For example, in communal violence, the bodies of minority/other women become the targets of physical and sexual violence for the majoritarian community (Sangari 1995, 3294). In the Indian context, the majoritarian groups try to control the lower caste and religious minority groups by subjugating women from those communities. In these ways, the women of marginalized communities are disproportionately and systematically made vulnerable. Majoritarian politics also tend to emphasize the patriarchal control within the community to portray the community as backwards in terms of women's empowerment, but they forget to mention how the politics of vulnerability helps to maintain the status quo by marginalizing minority women.

The voices of women in the public protest of Shaheen Bagh have challenged the politics of governance through the production of vulnerability, and highlighted that Muslim women are active agents in the political domain

capable of overcoming the fear perpetrated by majoritarian politics. Their protest to ensure the rights of the Muslim community is a feminist assertion, and although the protest in Shaheen Bagh focused on the rights of one religious community, their demands emphasized the needs and experiences of women from different minority groups. They did not subscribe to the idea that women from all socio-political domains have similar problems or experiences, and therefore should seek justice against oppression following a singular political trajectory. Instead, the protest highlighted the experiences of Muslim women in India who had a particular problem in a given socio-political scenario under the rule of majoritarian Hindutva politics. Such a protest should be analysed from an intersectional perspective. Women in Shaheen Bagh negotiated with multiple patriarchies while articulating their political voice, and the protest revealed the changing dynamics between Muslim women, religious patriarchy, and the Indian state.

Why is Shaheen Bagh a Feminist Strike?

The term "feminist strike" evokes the international women's movement for eradicating inequality in personal and public spaces (Gago 2018, 662). In India, women from the upper-class and upper-caste Hindu backgrounds were able to formulate a feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s; however, women from lower castes and minority religions did not have a chance to voice their opinion or experiences in the movement led by those Savarna feminists (Rege 1998, 39). It is not enough for women from the Dalit or minority section to fight only against gender-based discrimination; Dalits and other marginal women must recognize and resist different layers of exploitation in Indian society. In this way, the movements of marginal women from the so-called Third World diverge from the second-wave feminist strikes led by white feminists and are better understood through an intersectional lens (Crenshaw 1991).

The Shaheen Bagh protest can be analyzed as a women's political movement concerning the issues of the Third World, where women from different backgrounds and age groups participated and stressed multiple concerns. A few protesters at Shaheen Bagh were homemakers, but working women from different age groups were also engaged. It was the grandmothers or *Daadis* who led the movement. The protest was not limited to Delhi but spread across different cities of India, namely Lucknow, Prayagraj, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Chennai, and Patna (Salam 2020, 130).

The Shaheen Bagh strike was aimed at a political goal, to stop the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 by bringing the concerns of Muslim women to the masses. The women were aware that the Muslim community was becoming the target of discriminatory Hindutva politics for their religious identity. The protestors of Shaheen Bagh also understood how Dalits and other marginalized communities would face discrimination in the future for the political gain. Therefore, the Shaheen Bagh event became a symbolic protest against hyper-masculine Hindutva politics to protect the rights of minorities, Dalits and other marginalized sections.

In this strike, Indian women were exposing and resisting layers of patriarchal oppression to defend the democratic ethos of the Indian nation state. Analyzing the Shaheen Bagh strike from an intersectional perspective makes it possible to understand the nuances of Indian Muslim women's protest actions in a country that subjugates them for their religious and gender identity. Shaheen Bagh is a feminist strike for the rights of Indian Muslim women who have to challenge multiple patriarchies; while doing so they re-emphasised the values written in the constitution of secular democracy. Indian Muslim women's attempts to protect and reinforce the rights of their religious community under majoritarian politics is a political struggle as well as a feminist strike of contemporary times.

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Reflection

From Italy with Rage: Feminists Striking in Uncertain Times

by Lidia Salvatori

Abstract: In this contribution, I reflect on the significance of the Paro Internacional de Mujeres (International Women's Strike) for contemporary Italian feminism. I draw from autoethnographic research within the feminist movement Non Una di Meno (Not One Less) to explore how the organization of the strike on March 8, 2017, contributed to the development of the movement's theorization and mobilization strategies. In this piece, I illustrate how digital connectivity had a central role in facilitating the expression of solidarity and processes of exchange and 'contamination' (Salvatori 2021) between movements across borders. I describe how the sharing of materials, slogans, hashtags, and songs centred on similar claims contributed to the construction of a transnational political subject. Through the strike, feminists analyzed and denounced how economic and patriarchal violence play out in the context of Italy, while highlighting the systemic and non-exceptional character of these forces within neoliberal societies more broadly.

