

**BUILDING FEMINIST SOLIDARITIES: THE CASE STUDY OF *MUJERES  
CREANDO***

by

**Andresa Natacha Gomes de Almeida Vicente**

submitted in accordance with the requirements for  
the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

in the subject

**SOCIOLOGY**

at the

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**SUPERVISOR: Prof. Deirdre C. Byrne**

(January 2022)

## Acknowledgements

My deepest thanks to my family for their unwavering support, and to my supervisor, Prof. D.C. Byrne, for her invaluable guidance and assistance.

## Abstract

The case study of Bolivian radical feminist group *Mujeres Creando* is aimed at exploring both the micro and macropolitical challenges to and strategies for building feminist solidarities within the broader context of globalised neoliberal capitalism. The main research question orienting this study is: What would feminist activism look like if it addressed both macro and micropolitical factors in a way that led to the formation of anti-capitalist subjectivities and sustainable environments? The anticipated outcome of this research project is the achievement of a better understanding of how the feminist notion that the personal is political is the basis for the formulation of alternative forms of theory and praxis leading to emancipatory social change and the emergence of egalitarian and sustainable democratic realities. Feminist insights on subjectivity formation and coalition-building offer valuable conceptual material with the potential for innovation from which to re-imagine and re-construct the social realities of women and, by extension, of all members of society. The methodological framework for this study is qualitative discourse analysis. The aim of this research is not to impose predetermined concepts for testing, but rather to provide a framework for an iterative process, comprising the dual movements of exploration and interpretation, where theory and hypotheses are developed in the course of the study in contribution to existing dialogues on the subject of feminist solidarity building. As the type of data studied is not amenable to quantitative analysis, a qualitative design is better suited to the subjective nature of the matter and my need to access unquantifiable aspect about the members of *Mujeres Creando*, such as the effects of discursive colonisation on the lives and struggles of marginalised women, how they make sense of their socio-political context and engage with dominant discursive practices on a daily basis. All the data for this thesis was gathered exclusively by means of qualitative discourse analysis.

Key words

Feminism; solidarity, art activism; micropolitics; macropolitics; subjectivity formation; affect; Bolivia; *Mujeres Creando*; neoliberal capitalism

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the study entitled: *BUILDING FEMINIST SOLIDARITIES: THE CASE STUDY OF MUJERES CREANDO* is my original work, and that all sources used or cited in this thesis have been indicated and acknowledged by means of a complete reference list, and that this work has not been submitted before for any other degree at any university or any institution of higher learning.

**NAME:** Andresa Natacha Gomes de Almeida Vicente

**STUDENT NUMBER:** 31245412

**DEGREE:** Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

**QUALIFICATION CODE:** 98419



Signature

Date, 12<sup>th</sup> January 2022

## Contents

Chapter 1 .....	1
INTRODUCTION .....	1
Why a case study of <i>Mujeres Creando</i> ? .....	1
The problem.....	4
Socio-political problems requiring feminist attention .....	8
Patriarchy as a global system of inequality.....	8
Feminist theory in opposition to neoliberal and colonial patriarchy.....	11
The deleterious impact of neoliberal capitalist policies on women .....	18
Micropolitical resistance .....	20
My position .....	23
My approach.....	27
An introduction to <i>Mujeres Creando</i> .....	28
Access to Data and Ethical Considerations .....	34
Chapter outline .....	44
Chapter 2 .....	45
LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY.....	45
Chapter outline .....	45
Feminist Theory.....	47
Karen Barad’s feminist new materialism.....	49
Donna Haraway’s situated storytelling.....	50
Rosi Braidotti’s posthuman philosophy.....	53
Stacy Alaimo’s concept of transcorporeality .....	56
Silvia Federici’s notion of the commons .....	58
Postcolonial feminism .....	62
Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s <i>Under Western Eyes</i> .....	62
Vandana Shiva’s decolonial ecofeminism .....	65
Arundhati Roy’s critique of neoliberalism.....	67
Decolonial Theory.....	68

Maria Lugones’s coloniality of gender .....	69
Walter Mignolo’s concept of delinking .....	72
Nelson Maldonado-Torres’s coloniality of being .....	73
Subjectivity Formation .....	75
Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff’s postfeminism .....	75
Jorge Alemán and Suely Rolnik’s poststructuralist technologies of the self .....	78
Judith Butler’s philosophy of precarity and Melanie Klein’s understanding of sympathy and rage .....	82
Aims and rationale .....	83
Methodology .....	84
Chapter 3 .....	92
MUJERES CREANDO .....	92
The political background of Bolivia .....	92
<i>Mujeres Creando</i> — the beginning .....	94
Analysing <i>Mujeres Creando</i> .....	98
Butler’s theory of precarity and Klein’s theories of sympathy and rage .....	102
Depatriarchalisation and decolonisation .....	107
Complex political subjectivities .....	112
Anarcha-feminism.....	114
The personal is political .....	122
Intersectional political alliances.....	126
Conclusion.....	132
Chapter 4 .....	134
<i>MUJERES CREANDO</i> – ART ACTIVISM.....	134
Background to global art activism .....	134
Decolonial discourse as subversive of capitalism .....	146
The role of the image.....	148
Art activism .....	150
The capitalist domination of the culture industry .....	151
Decolonising discourse.....	151
The colonial wound.....	155

The art activism of <i>Mujeres Creando</i> .....	156
The São Paulo Biennale, 2014.....	156
The blasphemous murals.....	160
Intervention at a book fair in La Paz, 2015.....	166
Graffiti.....	173
Chapter 5.....	180
Conclusion.....	180
<i>MUJERES CREANDO: FEMINISM AS A PROJECT FOR SOCIAL</i> <i>TRANSFORMATION</i> .....	180
Conducting qualitative discourse analysis.....	180
Feminist emancipatory groups around the world.....	181
Socially transformative feminism.....	186
Concluding remarks.....	188
Can <i>Mujeres Creando</i> 's experiences be transferred to other emancipatory movements?.....	193
List of Sources.....	195
Appendix.....	213



## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Why a case study of *Mujeres Creando*?

At a historical juncture when the influence of neoliberal capitalism extends beyond the macropolitical level of the social order to the micropolitical level of subjectivity formation, comprehensive revolution leading to the emergence of egalitarian and sustainable democratic realities seems ever more unlikely. This is what makes a case study of the Bolivian radical feminist group *Mujeres Creando* pertinent. The group is a living example of what situated insurrection in the pursuit of democratic community over two decades might look like. So, this case study is an exploration of how the feminist notion that the personal is political can serve as the basis for the formulation of alternative forms of social theory and political praxis. The case of *Mujeres Creando* allows for an in-depth analysis of how one group draws and acts on feminist insights into subjectivity formation and coalition-building, making daily use of this valuable conceptual material to innovate, re-imagine and reconstruct the social realities of the women in their group and, by extension, of all members of Bolivian society.

In this light, *Mujeres Creando* might be seen as forcing a fissure in a globalised socioeconomic system that currently determines both the relations of production and social relations in ways that are damaging to the planet and its inhabitants. It is important to note that this case study is not intended as an uncritical exercise in glorification: the group continues to grapple with the complexities and challenges of accomplishing long-term political objectives of social change. *Mujeres Creando*, in a fluid state of constant

becoming, is naturally subject to all the advances, setbacks, and missteps inherent in a processual dynamic. However, despite whatever lesser successes they might have thus far experienced, in my view the group is worthy of study because of their decolonial practices of knowledge production, their use of art activism as micropolitical resistance, their commitment to the creation of complex political subjectivities and intersectional political alliances, and not least because of how all of these aspects are brought together through situated discursive-material practices. On an everyday basis these practices cumulatively amount to ongoing attempts by the group to found an alternative space and community, which resists the established, and in their view, inherently patriarchal, political, social and cultural institutions of Bolivian society. Since the country's dictatorial period (1964 and 1982), Bolivia's governments have identified as leftist-progressive. Despite this, the country continues to struggle with the legacy of its colonial, patriarchal and racist past. Women, especially those from socially oppressed groups, are vulnerable to violence.

The possibility of doing fieldwork with the group would have no doubt provided a clearer picture of sources of conflict and of the challenges faced within the group itself, as well as of those arising between *Mujeres Creando* and other social actors in Bolivian society. However, as this possibility was precluded by the group's strict anti-academia position, and further compounded by the onset of Covid-19, my analysis for this case study draws exclusively on materials on the group that have been made available in the public domain, mainly on the internet. These include the group's own website, their own published literature, and a growing body of articles, videos and studies on the group themselves, who enjoy a certain acclaim in Latin America. Their position in relation to what they view

as an expropriation of their work by scholars, be it their intellectual production or their activism, is unequivocal. They are implacable in their rejection of any such attempts, which is the main reason for their anti-academia stance, whose roots can be traced to the still-unresolved tensions between Global North and Global South feminisms. Another reason is that, despite their online presence, *Mujeres Creando* is faithful to situated political praxis. The group is firmly committed to a feminist politics that develops its own knowledge and practices in response to their situated circumstances, and encourages other feminist activist groups to do the same. While the group is not averse to calling on more established entities for occasional collaborations when these enable actions the group does not have the resources for, as in the case of a survey carried out by Harvard, they act to safeguard against any possible colonisation of their knowledge production and activism, especially by institutions such as universities.

