



Editors' Introduction

Women in Movement & Feminisms: Critical Materialisms & Environmentalisms

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As an example of a global model of devastating accumulation, the Americas present extreme situations that challenge a variety of feminisms flourishing there to rethink the very feasibility of nature, matter and life itself. Governments throughout the region on the left and right have opted for an extractive development model based on the over-exploitation of communities and the environment (Arsel, 2013; Marston, 2020; Schilling-Vacaflor, 2017). Processes of migration (or expulsion) linked to poverty and violence have been exacerbated by the effects of climate change and environmental destruction. Furthermore, the limited efforts towards democratization and consolidation of redistributive policies is aggravated by the growing expansion of religious fundamentalisms with an anti-gender agenda, representing an extreme form of cultural expression in line with a hegemonic neoliberal development model (Biroli, 2020). In light of this onslaught on life itself, whose effects reverberate unequally and harm the most vulnerable populations, both established and emerging anti-capitalist feminist struggles are striking out in new directions to rethink core elements of emancipatory politics in the region under the current configurations of global entangled inequalities (Jelin et al., 2017).

In this context, critical materialisms are garnering growing interest to understand feminist struggles in the region and to link body politics to diverse forms of labour and its exploitation at various scales such as communities, subaltern territorialities and various ecologies. Secondly, feminist struggles appear to be increasingly intertwined with ecological ones. Third, and related to this, feminist movements also appear to be engaging in mutually beneficial

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cross-movement alliances with activists who are not primarily focused on feminism (Conway, 2017). Feminists are expanding their core agenda in directions such as environmentalism and food sovereignty, while also trying to sensitize other movements to feminist issues (Conway, 2018; Masson et al., 2017). Finally, Latin American-situated knowledges, practices and mobilizations have revealed the diversity of feminisms in the region, rendering visible the intersections not only of race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexual orientation but also of categories of difference that inform important intersections such as nationality and spatialities – e.g., the diverse forms of rurality – that remain under-conceptualized (Motta & Teixeira, 2021). These power relationships are best understood by combining discourses and material practices, inquiring into the role that these play in both the domination of bodies and nature, but also in their strategies of resistance to capitalism, patriarchy and environmental destruction in the rural context and beyond.

In this special issue, we engage in a discussion on how renewed critical materialism can contribute to feminist knowledge and struggles through an interdisciplinary dialogue and by recounting experiences of resistance in Latin America. Situated in the specific, concrete struggles at this moment of abysmal crisis, what can critical feminist materialism offer? What are the new dimensions of politics, agency and difference? Are there openings, nuances or opportunities for novel thinking, acting and resisting in rural spaces?

Along with the environmental crisis, violence has shaken the Americas, which the contributions in this issue seek to address within the new materialisms research agenda. Therein, the political role of the body amidst extreme violence becomes an object of debate and analysis. As Souza (2019) argues, the body speaks to the political. Violated bodies speak volumes about the violence against women – even and especially if they end up lifeless – despite the patriarchal (non-)response from authorities and institutions, covering for the culprits. In an act of reverberation, ever more bodies are moving through protests and collectives to strategize and fight against patriarchal violence (Gago, 2020; Segato, 2014). While the internet has served to empower women's organization, it also represents a further space where gender violence has made its presence *felt* (Suárez, 2021). The female body is at the center of such politics.

Material bodies are thus at issue here, and new materialisms represent a pluralistic research agenda for analyzing the multiple relations between and with matter (Barad, 2007; Coole & Frost, 2010). Bodies are a crossroads: simultaneously the very sites of oppression and the vessel for renewed agency (Baer, 2016; Souza, 2019) that goes beyond the sole act of resisting to encompass a variety of ways of participating in the political arena.

Science and technology studies (Barad, 2003; Haraway, 1991; Suchman & Weber, 2016) constitute another fruitful area of new materialisms that disputes the discourses of neutrality and objectivity of techno-scientific knowledge. In their contributions to this field, authors such as Haraway (1991) and Barad (2003) encourage us to look beyond binaries in discourse, matter, bodies and

machines to explore forms of transgression. The emblematic figure for the embodiment of technologies is Haraway's (2016) cyborg, which unveils the scientific-technological, military, patriarchal, racial, colonial matrix of technology, as well as the role of women in what the author calls the integrated circuit of networks of infrastructures and technologies. By drawing connections between the physical and non-physical, and at the same time between the divisions of humans, organisms and machines, the cyborg transgresses dualities to embrace mutability and the dynamic nature of aforementioned "divisions" (Haraway, 1991; Lynes, 2015). For her part, Barad's (2003) proposal of posthuman performativity emphasizes that not only discourses are performative, but matter is as well. Barad's work allows one to grasp the materiality beyond the focus on discourses.