Keywords: economic violence; feminism; social movements; strike; transnationalism

Author: Lidia Salvatori holds a PhD in Media, Communication, and Sociology from the University of Leicester. Her published research focuses on contemporary transnational feminist activism and explores how digital technologies are being used to produce new narratives on gender, challenge sexism, rape culture, and harassment while also mediating new forms of abuse and violence. Currently, as a policy and communication lead in a health non-profit, she is interested in researching the intersections between gender, digital, and health (in)equities.

Introduction

On November 26, 2016, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, approximately two hundred thousand people gathered in Rome, marching to the cry of "Non Una di Meno" (Not One Less). The demonstration was held in response to a femicide in Rome, where a young woman named Sara di Pietrantonio was burned to death by her ex-partner. Feminists marched to link this murder to the broader and more structural problem of femicide in Italy and to rise up in opposition to violence against women and gender-based violence in all its manifestations. A new mobilization was rising, strengthened by the legacy of feminist and queer movements in Italy and by transnational influences, such as the emergence of Ni Una Menos in Argentina, the Polish Women's Strikes, and pro-choice protests in Ireland.

Following the demonstration, an assembly took place, gathering feminists from different regions who were reconnecting or creating new friendships, bringing to the table a variety of themes which then found their place in the *Feminist Plan to Combat Male Violence against Women and Gender-Based Violence* (NUDM 2017). The plan resulted from a process of collaborative writing over the course of a year. This process was generative and transformative in itself since, through the regular participation in local and national deliberative assemblies and the continued engagement in mailing lists, social media discussions and chat groups, feminists developed a common language while cultivating affectionate relationships.

Shortly after its emergence, Non Una Di Meno (NUDM) responded to the call for a transnational day of strike on March 8, 2017, launched by Argentinian

feminists inspired by the Polish Women's Strike. Gradually, activists in more than 50 countries, connecting digitally through the Facebook group Paro Internacional de Mujeres/International Women Strike (IWS), adhered to the call, organizing different actions depending on the affordances and limitations of their context.

"Solidarity is our weapon": A Radical Refusal of Patriarchal and Economic Violence

Participation in the IWS since 2017 was central to the Italian movement's theorization and mobilization strategies. The IWS added a feminist lens to the strike, a traditionally workerist instrument of class-based struggle. By appropriating the strike as a tool of feminist struggles, the IWS highlighted the interconnection between patriarchal violence and economic violence, manifesting differently depending on the locality (such as the Italian socio-political context), yet having a transnational dimension. Starting from everyday experiences and material conditions of oppression and marginalization, a feminist strike brings into question the neoliberal division of labour, based on the devaluation of care and reproductive work carried out mostly by women (Federici 2018), particularly migrant women, women of colour (Emejulu 2018) and *dissident identities* (Mason-Deese 2020). It is simultaneously a process of abstention from productive work and consumption, a rejection of traditional gender roles, sexual hierarchies, and a refusal of reproductive work (Arruzza et al. 2019; Cavallero and Gago 2020, Salvatori 2021).

The transformative impact of the organization of the IWS, can be better understood through the concept of *eventful protest*: "Especially during cycles of protest, some contingent events tend to affect the given structures by fuelling mechanisms of social change: organizational networks develop; frames are bridged; personal links foster reciprocal trust" (Della Porta 2011, 135). Actions or campaigns which have a high degree of *eventfulness* are ones through which new tactics emerge, where there is a creation of feelings of solidarity and the strengthening of networks.

The IWS was highly *eventful* as it facilitated the development or strengthening of interactions and the expression of solidarity. It contributed to processes of contamination, an expression used by activists within NUDM to define how practices are borrowed across borders and how the sharing of materials, slogans, hashtags, and songs help create common ideas and a new transnational political subject without a hierarchical structure (Monforte 2014; Rudan 2018). Digital connectivity had an important role in facilitating these processes of exchange, highlighting the similarities of experience of gender-based and economic violence across different geographical contexts, and the transnational extent of the neoconservative backlash. Meeting in person and occupying spaces together through assemblies and demonstrations however, remains central also as a way to reach out to parts of the population who might be digitally excluded or less confident with digital tools (Sabbadini 2015), such as older or migrant women.