Therefore, contrary to the patriarchal metaphysics underlying neoliberal capitalism, *Mujeres Creando* proposes an alternative view of society as deeply relational and fluid, in opposition to the racial and gendered oppressions that persist today. *Mujeres Creando* not only proposes a new ethics within its particular social and political context, but also provides a real-life cartography for change in their daily lives through the dissolution of the private/public binary, demonstrating how this feminist principle might prove to be the key for rethinking the political subject and solidarity-building. Specifically, I find that the incorporation of a micropolitics of resistance into their emancipatory practices provides a rich source of reflection for other groups fighting for social change, as might their perceived failings. For all of these reasons, *Mujeres Creando* makes for a compelling case study.

## The problem

The world currently faces many socio-political challenges. On a macropolitical level, these challenges involve unequal access to power and resources. Boaventura de Sousa Santos argues that neoliberal forces have made social redistribution the major challenge facing the twenty-first century, having compromised democratic mechanisms to the point where the levels of exploitation suggest that we are entering a new period of primitive capital accumulation (Santos 2009:13,14). Global inequalities in power and access to resources, mapped discursively by references to differing levels of “development”, not only persist but intensify, and are especially evident in the global South.<sup>1</sup> In contradiction, therefore, to the core tenets of neoliberal theory that uphold a minimalist state, private property rights, free markets and free trade as civilisation’s maximum achievement, the worldwide imposition of the neoliberal model, in fact, does little to address global inequalities.

Neoliberalism originated in the United States and is strongly associated with Milton Friedman, Nobel Laureate Gary Becker and the Chicago School of Economics. To begin with, it was intended as an economic experiment grounded in the values of economic liberalisation, minimal government intervention in the market, privatisation and the

---

<sup>1</sup> The term “global South” was first coined by Carl Oglesby in 1969 and has gained traction since then. Scholars such as Alvaro Mendez, co-founder of the London School of Economics and Political Science Global South Unit, prefer the term over alternatives such as “Third World” or “Developing World”, arguing in favour of the term’s empowering aspect. Others are more critical, claiming the term is used by members of the upper classes in Latin America who profit from the economic and political status quo, and that, for the majority of people in these areas, the terminology is of little importance (Wolters et al [O]).

consequent dismantling of the welfare state. In *The Shock Doctrine* (2007), Naomi Klein discusses how Friedman's free-market program was first put into practice in Chile, accompanied by severe social repression, when Friedman acted as advisor to Chilean dictator General Augusto Pinochet. At a time when leftists

[...] promised freedom for workers from bosses, citizens from dictatorship, countries from colonialism, Friedman promised 'individual' freedom, a project that elevated atomized citizens above any collective enterprise and liberated them to express their absolute free will and consumer choices.

(Klein 2007:63)

Friedman conceived of the free market as the perfect scientific system — any disturbance of market equilibrium, showing up symptomatically as high inflation or unemployment, was attributed to state interference and the market not being totally free. Reaching this utopia thus required a "purification" of the market through the eradication of government interference in the market. Their direct enemies, therefore, were "the Keynesians" (proponents of managed economies) in the United States, the social democrats in Europe, and the developmentalists in what was then called the Third World.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> The term "Third World" was first used during the Cold War to refer to those countries which remained non-aligned with either NATO or the Communist Bloc. Together with the terms "First" and "Second" Worlds, this terminology provided a means to classify nations according to social, political and economic factors. Despite an absence of consensus as to the exact definition and use of these terms, mainly due to complex historical processes leading to evolving meanings, the Third World has come to be equated with less developed, poorer countries, alternatively labelled the global South. Geographically, the global South is said to correspond to Africa, Latin America, parts of Asia and the Middle-East. However, geographical location will not impede a country from being considered part of the global North if its economic and development status improves. Debates over the accuracy of this terminology frequently also call into

Presently, neoliberal globalisation<sup>3</sup> involves the worldwide implementation of policies founded on profit-making, individualism, and economic deregulation. In practice, these policies manifest as the withdrawal of the state from all aspects of social life, a debilitated (if not demolished) welfare state, and the penetration of society by an economic logic presented as self-evident and inescapable.

The challenges facing society today are not, however, limited to macropolitical concerns. The influence of neoliberal capitalism extends beyond the macropolitical level of the social order to the micropolitical level of subjectivity formation. On a micropolitical level, the unequal access to power and resources is perpetuated by socially legitimated forms of subjectivity formation, producing subjects who, through the politics of knowledge production, view difference in hierarchical and dichotomous terms and define subjects in opposition to or in exclusion of each other. Neoliberal capitalism thereby deforms relational subjectivity by reducing difference to a consumable, to the extent that the consumption of differences has emerged as a dominant cultural practice. As Rosi Braidotti claims, “Advanced capitalism is a difference engine — a multiplier of deterritorialised differences, which are packaged and marketed under the labels of new, hybrid and multiple or multicultural identities” (Braidotti 2007:66).

---

question definitions of development that fail to take into account issues of sustainable growth linked to the environmental cost behind the economic success of the global North.

<sup>3</sup> Within globalisation theory, however, a distinction is made between neoliberal globalisation and counter-hegemonic globalisation, epitomised by anti-globalisation movements which are concerned with the erosion of democratic representation and the abuse of human rights, and who call for fair trade and sustainable development. Anti-globalisation movements are transnational and pluralistic, and are constituted by groups whose principles may contradict each other. However, unity or a functional sense of common purpose, while an always incomplete process mediated across differences, is negotiated on the basis that the problems under consideration are all caused by the logic of capitalism (Fuchs 2015).

Opposing a socioeconomic system that determines both the relations of production and social relations calls for an exploration of alternative life-models, not only economically and administratively, but also in discursive terms. Premised on the notion that discourse is constitutive of society and the individual, and that it comprises a social action with the potential to effect change, “discourse analytical approaches take as their starting point the claim of structuralist and poststructuralist linguistic philosophy, that our access to reality is always through language” (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002:8). This perspective implies that the representations of reality produced through language do not merely reflect pre-existing realities but rather contribute to the construction of reality itself, resulting in a particular worldview. The latter point underscores the link between the knowledge deriving from social representations and social processes themselves. As competing understandings of the world lead to different social processes, the social construction of knowledge is never a neutral practice but, rather, entails tangible social consequences.

The potential drawbacks of discursive approaches to reality, namely the tendency to isolate language and discourse from the material forces of human bodies and non-human nature, thereby replicating nature/culture dualisms that presuppose nature as a blank slate for the projection of human designs, can be tempered by the combination of discursive critique with feminist new materialisms. Taking into account the complex interactions between the social and the natural, the discursive and material, feminist new materialisms allow for the significance and agency of materiality in the production of knowledge.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, I see the discursive model as complementary to the new

---

<sup>4</sup> The interactions between the natural and social worlds are explored in the works of Donna Haraway (2016), Bruno Latour (2017), and Karen Barad (2007), for example.

materialist position. I will now enumerate what I perceive as the main challenges attendant on a global neoliberal system, together with a discussion of what key theorists have said about each.

### Socio-political problems requiring feminist attention

#### *Patriarchy as a global system of inequality*

Feminist theory has identified gender as one of the main axes on which inequality/difference is mapped. Patriarchy, the system of gender inequality, is an especially vivid, long-lasting and ubiquitous form of inequality that overlaps, as Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1991) theory of intersectionality shows, with other oppressions, such as race. (I will discuss Crenshaw's theory in more detail later in this chapter).

Gender difference, a cultural binary where man is positioned as superior to woman, is a western cultural construct reaching back several hundred years, which, some feminist theorists<sup>5</sup> argue, was exported to the rest of the world during the process of colonisation. Patriarchy functions as a worldview, or as an organising principle, with far-reaching consequences for society. The work of Nigerian feminist Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí (1997), for example, theorises how the western hierarchical gender system in Africa disrupted the existing life-philosophies on the continent. Oyěwùmí argues that gender was a colonial imposition in Yorùbá society. A significant aspect of her argument is how this imposition conditioned all aspects of life in Yorùbá society.<sup>6</sup> Oyěwùmí argues that the colonial

---

<sup>5</sup> Maria Lugones (2007, 2010) and Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí (1997) both argue that gender is a western construct.

<sup>6</sup> Detractors, such as King (1998) and Geiger (1999), claim that Oyěwùmí's work is over-reliant on generalisation regarding her reading of Yorùbá culture and western feminism. Others, such as Oyèrónké Olajubu (2004) and Lorand Matory (2005), dispute the empirical accuracy of her assertions. However, the



imposition of gender in Yorùbá society not only entailed an upheaval in the socio-political order, but also led to a different construction of the subject, relationships and the world. Her argument demonstrates how the prevailing western categories of thought are not universal, but, rather, culturally specific.

Oyěwùmí explains how the metaphysics of western patriarchy is based on an understanding of identity as a unitary ideal, and all difference is construed in terms of hierarchical dichotomies. In her understanding, the imposition of western patriarchy interfered with the metaphysics of affinity and the epistemological foundations underlying Yorùbá society, which had been deeply relational and fluid in precolonial times, as opposed to the essentialised subjectivities that result from the western gender system. A logical implication of Oyěwùmí's analysis is that resisting capitalism necessarily entails epistemological resistance to a western worldview.