Debates on critical and new materialisms appear against this background as a helpful tool to analyze, understand and decry the injustices suffered by women. The articles submitted and selected for this issue incorporate the multiple relations of rule (Mohanty, 2003; Smith, 1987): capitalist exploitation over labour and land, patriarchal power over bodies, destructive relations to environments, and power and violence through technology, among others. The articles that make up this special issue pay renewed attention to the materialist approach that understands capitalism as not simply an economic system but a civilizational project with powerful social, gendered, colonial and ecological dimensions (see in this issue, Calcagni; Kunin; Fontana & Miramonti; Mitrović; and Suárez Estrada). To do so, each article engages in a dialogue between critical materialism and the feminist analytics of intersectionality (see Dunbar Winsor & Sheppard, this issue). This feminist contribution to discuss the multiple dimensions of inequalities originally called attention to the specific situation of Black women within feminist and antiracist struggles in the United States (Crenshaw, 1991) and is now deployed to critically consider how inequalities are entangled – and thus what other dimensions should be also taken into account in new feminist materialism.

Furthermore, the articles incorporate the contribution of feminist epistemologies, including the commitment to recognize knowledge production as situated knowledge (Haraway, 1991) that broadens the conception of materialism itself (see Calcagni's contribution in this issue). The categories "woman" or "feminism" should not be understood as an essentializing or universalizing unity, nor as merely ontological (see Sempertegui's contribution in this issue). Rather, the situatedness in question is to be traced back to her social and spatial location. The materiality of different experiences has direct consequences on theorizations and conceptualizations. This implies that knowledge production must take into account not only the context of the subject who produces knowledge but also the need to make connections between differently situated struggles. In other words, a feminist point of view about knowledge production is committed to certain values, namely that of emancipation vis-a-vis relations of domination operating via class, gender, race, colonialism, etc. (Harding, 1991). For instance, "subsistence" is related

to Indigenous or peasant societies. The concept has been prescribed since modernity as a pre-industrial societal characteristic; as “natural” and pre-modern. But it is also a reference to pre-capitalist production systems as well as racist-colonial power constellations based on Eurocentrism (see Kunin’s paper in this issue).

This brings us to the material entanglements of environmental issues: due to global dynamics of capitalist accumulation and state development projects affecting rural areas and their struggles, environmental activism seems to deepen contexts of common struggles (Mohanty et al., 1991) to broaden the spectrum of social movements and collective action in the region, often with decolonial and feminist inspirations. Many movements articulate powerful decolonial concepts such as food sovereignty, self-determination and body-territory, and explore new means of embodiment. Some surprising new coalitions are coalescing around the shared goal of preserving and protecting the environment. Thus, how different actors and movements produce knowledge on socio-natural worlds, conceive and relate to matter, and offer a broader view of embodiment and body politics is our topic of enquiry. We bridge rural areas and environmental struggles to urban mass protests and online harassment, among other spatialities. Inspired by new materialisms, we consider the agential role of technologies such as prisons and social networks over women’s bodies as well as possibilities for resistance and change. From this perspective, we would like to examine *women in movement* resisting digital violence aimed at their activism and study their strategies to embody the internet as a political space (see Suárez Estrada’s paper in this issue).

This special issue includes five articles and two creative interventions. Each contribution sheds light on instances of *women in movement* in the Americas. The first article “Peasant Struggles in Times of Crises: The Political Role of Rural and Indigenous Women in Chile Today” by Mariana Calcagni is about the struggle of the women’s unionist movement ANAMURI (National Association of Rural and Indigenous Women). Based on political ecology of food, decolonial and economist perspectives, the main argument of the article is that peasant and Indigenous women are key political actors, influencing the political agenda in the struggles for social change in the 21st century. The author analyzes documents, statements, reports and bulletins of ANAMURI and their main narratives and strategies to influence the political scenario in Chile. The article cites evidence of renewed women’s agency that manifests in terms of strategies for social change: alliances and political articulations, social and political training, unionism and women’s labour rights, and political advocacy.