"Solidarity is our weapon" was the slogan of the first IWS and the movement began to configure feminism as a sweeping force, the only mobilization capable of building a radical alternative to the neoliberal system, as the "spearhead of an international insurgency" (Furtado et al. 2020). This was conveyed for example through the circulation of metaphors. Italian feminists used the metaphor of an unstoppable feminist tide, capable of invading every street and square and exceeding every border. Initially used by the 15M mobilizations in Spain, the metaphor of the tide was adapted through a feminist lens by Italian feminists and then adopted by Ni Una Menos. As Cecilia Palmeiro (2020) explains, "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." In this process, content is borrowed and circulated through practices of political translation (Doerr 2018; Palmeiro 2020). The tactics and images used by NUDM during strikes and demonstrations are influenced by a range of collective practices and shared imaginaries, including direct action, artivism, and petition sharing. They also draw inspiration from those developed by Ni Una Menos.

An example is the use of the *pañuelo*: while Argentinian feminists carry a green square handkerchief as a symbol of their struggle for free, safe, and legal abortion, forming a green tide during their mass demonstrations (Palmeiro 2018), Italian feminists carry a dark pink pañuelo (the colour adopted by NUDM). The staging of a dramatic performance of the song by the Chilean feminist collective Las Tesis, "The rapist in your path," by feminists around the world is another significant example of

the circulation of content between movements. In 2020, with the pandemic signalling the critical role of reproductive and care work, the title of the song was changed by Italian feminists into "The exploiter is you" and used to launch a safely distanced flashmob on March 8.

Conclusion

I have argued here that the process of collective deliberation and writing that lead to the elaboration of the Feminist plan and the participation in the IWS since 2017, were fundamental steps in the development of NUDM's theorization, mobilization strategies and in the formation of a transnational political subject. The strike served to highlight how economic and patriarchal violence coexist and reinforce each other, and to expose how multilayered interconnected issues play out at the transnational level and in the Italian context. In particular the IWS brought to the surface a deep critique of the neoliberal system which heavily relies on care and reproductive work carried out mostly by women and particularly migrant women and women of colour (Emejulu 2018). On this point, activists in this movement acknowledge the need to reach out to the migrant population, often employed in precarious conditions as domestic, care, factory or sex workers, or working as pickers in the fields (Prandi 2018). With this intent, the IWS communiqué was translated in different languages and feminists engaged in direct actions and supported women organizing protests and strikes in factories. While NUDM strives to build an intersectional movement where the voices of migrant women, women of colour, trans and non-binary individuals are heard, it struggles to achieve this objective consistently. It diffuses, however, an important problematization of the 'whiteness' of Italian feminism and started a long overdue discussion on the legacy of Italian colonialism (Salvatori 2021).

If the IWS exemplifies the transnational reach and potential impact of grassroots feminist activism and feminists' ability to utilize digital connectivity strategically, this form of mobilization presents great challenges. In Italy, feminists had to navigate a hostile and complex political landscape marked by political polarization and resistance from conservative and anti-feminist groups who sought to undermine their goals and disrupt their activities. Particularly in its first years, the strike encountered criticism and lack of support from most trade unions, a nearly complete lack of media coverage and resistance from other feminist groups who considered it a disruptive and counter-productive action.

In recent years, while the pandemic interrupted the organization of the strike, it also revealed the relevance of its message. The effects of late neoliberalism and of the shortsighted policies on healthcare and social services came to the surface with catastrophic consequences. The critical role of care and reproductive work became evident to many, as well as the vulnerability of women and LGBTQ+ people who were exposed to domestic violence, overwork, online abuse, or further marginalization during lockdowns.

In a world of continuous crises, systemic failures and unsustainable inequities, an intersectional analysis such as the one articulated by this transnational mobilization needs close attention. As we observe the diffusion of protest movements worldwide (Della Porta, 2017), as well as heated backlashes and repression, it is crucial for feminists to resist polarization, divisions and political instrumentalization.

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Interview

"Derailing the status quo": A Conversation with Marwa Arsanios about *Who's Afraid of Ideology?*

by Judith Naeff and Marwa Arsanios

Keywords: Colombia; ecology; feminism; Lebanon; Kurdistan; Marwa Arsanios; Rojava

Authors: Judith Naeff is Assistant Professor of Cultures of the Middle East at Leiden University, the Netherlands. Her research focuses on contemporary visual culture and literature of the Arab World. This interview is part of her research project *Remembering Dissent and Disillusion in the Arab World*, funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO projectnumber VI.VENI.191C.002).