A further analytical insight provided by Oyěwùmí's work is the intersecting character of gender and race as oppressive forces. As she discusses, the colonial imposition of dichotomous gender categories was at the heart of the functioning of colonial power. The creation of woman in colonial terms implied the reordering of all aspects of life, extending beyond reproduction to "labour, governance, trade and all other dimensions in the newly created colonial order" (Oyěwùmí 1997:77). Splitting society into gendered private and public spheres also had wide-ranging political and social ramifications. The masculine/feminine distinction therefore became the mark of civilisation, with the

---

point here is that the specific type of gender difference imposed by the colonisers altered the existing forms of society.

implication that to be fully human was to comply with gender hierarchies. The internalisation of western gender categories as the mark of civilisation, and indeed of modernity, is explored in the work of decolonial feminist Maria Lugones (2010). Lugones regards the gender binary as undergirding the human/non-human dichotomy that subtended colonialism (the physical occupation and administration of the colonies) and coloniality (the attendant metaphysics defining coloniality as a worldview). For her, the human/non-human distinction, which is interwoven with and dependent on the masculine/feminine dichotomy, comprises the central dichotomous hierarchy of colonial modernity. She holds that the distinction between man and woman became the mark of the human in opposition to the non-human: “[o]nly the civilized are men and women. Indigenous peoples of the Americas and enslaved Africans were classified as not human in species — as animals, uncontrollably sexual and wild” (Lugones 2010:743).

The project of colonial modernity, which extends to this day, is based on racial and gendered oppressions that deepen divisions between subjects, and divisions between subjects and the world. The metaphysics of western modernity is one of separation rather than unity, and the consequences of this worldview are in plain sight. The hallmark of the modern era is the global establishment of western cultural hegemony, with a profound impact on the production of knowledge, human behaviour and the building of societies.

The current global dispensation of neoliberal capitalism, in both its macro and micropolitical aspects, is an extension of colonialism as a civilising project whose values are deeply divisive and have contributed to the current state of the planet, where inequality is rife and the environment in peril. Modern coloniality is based on intersecting gender and race dichotomies that exercise an oppressive force. It is clear that the world

is in need of a new ethics, something that feminism has long been committed to in its efforts to formulate a revised sense of materialism and of embodiment, and of a passage to sustainable socio-economic relations. The condition of the world calls for a refiguration of the subject, materiality and the future, as Rosi Braidotti argues: “The point of feminist theory is to achieve in-depth transformations of subjectivity: we need schemes of thought and figurations that enable us to account in empowering and positive terms for the changes and transformations currently on the way” (2007:68). The intention of my thesis is to contribute to this conversation by exploring different ways of thinking about the possibilities for the creation of alternative subjectivities and societies. I find that feminist theory provides the most comprehensive response to inequality on many levels: it provides a framework through which to understand the impact of neoliberal capitalism on gender, and also demonstrates the interconnectedness of various forms of oppression. However, as this thesis cannot explore all the ramifications of global inequality, my focus will be on the condition of women as well as feminist opposition to neoliberal and colonial patriarchy.

*Feminist theory in opposition to neoliberal and colonial patriarchy*

The feminist commitment to participating in the development of social and economic alternatives is grounded in an ethical and ideological opposition to the widespread inequalities generated by the neoliberal system. More specifically, however, feminism finds itself at odds with neoliberal economic and governance policies because women have been most affected by these policies.<sup>7</sup> In *Caliban and the Witch – Women, The Body*

---

<sup>7</sup> The *Poverty is Sexist* Report makes this clear, see: <https://www.one.org/africa/take-action/poverty-is-sexist/> (Accessed 23 February 2020). I will return to this point in greater detail later in the chapter.

*and Primitive Accumulation* (2014), Silvia Federici reads the transition from feudalism to capitalism from the viewpoint of women with the purpose of finding a satisfactory explanation for the roots of women's social and economic exploitation. She argues that "the exploitation of women has played a central function in the process of capitalist accumulation, insofar as women have been the producers and reproducers of the most essential capitalist commodity: labour power" (Federici 2014:8). Federici's primary contention is that the subjugation of women throughout the history of capitalism has been carried out in order to appropriate their unpaid reproductive and productive labour as a source of capital accumulation. From this perspective, she aptly interprets the re-ascent of neoliberalism as a new round of capitalist expansion, effected through neoliberal policies intended "to cheapen the cost of labour and to hide the exploitation of women and colonial subjects" (Federici 2014:17).

By demonstrating how "the female body is still the precondition to the accumulation of wealth" (Federici 2014:17), Federici provides a solid argument for the indispensability of a feminist perspective to theorising a response to neoliberal hegemony. Her argument underscores the indivisibility of the feminist question from capitalism, thereby correlating women's history with capitalist history. This viewpoint, based on Federici's years of research and activism in collaboration with other feminists,<sup>8</sup> broadens the scope of feminist inquiry beyond an exclusive concern with sexual discrimination to include the

---

<sup>8</sup> There is a long history of feminist research into the position of women in capitalism, reaching back to Simone de Beauvoir's work in *The Second Sex*, first published in 1949.

corresponding devaluation of other population groups, such as colonial subjects and unwaged workers, by capitalism.

In addition to highlighting the importance of a feminist perspective in the struggle for social justice, Federici's focus on women's reproductive work, which she defines as "a complex of activities and relations by which our life and labour are daily reconstituted" (Federici 2012:5), is strategically advantageous. In *Revolution at Point Zero* (2012), she discusses how reproductive labour constitutes a point around which to organise politically. Additionally, she advises that starting new collective forms of reproduction not only provides a means through which to reclaim the wealth of our labour: it also allows for ways to confront "the divisions that have been planted among us along the lines of race, gender, age and geographical location", (Federici 2012:12) and for rebuilding ties of solidarity through commoning practices. By commoning, Federici refers to creative investment in the production of alternative forms of sociality, new spaces of cooperation where resources are collectively and equitably managed. Within these spaces, community is based on "a quality of relations, a principle of cooperation and responsibility: to each other, the earth, the forests, the seas, the animals" (Federici 2012:145), rather than on ethnicity or religion. She sees such communities as vital steps in our education on collective governance and as an important communal counterpoint to capitalist-induced amnesia of history.

While Federici's analysis provides a promising map of action for addressing sexual discrimination within the larger context of capitalist exploitation, building and sustaining solidarity to accomplish long-term political objectives entails its own set of challenges. The difficulties intrinsic to accomplishing and prolonging solidarity have long pursued the

feminist movement,<sup>9</sup> and are especially relevant now as resistance to capitalism takes on global dimensions. Overcoming these challenges implies developing strategies that, similarly to neoliberal capitalism, operate on both the macro and micropolitical levels, and take into account the often dialectical relationship between these two orders. Drawing on feminist theory, Federici suggests that practices are required through which the false divisions between the personal and the political, between political activism and the reproduction of everyday life, are eliminated, where commoning the collective means of reproduction leads to mutual bonds being forged that reinforce the capacity of human beings to commit and endure.

In this thesis I argue in favour of commoning practices as a counter-approach to the oppressions that reproduce social hierarchies. On the one hand, by providing an alternative anti-capitalist life-model comprising different forms of organising labour, commoning practices address macropolitical questions of power. On the other, commoning practices provide a space, apart from the ubiquitous and reductive logic of neoliberal capitalism, from which to imagine alternatives and possibilities for change beyond commodification. They also furnish a means through which to address equally important micropolitical factors, such as the discursive constitution of ourselves and consequently of society. The struggle for social transformation therefore implies that we bridge the gap between the macro and the micropolitical, and collapse the divide between theory and practice.

---

<sup>9</sup> Rifts between feminisms of the global North and South arose during feminism's so-called second wave, when white liberal feminists were criticised for presenting their experiences and their interpretations of these experiences as representative of all women. These challenges are explored later in this chapter.

The feminist struggle against capitalism is not new. Feminist activism has had to adapt over the years to meet the particular demands of each epoch. Taking 1960s second-wave Anglo-American feminism as a starting point, a brief retrospective reveals what feminist philosopher Nancy Fraser (2013) has interpreted as the three main stages in feminist politics to date. In Fraser's first stage (1960s-1970s), feminism is seen as participating in a broader field of democratising, anti-capitalist struggles alongside the New Left, primarily aimed at producing a radical critique of social democracy under state-managed capitalism. At that time, feminism's particular focus was on exposing capitalism's deep-seated androcentrism and its bureaucratic organisation, with a near-exclusive focus on questions of distribution. According to Fraser, feminist critique, at this stage, represented an expanded understanding of what constitutes the political. The "personal is political" slogan is emblematic of this period, when feminist consciousness-raising exposed the underlying connections between personal experience and wider social and political realities, thereby demonstrating that women's life experiences could not be reduced to personal choice, but were, to a great extent, the result of larger patriarchal structural arrangements that worked against women's rights.