Along the same lines, the article “Rural Women Redefining Care and Agency in the Argentine Pampas” asks the question: is care always oppressive for women? By focusing on three levels of care: (1) care of their children; (2) global care and (3) green care under a postcolonial feminist perspective, the article departs from Eurocentric feminist impulses that claim that care work can only be oppressive for women. Instead, the author, Johana Kunin, argues

that caregiving involves a type of agency that can also be emancipatory and anti-patriarchal. Through an ethnographic approach that involved conducting field research from 2014 to 2017 resulting in 40 interviews from the Buenos Aires Province (Argentina), the author argues that caregiving can be better understood as productive agency in which care practices are not limited to the “domestic” but are both public and political.

Also situated in the rural and Indigenous context, the article “Weaving the Spiderweb: Mujeres Amazónicas and the Design of Anti-Extractive Politics in Ecuador” by Andrea Sempértegui, shows the always moving and changeable character of Indigenous women’s cultural and social identities through their strategic deployment of reproductive practices. Working together with an Indigenous network called *Mujeres Amazónicas*, Sempértegui analyzes how their organizing is characterized by a political design that merges public expressions of resistance – such as mobilizations, protest marches and other public actions – with communitarian practices that reproduce human and more-than-human life in the Amazon. The article concludes that *Mujeres Amazónicas* are historical and political subjects with the power to shape the lines of political confrontation vis-à-vis the state and extractive capital, and to build global connections between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of living.

Moving away from rural worlds in South America to the confinement of a prison in Canada, Katharine Dunbar Winsor and Amy Sheppard’s article “Dance as Revolution: Exploring Prisoner Agency through Arts-based Methods” confronts us with the paradox between prison and the movement of female bodies through dance. By definition, prison involves a restriction of movement, yet the authors argue freedom can take on new meaning when it focuses on self-care while women are confined. Freedom is thus situational and performative. Through a workshop-based methodological approach, the authors observe how, when female bodies are in motion, dance becomes a revolutionary act that stimulates an agency in the very place that remains limiting to the movement of female bodies.

Marcela Suárez Estrada’s article addresses the question: what are the strategies of feminists against digital violence in Mexico City and how do they relate to performative forms of social justice? With the lens of new feminist materialisms and through a digital ethnography that involved following two feminist collectives in Mexico City, the author argues that these are embodying the internet and mobilizing the body as a political and material category to innovate in forms of social justice to fight digital violence. These embodied strategies are related to the critical questioning of technologies to repoliticize digital violence and to render visible the memories and affects of violence in women’s bodies, as well as to mobilize a new feminist positioning called “hackfeminist self-defense.”

Mirjana Mitrović’s creative intervention “Pink. Glitter. Violence.” raises the question: how can a protest, ranging between popular feminism and destructive anger, be documented and perceived, represented and remembered in public

and private spaces? The intervention is the result of a photographic exhibition based on ethnographic notes by the artist and researcher about the feminist protests from August 12 and 16, 2019 in Mexico City, sparked by the sexual violence perpetrated by policemen against two minors. In both protests, women mobilized rage as a repertoire to fight against police sexual violence; in response, a public discussion and attempts to discipline the protesters ensued.

Finally, a contribution based on the artistic intervention, “Women in Wildfire Crises: Exploring Lived Experiences of Conflict through Forum Theatre” by Lorenza Fontana, Angelo Miramonti and Caleb Johnston, presents space for dialogue on the entangled gendered, social and cultural politics of wildfires in the Amazon. In this region, women are mostly affected by wildfires that caused and were caused by long term violence, dispossession, corruption and extreme inequality. In a Forum Theatre workshop in March 2022, 28 participants relived the experiences of 21 different communities affected by fires in Chiquitania in the Amazon region. The participants were Indigenous people, peasant migrants, farmers and farm labourers. In this context, the Forum Theatre provides evidence of women’s heroic survival and resilient agency.

Taken together, the articles in this special issue showcase the diverse ways in which women *on the move* are breaking into the political arena. From Canada to the Argentinean Pampas, passing through Mexico, the Amazon and Chile, women give account of a renewed feminist agency that materializes in political practices of care, political mobilization and influence, resilience, performance, dance, hacking, embodiment and politicizing violence. As the title of the issue indicates and all articles agree, women are key actors *in movement* in the Americas, defining the political agenda for social change and exhibiting innovative political practices.

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