Marwa Arsanios is an artist, filmmaker and researcher whose practice tackles structural and infrastructural questions using different devices, forms and strategies. From architectural spaces, their transformation and adaptability throughout conflict, to artist-run spaces and temporary conventions between feminist communes and cooperatives, the practice tends to make space within and parallel to existing art structures allowing experimentation with different kinds of politics. Film becomes another form and a space for connecting struggles in the way images refer to each other. In the past four years Arsanios has looked at questions of property, law, economy, and ecology from specific plots of land from a new materialist and a historical materialist perspective with different feminist movements that are struggling for their land. Arsanios was a researcher in the Fine Art Department at the Jan Van Eyck Academie, Maastricht (2010–12). She is currently a PhD candidate at the Akademie der bildenden Künste in Vienna. For information on some of her exhibitions and film screenings see https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-members-artists/marwa-arsanios/

Marwa Arsanios is an artist, filmmaker, and researcher from Beirut, Lebanon. Her work has explored the entanglements of modernity, the promise of liberation, and gender relations in the twentieth century, and has been shown at the Berlin (2020), Warsaw (2019) and Sharjah Biennales (2019), among many other venues. Her quadrilogy, *Who's Afraid of Ideology?* consists of four short experimental documentaries on radical feminist ecological resistance as practised by different autonomous women's movements in conflict zones, focusing alternately on Syrian Kurdistan, Turkish Kurdistan, Colombia, and Lebanon.

Judith Naeff: Can you tell us how you came to this project?

Marwa Arsanios: The project started with an encounter in 2015, when I was still living in Beirut and co-running the 98Weeks research project.[1] At the time, there was a so-called trash crisis in Lebanon. As a result of large-scale corruption, the garbage management system collapsed, and trash was piling up all over the city. I had been part of a coalition of feminist organizations, and with other members here in the city, this crisis brought us back to ecological feminist texts. At the same time, the situation in Syria had turned into a civil war, which had a lot of repercussions here too. But in the north of Syria, there was an experiment of the Kurdish autonomous women's movement in the self-governed region of Rojava.

Figure 1: Reading group at 98Weeks. Image courtesy of Marwa Arsanios.

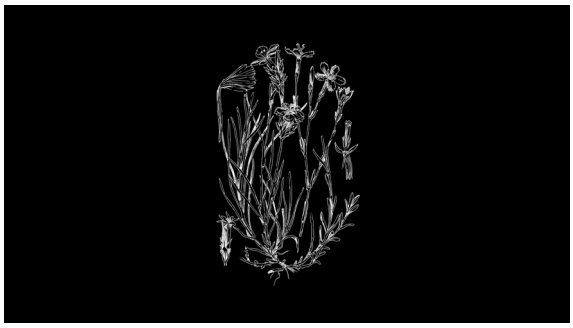

Figure 2: Still from *Who is Afraid of Ideology?* Part I (Marwa Arsanios, 2017)

It was in this context that I decided to invite, through 98Weeks, two members of this movement to explain to us what was happening there, but also to do a reading group around a text by a guerilla fighter.[2] Her name is Pelşîn Tolhidan, an ideologue of the autonomous women's movement. She was writing on the question of ecology and feminism, but also addressed the contradiction she faced as a guerilla fighter—the contradiction of being in a situation of war while also thinking about ecology. The two members who were invited, Dilara and Meral, translated her writings, and we had a reading group around it. This was the starting point of continuing discussion, with the two guests, but also with other members we met here in Beirut.

Eventually, I was invited to go and meet Pelşîn in the mountains. I went with a friend, and we had discussions with them. We really received an education about the work of the movement and what they were doing, their ecological practice of being in relation to the landscape while they were also living in a context of war. There was a mutual desire to communicate all of that by creating a film. *Who's Afraid of Ideology*, Part I would take on and communicate that struggle, the particularity of the landscape and the ecological practices that were put in place.

This was the instigation for the whole process. I find Pelşîn's text extremely inspirational. It became a key text in regard to the question of radical ecology, and how one can think ecology beyond environmentalism. Coming out of a question of economy, as the practice of the household, and into the question of ecology, as the practice of living and inhabiting the land. In that sense, the whole series asks this question: how do we inhabit the land and what kind of relationship do we create with this land? It responds to a shallow idea of environmentalism that posits nature as the other and presupposes a divide between nature and the self. The film approaches this question by entering into conversation with people who are already doing this work of changing our relationship to the land and sees these practices as part of a wider political struggle. It is not aimed at a quick fix, but a practice of being that challenges the imposed divide between nature and humans.