In the second phase (1980s-1990s), as identified by Fraser, there is a shift in the feminist political imaginary from a politics of distribution, focused on the political economy, to a politics of identity. Significantly, this shift coincides with the re-ascent of neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism

[...] takes the view that individual liberty and freedom are the high point of civilization [...] and these can best be protected and achieved by an institutional structure made up of strong private property rights, free markets

and free trade, a world in which individual initiative can flourish, the implication is that that the state should not be involved in the economy too much but should use its power to preserve private property rights and institutions of the market and promote these on the global stage (Lilley 2006).

Fraser points out that feminist struggles for redistribution shifted to struggles for recognition at the same time as the rise of neoliberalism and that this inadvertently facilitated the course of neoliberalism, precisely because a shift of attention away from the political economy suited its aim of global marketisation free from social or political constraints. This unintended and invidious liaison between liberal feminism and the neoliberal agenda is explored in depth by Hester Eisenstein in *Feminism Seduced* (2009). Eisenstein's thesis is that a number of feminist precepts have been selectively filtered into what she terms hegemonic mainstream feminism, which, in the US, is interpreted as "individualism and the right to participate in the market economy as a worker or entrepreneur in one's own name, separated from one's role as a wife and/or mother" (Eisenstein n.d.:5). As Eisenstein explains, "this apparent acceptance of feminist principles is in fact an attempt to co-opt the energies of feminism into the project of corporate globalisation, an enterprise with disastrous effects on the lives of most women" (Eisenstein n.d.:2). From the point of view of solidarity-building, the unintended liaison between liberal feminism and individualising neoliberal policy was, at the very least, ironic. This is especially so because the second wave of feminism was a period of consciously creating solidarity among women, although there were important limitations, as feminists of colour were to point out.



Traditionally, feminism has fought against women's dependence on patriarchal social protections such as the welfare state, which denied women parity of participation in social and political life with men. Fraser provides a detailed analysis of how this impulse toward emancipation from any and all forms of domination, even in the form of hierarchical social protection, can potentially dovetail with neoliberal claims to efficiency, individual choice and the negative liberty of non-interference as its highest values by dissolving the solidarity-ethical basis of social protection (Fraser 2013: 236). Eisenstein makes the same point when discussing how women's willingness to enter the labour market and their mass entry into the workforce have served the interests of capital by enabling employers to keep wages low. The idea that women should be working for wages aided the interests of conservative forces seeking welfare reforms, supporting the argument that there should be no "welfare queens" (Eisenstein n.d.:7). Thus, the once unequivocally emancipatory ideals of feminism devolve into ambiguity, which is exploited by neoliberal capitalism on a global level. In the name of development, small-scale local economies of the Global South have been transformed by the imposition of the free market regimes of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund through free-trade agreements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement and Structural Adjustment Programs (Eisenstein n.d.:10). Eisenstein observes that development has become virtually synonymous with gender in development literature, giving rise to the fallacy that the development of women is somehow a substitute for state-led economic development, or, in other words, that "to eliminate poverty, it seems, it is no longer necessary to create an economy that meets people's needs. Now a focus on women's leadership is sufficient" (Eisenstein n.d.:10).

Now in its third and current phase,<sup>10</sup> Fraser argues, feminism faces the particular challenges posed by the consolidation of neoliberal hegemony, that is, the global character of neoliberal capitalism, and the particular nature of neoliberalism, namely, the ways in which its goals are largely (if not primarily) secured through an incursion into the processes of subjectivity formation. The extension of neoliberal influence beyond the economic sphere, and its subsequent pervasion of the social domain, points to the operation of a productive, biopolitical logic of power in the Foucauldian<sup>11</sup> sense, demanding the deployment of a systematic critique that cuts across the major economic, cultural and political battles of the current epoch.

*The deleterious impact of neoliberal capitalist policies on women*

Neoliberal capitalist policies have gained ground across the globe, with the aim of maximising profit, frequently at the cost of democratic and ecological principles, such as human rights, fair trade and sustainable development. Economically, neoliberal capitalist measures have done little to improve the welfare of the majority of people in general, or of women in particular, and have, in fact, served to entrench patriarchal rifts further. This is most evident in the Global South. The *Poverty is Sexist* report (2016) clearly outlines how social and economic opportunities in poorer developing countries continue to

---

<sup>10</sup> Some theorists (such as Pythia Peay (2005)) argue that feminism has now entered a fourth phase marked by spirituality and a focus on technology, specifically online activism. She claims that this has facilitated a “call-out” culture, where sexism and misogyny are more easily denounced. To what extent the internet is reinvigorating feminist politics remains open to debate, as women lacking the technological resources to stay connected are necessarily excluded from this type of networking.

<sup>11</sup> The Foucauldian concept of biopolitics refers to the administration and regulation of human life at the level of the population and of the body. Biopolitics is not limited to the exercise of repression but also embraces productive and generative forces. “ I understand it, the liberalism we can describe as the art of government formed in the eighteenth century, entails at its heart a productive/ destructive relationship [with]\* freedom [ ... ]. Liberalism must produce freedom, but this very act entails the establishment of limitations, controls, forms of coercion, and obligations relying on threats, etcetera” (Foucault 2002:64).

correlate with gender, with women and girls consistently representing those who are worse off. For example, the report declares that in 2016 “half a billion women still cannot read, 62 million girls are denied the right to education and 155 countries still have laws that differentiate between men and women” (*Poverty is Sexist* 2016). I agree with this report’s argument that investing in women and girls will improve the status of all, and I also agree with its recommendation of investments in healthcare, education, nutrition, legal equality and connectivity to the internet as the steps that governments should take if they genuinely wish to address these inequalities and eliminate poverty.

The negative effects of structural adjustment policies in the global South are notorious, with women affected in particularly damaging ways. Despite appropriating the vocabulary of development and modernity, the privatisation accompanying neoliberal economic reforms results in reduced public spending, which disproportionately affects women, who are traditionally more dependent on government services for the care of their families. Despite claims to the contrary, opening up the market to feminine employment has done little to address or further gender equality. This is made apparent by the persistence of stereotypical notions of women as docile labour disinclined to protest against low wages, and the pervasive reality of devalued feminised labour,<sup>12</sup> where employment is often characterised by exploitation and high levels of control and surveillance.

Certainly, for those suffering these consequences first-hand, it remains imperative that global South and North feminisms are able to work towards transnational anti-capitalist

---

<sup>12</sup> Ester Boserup explores how the gendered division of labour has functioned against the interests of women since colonial times in *Women’s Role in Economic Development* (1989).

solidarity as a social justice movement in response to the unacceptable situation of women and girls worldwide, and especially in the global South. In situations where, for example, locally-grown agricultural products are forced off the market by the influx of heavily subsidised food from rich countries, the decline in subsistence farming has led to many women having to abandon their land and seek employment in the major cities. Most often, these women end up in shanty towns, trying to make a living from the informal economy, “characterised by low wages or incomes, uncertain employment, poor working conditions, unregulated by health and safety standards” (Jaggar 2005:9). Many women turn to prostitution to survive, making them more vulnerable to the AIDS epidemic. Structural Adjustment programs, advocated by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund,<sup>13</sup> result in cuts to social services, affecting women more directly in their role as family caretakers and providers. Women are made to absorb these impacts, compensating for the reduction in social services with their own unpaid labour, resulting in more work, and often in more school drop-outs because of the preference in economically constrained families for educating sons. In this, and in numerous other ways, the neoliberal agenda has resulted in the dilution of feminist emancipatory goals, of which education has traditionally been a priority, as defended by the likes of Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) and Betty Friedan (1963) in their pre-feminist and second-wave feminist texts.

### *Micropolitical resistance*

The production of neoliberal subjectivities, and the way in which this is fundamentally aligned with definitions of development, modernity and what it means to live a good life,

---

<sup>13</sup> See Grewel & Kaplan (2002:501-518).

are sources of major concern and the object of research by leftist theorists. In effect, notwithstanding the significance of the macropolitical struggles involved in the struggle against capitalist hegemony, there are theorists<sup>14</sup> who argue that the micropolitical level — the level of subjectivity formation — is where the hardest battle against neoliberalism is to be waged. Argentine psychologist and philosopher, Jorge Alemán (2015), considers the current hegemonic order unprecedented in its attempts to capture the Lacanian ontological instance, when the living being becomes a subject through language. Neoliberalism is a specific formation of capitalist logic, and is historically the first formation that aims at the very production of subjectivity, to fashion an insular neoliberal subject, disinclined to solidarity with others and subject to a debilitating political dormancy when confronted by cognitive dissonance. In other words, capitalism aims to capture the constitution of the subject and has reconfigured what it means to be human in terms of consumption.

Basing his work on the psychoanalytical theories of Jacques Lacan,<sup>15</sup> Alemán explains how the symbolic order<sup>16</sup> constitutes the subject. However, due to its particular nature, the symbolic matrix, into which the self is precipitated, is incapable of fully comprehending the Real: a notion premised on Saussure's concepts of the signifier and the signified in language.<sup>17</sup> The inability of the Symbolic to capture the Real produces a fragmented

---

<sup>14</sup> See Alemán (2015).

<sup>15</sup> Jacques Lacan, 1901-1981, was a French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist.