Who's Afraid of Ideology? traces different strategies of deprivatizing and communalizing the land. The organizational strategies are often pragmatic, but they are not removed from the philosophical and ideological drive. The title, then, is meant as a provocation of a more liberal feminism and liberal environmentalism that are part of the post-1989 hegemony of a supposedly post-ideological new world. These are moralist and ahistorical approaches: a feminism that fails to address colonial and neocolonial relations, and an environmentalism that fails to tackle the neocolonial extractivist political economy behind ecological disruption.[3]

JN: The four videos are experimental documentaries. Can you clarify some of the formal choices you made regarding your role as a mediator, filming the landscape?

MA: The question of seeing and mediating the landscape is articulated more explicitly in part IV. It takes the camera as a necessary tool to rethink the landscape. The camera has been an important tool for our extractive relation to land and it was vital to colonialist land grabbing. I believe that we can only rethink our relation to the land and challenge ideas of ownership through the camera again. But in the other parts too, the driving question is: how do we film the land and the people inhabiting the land? It is a very difficult question. In parts I, II and III, I am embedding myself in different struggles which I am not part of in the everyday. So, I really needed to think carefully about my own role as the artist with a camera in relation to the land and the community. I was asked, but also consciously chose to put myself in this uneasy position as an outsider. This role is questioned when you can see the tripod or the microphone in the image. In the opening of part I, you see me speaking, but you hear me reading something else. So, there is confusion about whose voice is speaking. I wanted to emphasize that whatever I say, I am reading other people's words. The opening lines are from Karen Barad, and then I read from a transcript from the interview with Pelşîn. So, my role is almost like a container that is mediating the struggles, but it is not myself speaking.

JN: The topic of this publication is the politics and poetics of strike. I would like to invite you to reflect on these practices through the concept of strike.

MA: The different communities I have met, whether in Colombia, Kurdistan, or Rojava, I guess their practice is more a form of derailing than striking. It is a reappropriation of work which resists a specific understanding of what work should be, its relation to the state, and its relation to the land. It is a more affirmative gesture: derailing to create something new. By creating a different kind of agriculture and a different form of living together, you are refusing the existing social relations and resisting state institutions.

Figure 3: Still from *Who is Afraid of Ideology?* Part IV Reverse shot (Marwa Arsanios, 2022)

This is a different mode of critique than syndicalist strikes, because it is not only in the negative but also proposing a different practice. In that sense I think there is something quite anarchist about it, the idea of direct action. If you want to think about it as a strike: it is in fact saying, "No, we will not work the land as state employees on a daily wage," but because of the political situation in Syria, it is also saying, "We will actually take over the land and reorganize our relation to it and to each other." A strike, if you will, but not coming from the Western tradition of critiquing the institution. This is not to fetishize it. I am not saying that this is the solution, because then the responsibility would fall on society instead of the responsible people. But in these particular conditions of conflict zones, you really need to take such direct action in order to resist the state's hegemony.

JN: Part of this volume thinks through feminist strikes as a challenge to the gendered division between unpaid domestic labour and wage labour. I was wondering to what extent initiatives you study in your video also derail this gendered division of labour.

MA: In fact, the division between productive and reproductive labour is disrupted in these cases, because the garden, or the orchard, or the land, is an extension of the house. What they are fighting is industrial agriculture and monoculture, which is a capitalist, productive economy. The women themselves are taking care of the land, while also taking care of the household and the children. And they teach and educate, and they are fighting too. So, this division does not exist. When you are saving the seeds, you are nurturing, but you are also threatening seed corporations that seek seed patents to turn it into property which can be sold back to the farmers. This is the resistance.

Endnotes

1. 98weeks ran between 2007 and 2017. A short profile about the project can be found here: https://www.media-matic.net/en/page/306367/98-weeks

2. Tolhildan's text "Ecological Catastrophe" can be found here: https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/pel-in-tol-hildan-ecological-catastrophe

3. Marwa Arsanios has elaborated on these issues in the article "Who's Afraid of Ideology? Ecofeminist Practices Between Internationalism and Globalism." *e-flux Journal* 93 (September 2018). https://www.e-flux.com/journal/93/215118/who-s-afraid-of-ideology-ecofeminist-practices-between-internationalism-and-globalism/

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"It Felt Like a Strike Was in the Air at the Beginning of the Invasion." A Conversation with Sasha Talaver (Feminist Antiwar Resistance)

by Ksenia Robbe and Sasha Talaver

Keywords: Feminist Antiwar Resistance; International Women's Day; Labour Day; labour rights; mothers against war; reproductive labour; Russia's war against Ukraine

Authors: Ksenia Robbe's research engages with postcolonial and postsocialist transitions and develops critical perspectives on these processes through the studies of memory, time, and feminist practices in East European and Southern African literature, film and visual art. She is a Senior lecturer at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands.

Alexandra (Sasha) Talaver is a PhD candidate in Gender Studies at the Central European University, Vienna. She explores the opportunities, limitations, and tactics of women members of the Soviet Women's Committee in advocating for reproductive justice. She is co-editor of the book *Feminist Samizdat: 40 Years After* (Moscow: Commonplace, 2020). Aside from her academic work, Sasha is involved in feminist activism and is one of the coordinators of the Feminist Anti-War Resistance, which was founded in Russia on the day after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

This conversation with Sasha Talaver, one of the organizers of Feminist Antiwar Resistance (FAR) took place in August 2023. FAR is a movement founded by Russian feminists on February 25, 2022, the day after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and it has since been at the forefront of antiwar activism. In late 2022, FAR was included in the list of foreign agents in Russia. In 2023, the movement was awarded the Aachen Peace Prize.

At the beginning of the interview, Sasha confessed that after a year and a half of daily activist work, she as well as many of her colleagues feel burnt out and exhausted. She warned me that she might sound quite pessimistic and disappointed. Given this, I was especially grateful that she shared her reflections on the idea and tactic of strikes in feminist movements in Russia, and as we spoke I learned that she connects the future of antiwar and feminist activism with practices of strike action.

Ksenia Robbe: Employing strike as a conceptual metaphor or a way of organizing has been one of the FAR's tactics since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. For instance, on May 1, 2022, Labour Day, the movement organized an action called "Antiwar May 1: Feed pigeons, not war." Participants were called to come to places in the city that have the word "peace" in their names and to feed pigeons. The idea was to withdraw from the war economy to which they contribute through productive or reproductive labour, and that they gather and meet like-minded people. But before talking about this and similar actions, I wanted to ask if this was the first time that the concept of strike was invoked as part of feminist events in Russia, for instance those that took place on March 8th or May 1st.

Sasha Talaver: As far as I know, feminist strike was invoked before, on March 8. It was undertaken by particular leftist initiatives—rather small groups. This is as much as I know about that. I might have missed something, and I have not undertaken research on this topic.

The Socialist Feminist Alternative organized a strike on International Women's Day in 2020, and later. It was definitely inspired by the international women's strikes that took place in 2016 and 2017, but of course the scope of the strike was pretty small. Also, in Russia, a feminist strike has additional obstacles which are connected to the fact that March 8 is a day-off, which makes it difficult to make your absence visible at a workplace. So the Socialist Feminist Alternative organized a strike, I think, on March 5 and March 6, and that was a feminist strike. This and later strikes around March 8 were probably mostly student strikes. I remember that I was teaching Foundations of Gender Studies back then at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow. The course took place on Saturdays, and it was held online, and there was a strike on March 6. It took place only during particular hours and mostly at universities such as the HSE and Moscow State University. Some of my students asked me whether I would support the strike. "Of course," I said, "but let's reschedule our class because it's also kind of weird to miss a gender-studies class in Russia because you are doing a feminist strike." I think a similar strike took place in 2021, but I don't think it had any substantial message, at any rate, I cannot remember it now. So, that is my experience of feminist strikes in Russia. Earlier, I had personal encounters with feminist strikes at, for example, the Central European University in Budapest on March 8. There, it was not a day off, so there was a real strike. There was also an opportunity for gathering in spaces outside the classrooms. That was in 2018.

Figure 1: A poster for the FAR action, *Antiwar May 1: Feed pigeons, not war,* organized in 2022.

KR: And what about using strike as a metaphor? I'm thinking about the instances of framing feminist activism in terms of work—of refusal to work as a type of protest.

ST: I think that we all have some problems with metaphorical meanings of "strike" because it risks devaluing the strike as an actual political tool. If we call any type of public protest a strike without implying that it has to include the refusal to work, I think this can really turn a strike into another fancy pop-feminist word that would lose its political potential completely. But at the same time, to be honest, the strike that the FAR organized on May 1, that called on people to refuse work that reproduces a society which reproduces the war, was also metaphorical in a sense. We did not pay enough attention to organizing local communities that would go on strike, yet it was really quite successful, that people met each other and that they found new comrades. At the same time, when I think it over, it had nearly nothing to do with a real strike. For me it was still important that it was so explicitly connected to labour. And we did our best, moreover, to contextualize it within a history of both feminist and labour movements, not to lose this focus that it is our labour, productive and reproductive, that allows this society to operate. We actively used the book *A Dangerous Unselfishness: Learning from Strike Actions* [Sheill 2019]. We translated some cases from this book which were relevant. The idea was to really set a foundation for thinking seriously about strikes. After this first experience we thought that it was worth working more with this format and topic, and to develop them further. But then, as often happens in activism, we ran out of energy, capacity, and time, and lots of other things happened along the way.