<sup>16</sup> Lacan defines the symbolic order as the social world of linguistic communication, intersubjective relations, awareness of ideological conventions and compliance with the law.

<sup>17</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) did foundational work in the areas of linguistics and semiology. His *Course in General Linguistics* (*Cours de linguistique générale*), was published posthumously in 1916. The Real, a category established by Jacques Lacan, is defined as that which escapes the symbolic and

subject, radically split by a desire it is unable to symbolise in its search for the restitution of the primordial lack, lost forever at the moment of entry into the Symbolic.<sup>18</sup> According to Lacanian theory, every subject has a unique mode of experiencing the formative breach, which gives rise to an initial heterogeneity within the self. As this heterogeneity is impossible to factor into the calculus of capitalism, it is potentially destabilising to the capitalist project of all-encompassing commodification.

Alemán's ideas expose the limitations of emancipatory strategies that mobilise exclusively on the macro-level. For counterhegemonic movements to succeed, they require strategies that integrate macro-level concerns with micro-level processes of subject formation. The latter level holds the potential for rupture with capitalist narratives and for resistance to be built discursively. Liberating the subject from the ideological constraints of capitalist discourse constitutes a vital step toward interrupting and effectively substituting new interpretive and theoretical frameworks for existing modes of understanding.

Thus, the neoliberal phenomenon represents a particular set of challenges for counterhegemonic movements such as feminism, on the macro-level of economic policy

---

therefore can neither be written nor spoken. "The real is what resists symbolization absolutely". (Lacan 1991:66)

<sup>18</sup> While taking note of feminist criticism of Lacan's phallogentrism by the likes of Luce Irigaray (1985) and Julia Kristeva (2009), I nevertheless believe that there are aspects of Lacan's theory that are productive for my research. Especially, Lacan's theories of subjectivity formation and how our sense of self and our attachments, affective or political, are influenced by symbolic structures connected with discursive analysis: my primary methodology for analysing political texts.

and the attendant political practices generated, as well as on the micro-level of subject formation. While both macro and micropolitical factors require attention in projects of anti-capitalist solidarity building, theorists such as Alemán, nevertheless, approach this challenge firstly from a micropolitical perspective. This primary focus on the micropolitical is based on the notion that in order to effect institutional change, it is first necessary to displace hegemonic ideational paradigms within individuals and substitute these with other ideas which may serve as cognitive maps to building alternative realities.

### My position

Before continuing with my analysis, it is necessary to make my own position clear *vis-à-vis* global inequality. As a white, middle-class woman who was born in Mozambique, grew up in South Africa, has lived in Argentina and is now resident in Portugal, I have been privileged insofar as social crisis, when it has occurred, has done so mainly on the fringes of my life experience. That is, due to geographical and cultural coincidences, my family and I have, so far, not suffered the effects of social crisis in insuperable ways. That being said, from as far back as I can remember, I have been aware of the existential gulf between people like me, who enjoy relative social and economic stability, and the great majority of people, who live under radically different and infinitely harsher circumstances. Never satisfied with pat justifications for why this is so, I have been unflaggingly pursued by the question of the separation between “us” and “them”, between the “one” and the “other”. While the purported universalism of a shared humanity may linger philosophically, experientially the case is clearly otherwise, with some evidently perceived as more human than others, a fact reflected in the numerous social stratifications readily apparent wherever one goes.

In approaching these questions I have found my intellectual home in feminist theory, which has provided me with the conceptual tools to examine the various truths promulgated about the state of affairs in the world. In feminist theory, for example, the unmasking of the underlying eurocentric hierarchical androcentrism of the humanist notion of “man as the measure of all things” (Braidotti 2013:2) has enabled the necessary critical distance to rethink who counts as human, while in its posthuman turn, feminist theory goes further to question anthropocentric notions of species hierarchy, steering the critical focus towards ecological justice while retaining the position of women as a central concern.

Over the years, as I have moved from one country to another, the question of what keeps us separate from each other, from recognising our shared precarity, has been a driving force for my research. I use the term “precarity” as Judith Butler defines it, as denoting not only social positionings but also forms of subjectivation. Butler argues that precariousness is an unavoidable relational condition of social existence, referring to precarious bonds as “[...] those that should be structured by the condition of mutual need and exposure that should bring us to forms of political organization that sustain living beings on terms of equality” (quoted in Berlant *et al*:169) and which bestow “...a chance to start to imagine a world in which [that] violence might be minimized, in which an inevitable interdependency becomes acknowledged as the basis for global political community” (Butler 2004:XIII). Butler’s argument highlights the inevitability of human interdependency when it comes to securing and protecting our bodily needs. Her idea of precarity is a call for rethinking social relationality and for the re-organisation of social and



political infrastructures so that these might support, rather than undermine, our common fragility.

It is, in my view, impossible to consider the issue of separability without taking into account its opposite: unity, union, wholeness or interconnectedness. When we see separability and interconnectedness as binary opposites, we are spurred to question the validity of a dualistic understanding of the world, when such narratives became the foundation of our story as humans, and the motivation behind instilling such narratives as the dominant lens to interpret and make sense of the world. Once again, here, feminist theory, specifically feminist new materialism, provides a creative way to approach and understand the composition of the world and our position in it. Feminist new materialisms as “material-discursive practices that iterate a dynamic conceptualization of matter” (Revelles *et al* 2020:1), conceive the world and our experience in it as a fluid state of constant becoming, rather than as determined by a series of immutable or fixed conditions. This state of becoming, resulting from the unceasing flow of intra-actions between human and non-human planetary denizens, allows for a diffraction<sup>19</sup> of alternative states of being, laying the ground from which to engage with reality in productive ways. New feminist materialisms as “a specific ethico-political and onto-epistemological turn that is deeply committed to de-centralizing knowledge production, cutting across pre-established dichotomies, and focusing on processes traversing hierarchies of power relations that organize diverse forms of life” (Revelles *et al* 2020:2), comprise a situated methodology of discursive-material practices, whose basis in a

---

<sup>19</sup> In feminist new materialist theory, “diffraction” is often used figuratively, implying a methodology of critical and difference-attentive consciousness, thought and interpretation.

relational ontology gives rise to specific socio-cultural phenomena that materialise both human and non-human agency in more equitable ways.

The power of narratives to shape, not only our subjectivities, but also the kinds of worlds we might create for ourselves has been eloquently and powerfully argued within feminist theory.<sup>20</sup> In this way, feminist theory provides a way to explore alternatives to the grand narratives that have imposed a view of who we are in terms of separation and strife, and that claim humans are motivated solely by competition and the survival of the fittest. For me, feminist theory resurrects possibilities for imagining and creating alternative subjectivities and ways of organising our lived experience: possibilities that are more in line with accounts of solidarity and sustainability and in strict opposition to globalised neoliberal capitalism, whose driving themes are extraction, exploitation, competition and individuality. The hegemonic narratives of progress and so-called development discourses organise life according to a linear myth exalting human superiority over the environment, where life and planetary occupants, both human and non-human, are hierarchised and envisioned as separate. In opposition, feminist theory proffers an alternative understanding of reality as processual rather than results-based or teleological. Feminist theory not only allows for the scrutiny of oppression and conflict, but also for the transformation of our cultural and social imagination through alternative sense-making and the performance of different epistemologies, which represent entry points into new ways of living, in which feminist, ecological and other anti-hegemonic practices are diffractively engaged.

---

<sup>20</sup> In *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016), Donna Haraway argues in favour of multispecies collaboration and storytelling as an important way to respond to the problems of the Anthropocene.

These considerations led me to my research question: What would feminist activism look like if it addressed both macro and micropolitical factors in a way that led to the formation of anti-capitalist subjectivities and sustainable environments?

### My approach

During my stay in Argentina, I became aware of a Bolivian radical feminist group called *Mujeres Creando*. Exposure to and engagement with a new social context provided me with the opportunity to “reframe realities, and open up possibilities for being, becoming, and imagining the worlds otherwise” (Revelles *et al* 2020:3), and to go beyond inherited interpretative paradigms. In my experience, living new socio-cultural positionings can engender a process of diffractive becoming: through an enmeshment with difference, migration itself can catalyse a new identity. My acquaintance with *Mujeres Creando*, diffracted through life in Argentina, led me to wonder about the possibilities of activating the ethico-political dimensions of feminist theory through research, and the way this might link to responses to social and environmental injustices.

In pursuing my growing interest in *Mujeres Creando* as an exemplar of feminist organising that tackles both macro and micropolitical issues, I chose the case study model as an interesting and productive research design. Therefore, I decided to undertake a qualitative case study, using discourse analysis, of the Bolivian radical feminist group *Mujeres Creando*. Through this case study, I aim to explore the question of feminist activism on both the macro and micropolitical levels, as a response to the global social and economic asymmetries generated by a system of globalised neoliberal capitalism.

### An introduction to *Mujeres Creando*

I first came across *Mujeres Creando* in an Argentinian publication called *MU* in 2006. *MU* is a monthly newspaper published both online and in hardcopy by a work collective called *Lavaca*, who are based in Buenos Aires.<sup>21</sup> I was immediately drawn to the iconoclastic presence of their founder, Maria Galindo, and intrigued by the group's feminist project. *Mujeres Creando* is Spanish for "Women Creating" (my translation).<sup>22</sup> While I was unable to find any published or publicly accessible reference to the origin of the name, to me the group's designation is rich with inference: historically women have been barred from participating in the public domain as co-creators of political, economic and social structures. Artistically, too, women's participation in creative processes has been systematically discounted and omitted: in fact, feminist scholars continue to "uncover institutionally overlooked women artists through original archival research" (Millner 2015:145). The group's choice to cite women in the first word of their name can, therefore, be read as a gesture in protest against their historical effacement. Creating, on the other hand, is a quintessential act of becoming, referring not only to questions of sovereignty of thought, will and action, but alluding also to the possibility of a feminist reconceptualisation of utopia. In this way, the designation *Mujeres Creando* immediately positions the group politically and clearly stakes a claim as women intent on creating their own destiny.

As I learned more about the group, I came to realise that *Mujeres Creando* is one of the most visible, controversial and politically active feminist groups on the Latin American

---

<sup>21</sup> See: <https://lavaca.org/> (Accessed 24 November 2020)

<sup>22</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Spanish to English are my own.

continent. The group was founded in 1992 and has been politically active ever since, mainly in Bolivia but also throughout the South American continent. *Mujeres Creando* is well-known for its activism, which ranges from graffiti to street performance art and political protest, in support, not only of explicitly feminist questions, but also of a number of marginalised groups (as I will discuss in more detail later in chapter 3). I was interested in the group's use of art as a tool for political activism, especially because of the ways in which art can be used to disrupt established narratives and frameworks of interpretation, and provide a source of inspiration for alternative subjectivities and collectivities. The work of *Mujeres Creando* provides fertile ground to explore the question of what kind of politics and solidarities are made possible through art activism. I remain fascinated by how *Mujeres Creando* uses metaphor and symbolism in their street protests; I wonder how effectively storytelling can dissolve established chronologies and parameters of thought, and about the micropolitical impact of theatricality and performance as opposed to straightforward protest. For example, in the first half of 2016, one of the group's protests, directed at the government, addressed the inequitable distribution of public funds. For the protest, the unfair apportioning of funds was represented by a cake cut into different-sized pieces, each labelled and symbolising a share of government spending. The group of protestors, which included a number of physically disabled individuals, was led by Maria Galindo. Gathering outside the offices of the Vice-Presidency, Galindo picked up each slice, explaining to the crowd which portion of government funds the respective slices stood for, and then threw the pieces of cake at the entrance of the building. The last remaining slice, the thinnest, representing the share of money apportioned to those suffering from disabilities, was distributed among those present, with each person

receiving bits of the meagre remains. The protest was broadcast on the local news, as many of the *Mujeres Creando* protests are.<sup>23</sup> This arts-based methodology is clearly community-focused, and enables the diffraction of community concerns through the art activism of the group, the intra-action of which reorganises relational ties and undoes difference as a divisive force.

Art and storytelling, especially practised on the streets, possess relational and affective power, as well as providing an enmeshed methodology through which differences entangle to benefit community togetherness. I find the potential of street art to upend conventional subject-object positions and promote alternative relationalities to be a generative notion worth exploring.<sup>24</sup> In particular, the use of art by *Mujeres Creando* opens a route of inquiry into the crucial role of micropolitics for anti-hegemonic activism.

In times of crisis, social change is driven by the solidarity-building strategies of emancipatory movements, such as *Mujeres Creando*. The eventual efficacy of these movements is dependent on their ability to develop cogent political discourse that satisfies certain criteria. According to Anna Marie Smith (2003), it must, first, furnish the analytical tools for individuals to comprehend their condition; second, it must provide the means to imagine alternative realities; and, third, it must demonstrate the possibilities for collectively overthrowing the status quo (Smith 2003:8). In other words, emancipatory movements that hope to destabilise the hegemony of the global order must advance solutions and engage the subordinated individual at both the micro and macro levels of experience. The irreducible entanglement of these two levels of existence in political life

---

<sup>23</sup> This event can be viewed on the *Mujeres Creando* website: <http://www.mujerescreando.org/>

<sup>24</sup> Art activism is explored in detail in chapters 3 and 4.

has been theorised by feminists for decades. This notion is possibly best represented by the phrase “the personal is political”, which arose during second-wave feminism and whose usage is linked to feminist thinkers such as Carol Hanisch (2006), Shulamith Firestone (1970) and Robin Morgan (1977/1982).

Since its inception, feminism has always represented a force for emancipatory social change. In the current global situation of neoliberal capitalist dominance, it is ever more urgent to create conditions that allow for the emergence of alternative formulations leading to egalitarian and sustainable realities. These conditions must include both the psychological and the physical. Attending to the psychological and physical can be likened to attending to strategic and practical needs respectively. The practical corresponds to the physical — we all need food, water, and safety — while the strategic corresponds to structural needs, that is, lasting changes in perception so that hegemonic notions of status, participation and ways of interaction may be permanently altered. *Mujeres Creando's* organisation and art activism comprise a productive case study of feminist micropolitical strategising. Their group has provided me with an opportunity to understand how feminist solidarities are built and how micro and macropolitical aspects of activism can be combined. I am interested in exploring the group's art activism as an instance of micropolitics and their organisational strategies as instances of macropolitics. These two aspects interweave and dialogue with each other in inextricable ways.

The local everyday political struggles of *Mujeres Creando* consist of a series of actions. These cumulatively amount to founding an alternative space and community, which resist the established political, social and cultural institutions of the surrounding city of La Paz, Bolivia, in a struggle to transform Bolivian society — in the group's understanding — from

a patriarchy into a genuine democracy. The *Mujeres Creando* house, *La Virgen de los Deseos* (this translates to “the Virgin of Desires”, an allusion to the Virgin Mary as the patron saint of desire<sup>25</sup>), represents a specific site of confrontation with power, and might be considered a point of intersection between the molar body of Bolivian society and the microbodies of this group (Rabinow 1991:67). From within the house, which serves both as the group’s headquarters and their point of contact with the Bolivian community, there are strategic efforts to create a parallel, self-sustaining community, with its own sources of revenue<sup>26</sup>, philosophy and politics. The house also doubles as a café/restaurant, where numerous services are provided to the public to generate income. The group’s founder, María Galindo, has published various books<sup>27</sup> expounding the group’s philosophy, and articles are posted regularly on their website<sup>28</sup>; the group is politically active through public interventions, protest street art, and through their website and radio channel. An interesting aspect is the conflictual nature of the relationships between the Bolivian authorities — a government which self-identifies as decolonial and therefore should be anti-patriarchal — and the members of *Mujeres Creando*. The latter point illustrates the

---

<sup>25</sup> The ironic combination of virgin and desire, as well as the nod to the deconstruction of established dualisms and historical representations embodying power relations is obvious enough.

<sup>26</sup> While I was unable to find explicit references to whether the activities of the house are for profit, all evidence points firmly to the contrary, that is, *Mujeres Creando* is a non-profit organisation with a social mission.

<sup>27</sup> Titles include: *No se puede descolonizar sin despatriarcalizar* [n.d.], and *Ninguna Mujer Nace para Puta* [n.d.]. Galindo has also authored numerous articles, all of which are available on the *Mujeres Creando* website: <http://www.mujerescreando.org/>.

<sup>28</sup> I was unable to locate any information on which member of *Mujeres Creando* is responsible for running the website. Regarding access to their site, the following data concerning internet access in Bolivia provides an indication as to the visibility of the group’s online presence. In 2021, Bolivia’s population totalled 11.75 million, women making up 49.8% of the population and men 50.2%. 5.58 million internet users were registered in Bolivia in January 2021, with 8.20 million active social media users. Facebook reported 47.4% of its advert audience as female. See: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-bolivia> (Accessed 2 January 2021).



persistence of the barriers to a feminist perspective, even within the presumably anti-imperial and progressive Bolivian state.

The pertinence of this group as a case study is brought into focus by Chandra Mohanty's (2003) question<sup>29</sup> regarding what it means for feminism to make anti-globalisation a central part of its politics. The corollary to this question might be whether feminism is part of new social justice movements, described by Sousa Santos as "alternative, counter-hegemonic globalisation characterised by huge political and cultural diversity" (Eschle & Maiguascha 2010:4). Another reason for studying this group, therefore, lies in their participation in the shared effort to subvert prevailing gender hierarchies and reform the global economy; an analysis of what the group says and does may "open up potentially interesting and important lines of inquiry" (Eschle & Maiguascha 2010:5) and provide theoretical insights into the ongoing conversation about the creation of feminist solidarity. I find the way in which the group appears to exemplify the possibility of reclaiming a commons especially interesting as a strategy of resistance that ultimately addresses both macro and micropolitical levels. Here, the idea of the commons,<sup>30</sup> as Federici explains, is understood to offer "a logical and historical alternative to both State and Private Property, the State and the Market, enabling us to reject the fiction that they are mutually exclusive and exhaustive of our political possibilities" (Federici 2012:139). As a self-sustaining project, the activities of the house allow the group members to practise long-term solidarity with their political goals in such a way that there is no separation between their political activism and the reproduction of their daily life. Through the group's creation of

---

<sup>29</sup> See *Under Western Eyes* Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles (2003).