KR: Thank you for elaborating on this dilemma between the physical and metaphorical in feminist strikes. It's one of the questions we've been continually thinking about when preparing this special issue. Now, I'd like to talk about the labour rights support which FAR was providing to workers, especially to those workers who were expressing antiwar opinions, or who refused to participate in the war in one way or another. For this purpose, you started the Antifund that provides legal and psychological support and that also collaborates with the projects Antijob and Antiwar Sick Leave, which have similar agendas. How important has this type of work been for FAR?

ST: Actually, I think Antifund is in the process of restructuring and rethinking itself. If I remember correctly, it is currently on hold. It is a project that brought together FAR, Antijob, and Antiwar Sick Leave. It unites three different initiatives that are concerned with labour rights, women's rights, and the antiwar process. The idea was for it to provide legal help and support to people who were fired for their antiwar stance. The idea was also to accumulate data about strikes, to circulate different types of useful manuals, to establish connections with local activists or workers' groups, and so on. However, I think that the most important part of it was the legal advice. The number of applications for consultation was quite high at some point. It worked as a kind of trade union for people without trade unions or without trade-union experience.

KR: I know that this seems to be a time of exhaustion, but it's also important to reflect on what has been done and could be done in the future. If we can return to the beginning of the war, I remember, at that point many professional associations issued antiwar statements—teachers, students, doctors, etc. How important, in your opinion, are such professional communities, especially those of them that involve care work, in terms of generating resistance to patriarchal (bio)politics? Can attempts at organizing mothers' resistance against the war—if you consider that a possibility at all—use the methods or rhetoric of strike?

Figure 2: A photo from the action *Antiwar May 1: Feed pigeons, not war,* with the word МИР (which translates from Russian as both 'peace' and 'world') formed using grains.

ST: That's a great question. As for professional communities, I think that they play one of the most important roles for antiwar mobilization. We speak about different types of professional communities who have the opportunity to create small, invisible antiwar networks through the workplace. And as far as I know, they still exist, maybe not *en masse*, but definitely there are different groups connected with each other. Of course, my knowledge mostly concerns universities. That's definitely where it's happening. I can also see it, as anecdotal evidence, in schools. For example, many people sent us official letters by state authorities addressed to their company concerning the war. Sharing such letters plays an important role. It doesn't mean, of course, that they are organized at their workplace, but, nevertheless, they use their workplace, and access to the information that their workplace provides, for antiwar resistance. Of course, at the beginning, when all these letters appeared, that's what also inspired our strike. It felt like a strike was in the air at the beginning of the invasion. Everyone was talking about different types of strikes. Antiwar Sick Leave developed this idea of antiwar sick leave which people can take to go on a kind of invisible and safe strike. There were Students Against War who also called for a strike. There are numerous leftist organizations who also tried to organize and participate in strikes. I think many hoped that it would end soon. I was also one of those who was absolutely charmed by the idea of a strike. And I also believed in it.

I was familiar with research by Stephen Crowley [2021] who argues that labour protest is the only protest which has ever been able to achieve any results in Russia; it's the only type of protest that is taken seriously. Basically, the subject of labour is the only political subject in Russia. Crowley compared the state's reaction to labour protest and to political protest and showed that if the former grows large, then the president, or at least the mayor of the city, will go and talk to these people and try to do something for them. Whereas political protest is always framed as being organized by enemies of the state. Crowley says that if protest has a future in Russia, then it is definitely protest that is organized around labour because this is respected. But often such protests do not get politicized. In contemporary Russia, they do not get further than a salary raise, or a change to the working conditions. And that's why I was really impressed by all these letters from professional communities because it was incredible how people were able to self-organize immediately to react to this war. I think in the end it turned into some meaningful collaborations for certain

professions that have the potential for collaboration: for example, Animation Artists against the War are making cartoons against the war. However, most of these letters were just dismissed.

KR: That's very interesting. And what about the mothers?