<sup>30</sup> "Commoning" is the "creation of a commons".

their commons — the house — the reciprocal implication of the personal and the political is clearly demonstrated. In this sense, the group comprises a real-life experiment in attempting to clarify “under what conditions the principle of the common/s can become the foundation of an anticapitalist program” (Federici 2012:139), as well as a form of participation in counter-hegemonic antiglobalisation. For these reasons, this case study is a valuable contribution to the global conversation on feminist solidarity building and can assist in understanding the success and/or failure of other feminist emancipatory initiatives.

#### Access to Data and Ethical Considerations

Field work and my access to the group was curtailed by *Mujeres Creando*’s refusal to admit an outsider to their group. I attempted to contact the group when I first decided to research them, but received no reply to any of my communications. I was not surprised by this. The group has been very clear about its anti-academic position, especially in relation to European and North American academic feminisms, whose incursions into global South feminist knowledge production they perceive as self-serving appropriations aimed at boosting career ambitions. The group’s position, in this regard, reflects the continued tensions between feminisms of the global South and global North, and the complications involved in managing these tensions in attempts to create international feminist solidarity.

There are a number of reasons for the divisions between feminisms of the global South and North. From a decolonial feminist perspective, white bourgeois feminism presents a series of problems: first, there is the apparent unwillingness of classical feminist theory to recognise its privileged locus of enunciation within the modern matrix of the coloniality of

gender, the negation of which comes at the cost of burying the point of view of women who enjoy less privilege. Second, classical feminisms are committed to linear ideas of historical progress and of the emancipation of women, tethered to characterisations of the “women problem” based on statistical data of natality, literacy, access to education and participation in the labour market. Connected to these latter assumptions, there is also the typification of poor women of the “Third World” as indigenous, afro-descendant, peasants, tied to subordinating traditions, and therefore in need of state and international help, unlike their counterparts in the so-called “developed world”. Third, decolonial feminisms are opposed to the economic and political dependencies introduced by development policies to the “Third World”, together with the institutionalisation and technocratic takeover of social movements so as to impose a global agenda of rights in service to neocolonial interests.<sup>31</sup> Decolonial feminisms therefore exhibit a marked scepticism toward the salvationist proposals of classical feminisms that, in effect, reproduce the idea of Europe as both beginning and end of history, and of modernity as the ultimate human project. The latter, saturated by its colonial inheritance, is perceived as exacerbating differences in privilege despite cultivating the illusion of serving the common good, demonstrating how hierarchies of power can be perpetuated by movements that identify as liberatory. For this reason, decolonial feminisms dispute the claim that women’s rights, as they have been won in the global North, are the zenith of feminist achievement. This example is indicative of the differing agendas of global South and North feminisms. While the North is perceived as mostly concerned with securing women’s rights within the greater framework of the project of modernity as defined by the

---

<sup>31</sup> These ideas are explored in greater depth in Espinosa-Miñoso (2016).

West, the South is intent on exposing coloniality and racism as intrinsic epistemes within modernity, and wishes to decolonise feminism through the restitution of lost genealogies, the imagination of alternative meanings in community life, and the re-elaboration of universally endorsed utopias.

The reaction of *Mujeres Creando* to feminists from the global North is reflected, not only in decolonial feminisms on the South American continent, but also in other regions of the global South. African feminisms have in common “[...] a shared intellectual commitment to critiquing gender and imperialism coupled with a collective focus on a continental identity shaped by particular relations of subordination in the world economy and global social and cultural practices” (Baderoon & Decker 2018:5). In solidarity with decolonial feminisms elsewhere, African feminisms are suspicious of initiatives from feminists in the global North, especially institutional feminisms attached to discourses of development, such as Women in Development (WID), which are perceived as no more than neoliberal technologies of gender. Just as in other regions of the global South, arguments in favour of efficiency and productivity based on national and global economic indicators do little to alleviate the burden most African women already carry and ultimately serve the neoliberal capitalist agenda. Instead, the tendency in much African-based feminist theory is to base epistemological production “in activist or practice-oriented working environments and life experiences” (Baderoon & Decker 2018:7). Underlying this strategy are the complex dual intentions of resisting interpolation, while conquering space for political expression and human freedoms.

Subjacent to the tensions between feminisms of the South and North is the question of identity politics, which frequently complicates the management of differences between

groups. Here, Kimberlé Crenshaw's important work on intersectionality has revised intellectual inquiry and is "increasingly central to women's studies' methodology" (Smith 2019:46). It provides a more textured view of the ways in which inter- and intragroup differences can be mismanaged, either through simplistic conflation, ignorance or effacement. As Crenshaw discusses in *Mapping the Margins* (1991), the intersectional approach highlights the intersecting patterns of racism and sexism to which women of colour have been subjected and demonstrates how discourses attending only to either racism or sexism ultimately end up marginalising women of colour. Crenshaw's intersectional methodology thus proposes to disrupt the view of race and gender as separable. The concept of intersectionality can be usefully applied to the broader problematic of transnational feminist solidarities, given the way it highlights the question of difference, a minor instance of which is *Mujeres Creando's* refusal to admit an outsider into their group for the purpose of research. In this case, perhaps if the group had been open to dialogue, together we might have been able to "address [the] implications of intersectional approach within the broader scope of contemporary identity politics" (Crenshaw 1991:1245), as it might materialise on an individual level. I can understand, however, why engaging with a European scholar might not be a priority for the group in a context of far more urgent matters.

How do we manage differences in such a way that these do not represent a threat but rather function as a source for creative collaboration? Or as Crenshaw puts it: "The social power in delineating difference need not be the power of domination, it can instead be the source of social empowerment and reconstruction" (1991:1242). She goes on to add that "recognition of difference allows for creation of functional alliances among groups

after differences and common interests have been struggled with and sorted out” (quoted in Smith 2019:58). This latter point, however, remains an unresolved issue, at least as pertaining to the political practice of building solidarities among feminists. On the epistemological and philosophical levels, division and separability persist in feminist projects, as exemplified by the case of *Mujeres Creando* regarding their anti-academic and anti-European stance.

The divisions between feminisms of the global South and North are epitomised by *Mujeres Creando*'s point of view, which is representative of an epistemological shift in counter-hegemonic feminisms situated primarily in the global South. This epistemological shift implies going beyond a critical analysis of the androcentrism and misogyny of the Western project of modernity, as undertaken by classical feminisms, to interrogating its intrinsically racist and Eurocentric character. While the achievements of classical feminism represent an advance within the order of modern liberal democracies, the decolonial feminist perspective uncovers how these achievements entrench the matrix of coloniality by safeguarding the privileges of white bourgeois women to the detriment of the racialised majority. Decolonial feminisms therefore reject the imperatives of the Enlightenment project of modernity, which they regard as unsustainable and as an impediment to the transformation of the social, economic and political order. Instead, there is a commitment to deconstructing centre/periphery relations that condition the production of knowledge, and to stimulating the production and recognition of ideas from the various situated positions of subalternity within the global South. Seen in these terms, the production of knowledge requires theoretical contributions stemming from analyses of the epistemes of coloniality and racism as intrinsic to the project of modernity and its

liberatory initiatives. It also calls for complicity with the movements within autonomous communities that are undertaking decolonisation and restitution of lost interpretative genealogies that allow for other life-meanings and for the re-elaboration of utopic horizons.

There are, therefore, exacting challenges facing different feminisms wishing to achieve solidarity. However, there are some bridges already in place, and others being raised. There are epistemological contributions from global North feminisms that coincide with decolonial aims and that have proved to be productive points of theoretical intersection with global South feminisms. These include French materialist feminism's<sup>32</sup> early questioning of the idea of nature, and of the category of women as a class produced within the man/woman binary, as well as the analysis of heterosexuality as a political regime. Ideas such as the performativity of gender, together with the poststructuralist feminist critique of the essentialism of "women" as a category, and of identity politics, remain relevant. Other important ideas include the critical legacy of postcolonial feminism, with its notion of epistemic violence and of the possibility of a strategic essentialism,<sup>33</sup> and also the critique of colonialism by academic feminisms situated in the global North and the notion of epistemic privilege.<sup>34</sup> To these I would add contributions by other global North feminist theorists who are engaged in a critical revision of feminist theory, contributing methodologies and categories of analysis that complement the decolonial feminist project and disavow global North feminisms as ideologically and politically insular

---

<sup>32</sup> This school of thought is exemplified by thinkers such as Christine Delphy (1984), Monique Wittig (1969), and Colette Guillaumin (1995).

<sup>33</sup> See Spivak (1998).

<sup>34</sup> See Mohanty (2003a; 2003b).

and lacking in reflexivity in relation to global South feminisms. A number of global North feminists, such as Drucilla Cornell, Anne Phillips and Nancy Fraser, actively participate in building bridges of solidarity between feminisms of the global North and South. These feminists are concerned with theorising global feminist solidarity by addressing issues of invisibility and exclusion that have plagued liberal feminisms in the past. While their approaches to the problem vary, their efforts converge on the question of difference and on developing theories of intersectionality that allow for building engagement in feminist cooperative endeavours. Drucilla Cornell (2015), for example, advances the idea of an Ethical Feminism, which, in the South African context, is renamed “Ubuntu feminism”, a project for radical social transformation rooted in solidarity and in the core idea of the fundamental interconnectedness of all humans based on the African principle of the inherent ethical intertwinement of all from birth.<sup>35</sup> Ubuntu feminism furnishes an alternative standpoint from which to re-think interconnection and social bonds.