ST: Yes, we tried to work with them as well, a lot, also through the idea of reproductive labour rights. And the fact that mothers know the price of a person's life and that's why they are the ones who are the most sensitive to the changing circumstances of life, but also to the situation when this life is taken away, because they know how much it costs, in a sense. So, we try to also promote this narrative about reproductive labour, which I would say is also a kind of trap. It's not easy to promote simultaneously two things: a pretty radical reconsideration of your life in terms of care as labour *and* the idea of a strike… But it was important that these groups of mothers often appeared by themselves. As I said, FAR organized a support group for mothers and other relatives of those who were mobilized. FAR also organized our own group of mothers within the movement, those activists who have motherhood experience. We invited them to write a petition—"Mothers Against the War"—that we launched, which actually garnered about 110,000 signatures—people clearly stating that they are against the war. That was quite impressive. And that was already in late 2022 when there was no illusion regarding the level of repression against those who stood against the war.

KR: That was quite powerful.

ST: Yes, it was. And then also some of our activists decided to participate because many mothers' groups opened online chat groups. They participated in these groups, and they would share some useful links, but they would also specifically support those women who said something against the war as such, because, certainly, not all the women in these groups were against the war, and sometimes even those who articulated antiwar positions were bullied by their chat-mates. So, our activists would support these women. As you know perfectly well, in Russia there is a long tradition of mothers' or wives' protests. But these protests have always been framed in a sentimental way: it's about women's hearts and their caring natures. A woman has a special place, a special heart, but it has never been framed in the context of labour. I would say that's for a reason, because it's really difficult to see these revolutionary ideas. And I think that in this petition one can see how our language changed dramatically from the one that we used for May 1, where we had a clear focus on reproductive labour strikes. We see a potential in this type of mobilization. Probably we interpret it in our own way, while women who participate in this mobilization interpret it in another way, and they should go ahead with their own interpretation. The goal is, of course, not to educate them but actually to create a platform for them to organize and grieve.

KR: Under the current conditions in Russia, a feminist strike is, of course, impossible. And it's very difficult to think about the future now. But I'd still like to ask: how do you see the future of strike as method? Does it have a future?

ST: I still think that a strike is probably our main hope, to be honest. And I think that even though our experience was not that successful, it was good for the beginning, and it was also educational in any case. Also, throughout these years we accumulated a good number of different materials and manuals and ideas on how strikes can be organized. Now the task for all of us is to get over our burnout and to maybe develop new visions of working with these different communities, mainly supporting them. It's also important that we don't co-opt their agenda but rather, establish contact and trust, which can also perhaps strengthen some of the movements and protests that are already happening. There is an independent centre called Monitoring Labour Protest, and they regularly count the number of labour protests in Russia. According to their data, in 2022, 358 labour protests were registered, which means more than one protest a day. Seventy-two of these labour protests involved a complete or partial work stoppage. And most often these were strikes.

KR: That's impressive.

ST: Yes, this surprises everyone when they learn it. And then there is an amazing Telegram channel called Zabast.com (Забастком), which, again, one rarely knows about and which accumulates all the info. And it's also barely visible on social media. Of course, this type of perspective normally comes from underground leftist movements in Russia. I think that's why it's also not that popular yet. Also, not everyone in feminist antiwar resistance identifies themselves as left feminists or social or Marxist feminists. There are people with different political perspectives, so I don't represent some consensus po-

sition. But I personally believe we should invest more effort in working with this type of strike and thinking about a care strike or reproductive strike. However, this is not facile because care is moralized, and Russian hospitality, openness, and mutual support are seen as part of the national identity, so it's a challenging task to reclaim it as labour. Now I came up with an idea. I decided to ask this question in public as often as I can: why are all pregnant women not paid the same while they are doing the same job—being pregnant and giving birth? So maybe through these types of questions, there is a chance to raise the issues of reproductive labour in Russia, at least within the feminist community because, unlike, for example, the US, Argentinian, or Polish feminists, many Russian feminists have been very focused on domestic violence and much less on issues of reproduction. Of course, *Feminism for the 99%* [Arruzza, Bhattacharya and Fraser 2019] was translated, but this type of feminism was not that present in Russian academic and activist circles. However, for many years Anna Temkina and Elena Zdravomyslova have been running a research project on motherhood and birth culture in Russia which can inform feminist struggles in the sphere of reproduction too. Yet, to combine such a feminist perspective with antiwar activism and social mobilization under an authoritarian state seems to be a really hard job. But I believe it's needed.

KR: Thanks so much for this conversation.

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