Anne Phillips in “Democracy and the Representation of Difference” (2000) approaches issues of exclusion through her preoccupation with the representation of difference in democratic political institutions, taking on questions such as how to ensure the political representation of minority social groups without lapsing into essentialising arguments that have traditionally precluded the achievement of solidarity.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, in *Fortunes of Feminism* (2013), Fraser calls for a reinvigoration of feminist radicalism on a global scale in response to the unchecked expansion of neoliberal economic policy. Her emphasis of

---

<sup>35</sup> See Cornell & Marle (2015:n.p.).

<sup>36</sup> See Phillips (2000).



the need to transcend national borders in the struggle for social justice necessarily invokes the question of creating feminist solidarities.

Moreover, feminisms of the global North have addressed the origins of political division from a micropolitical standpoint through an exploration of postfeminist subjectivity. Designating a neoliberal subjectivity, postfeminism can be understood as referring to the process by which “liberal feminism is rendered hollow and transmuted into a mode of neoliberal governmentality” (Rottenberg 2013). In other words, postfeminism implies an evisceration of all political content from the political terms and symbols of mainstream feminism. Postfeminism becomes, like neoliberalism, an attitude of disavowing the social, cultural, political and economic causes of inequality, shifting the focus of feminism from a structural to an individual perspective.

I maintain that a mutually contemplative and accountable epistemic intersection between global South and North feminisms is a potential path to bridging the separation. Resolving differences so as to seal the fissures of separation does not entail facile propositions, but alludes, rather, in the spirit of feminist new materialism, to the possibility of diffractive interaction whereby the tensions inherent in difference are dissolved, rather than difference itself: a vital aspect for more efficient solidarities. In this way, the tensions inherent in identity politics stand the chance of resolution, while acknowledging that such an approach is always a process and not a results-based option.

In light of the above discussion, it becomes understandable that *Mujeres Creando* rejected an appeal from a white, middle-class woman living in Europe. My demographic profile fits neatly into an uncritical category of so-called European academic feminisms.

However, I disagree with the idea that research into the activism of *Mujeres Creando* might consist of a kind of epistemological extractivism. This would certainly be the case if their knowledge production were to be uncritically appropriated and denied due recognition. However, the work of the group is public and, I believe, a rich source of inspiration and learning for those interested in social change. I believe that similarly to the work of countless other feminist movements, the work of *Mujeres Creando* can best achieve its purpose by having as many people as possible engage with it.

As a result of having been barred direct access *Mujeres Creando*, I gained access to the group and their work via their website; newspaper and magazine reports on the group; the group's own publications, and the recordings of conferences and talks available for online viewing. The abundance of online material on and by the group allows for productive and creative engagement with the problems posed by my research question. While I was disappointed not to have the opportunity to carry out fieldwork, I am convinced that my research is valid. Propounding the notion that connection does not require physical contiguity, Barad proposes: "Why should we find the metaphysical individualism of classical physical so "natural" in its obvious applicability to human phenomena, while refusing to consider the possibility that the nonrelational ontology of quantum physics might yield a different set of insights worth considering about human and nonhuman worlds, and the ways that boundary gets made and enforced?" (Barad 2012:18). If, as Barad claims, "the world is an ongoing intra-active engagement, and bodies are among the differential performances of the world's dynamic intra-activity, in an endless reconfiguring of boundaries and properties, including those of spacetime" (Revelles 2020:45), then there is room to believe that differences and similarities are diffracted

through research, engagement and interpretation. Bodies are inseparable from discursive practices: “New materialism suggests that we would not be the same selves outside the field in which we are constituted, and that through the entanglement of our research site and ourselves, we change, and the subjects of our research change as well” (Revelles 2020:46). My analysis of the group finds validity in its transformative effects on me as the researcher and potentially on the reader/s of my research, acting as agentic forces for change and re-making. The research then becomes an instance of intra-action that is vital to the process of how we come to know ourselves and think about the future and social values. As Barad reminds us: “Diffraction queers binaries and calls out for a rethinking of the notions of identity and difference” (Revelles 2020:47).

In summary therefore, I believe that the locus of enunciation is as important as the writer/speaker’s context of origin. The movement from one to the other comprises a life, a trajectory marking our political choices and epistemological interests. My geographical position does not have to determine my philosophical and ethical standpoint. It is in no way my intention to reproduce the mistakes of global North feminisms that have involved invisibilising women in places of lesser enunciative privilege, or even to pretend to represent or speak for them in any way. This thesis represents my journey, a personal ethnography of how my intersection with the work of *Mujeres Creando* has impacted on my personal philosophical and political positionings, and how what I have learnt in doing so may contribute to the discussion on feminist solidarity.

Ethically, as there is no direct contact with humans in my research, and all the material has been made available by the group and/or is already available in the public sphere,

my engagement with the material does not in any way infringe on the rights or dignity of the members of the group.<sup>37</sup>

### Chapter outline

In this project I engage with the question of social change through the lens of feminist solidarity building. My methodology functions centrifugally, with the case study serving as a cardinal point from which to explore and analyse the question of feminist solidarity building within the broader context of neoliberal capitalist hegemony. The specificities of the case study illustrate the dialectic relationship between ideas and actions, through a focus on the interchange between micro and macro resistances aimed at subverting the hegemonic system. Chapter two will serve as a literature and methodology review. In chapter three I will engage in an in-depth exploration of *Mujeres Creando*. Chapter four is concerned with my research into the group's art activism. Finally, in chapter five I will summarise the conclusions to my findings.

---

<sup>37</sup> As attested by the ethical clearance attachment provided in the Appendix.

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

#### Chapter outline

My case study of radical feminist Bolivian group *Mujeres Creando* is centred on my research question: What would feminist activism look like if it addressed both macro and micropolitical factors in a way that led to the formation of anti-capitalist subjectivities and sustainable environments?

Theory that is relevant to this question can be organised along three interconnecting lines of inquiry: first, feminist theory as a comprehensive theory of response to the problems posed by capitalism; second, epistemological resistance to hegemonic modes of knowledge production in decolonial and postcolonial theories; and third, theories of subjectivity formation. I am especially interested in the points at which these different perspectives intersect and are not only mutually enriching but, ultimately, transformative of emancipatory theory and praxis.

This chapter is divided into two parts: first I will undertake a review of the relevant literature. The bodies of theoretical work that are relevant to my research are very large. Therefore, while I have read widely on my topic, I have chosen to mention only a few authors within each school of theory while evaluating their impact on my research. I will proceed with the literature review in the following order:

1. The feminist theories of new materialists such as Karen Barad (2007), Donna Haraway (2016), Stacy Alaimo (2010) and Rosi Braidotti (2015), together with the work of Silvia Federici, are presented as fertile starting points for considering forms

of anti-capitalist resistance. Feminist new materialist theories of posthuman subjectivities and the development of an environmental ethics serve as conceptual navigational tools that might adequately respond to our fractured and contradictory times. Silvia Federici's work explores the practical application of the feminist guiding principle that the personal is political. Her work on the commons looks into how feminist principles should result in radically transformed socio-political structures, combining in interesting ways with feminist new materialist relational ontology.

2. Postcolonial and decolonial theories are sources of epistemological resistance that focus on power relations within the political economy of knowledge production in ways that illuminate the inseparability of discourse and praxis, and the seminal influence of economies of knowledge on the formation of resistant subjectivities. I will discuss the work of postcolonial feminists Chandra Mohanty (2003), Arundhati Roy (2019) and Vandana Shiva (2016/2018), as well as the work of decolonial theorists Walter D. Mignolo (2011), Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007) and María Lugones (2007). There are a number of decolonial and feminist concepts that are mutually enriching for the development of a more nuanced understanding of the diverse ways in which, under capitalism, society remains organised according to a divisive and deeply repressive colonial logic, whose practical consequences are directly contrary to authentically democratic aims.
3. The question of subjectivity formation is prominent in Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff's (2013) work on postfeminist subjectivities, while the work of Jorge Alemán (2015) and Suely Rolnik (2007/2011) explores the psychology of the

processes of subjectivity formation, and how these are deeply implicated in struggles for hegemony over the means, interpretation and communication of social meanings.

4. On the subject of solidarity, Judith Butler's (2020) philosophy of precarity and Melanie Klein's (1997) understanding of sympathy and rage provide a theoretical framework for apprehending relations with the other.

The literature review will be followed by an explanation of my methodology in conducting research for this thesis.

### Feminist Theory

Feminist new materialisms partake of themes common to the distinctive critical projects making up the new materialist theoretical current in the humanities and social sciences. Continuities among the different approaches include the posthumanist concept of non-human matter as agentic, with the capacity for self-organisation. In contrast to traditional characterisations of matter as uniform and inert, new materialism sees it as an active force, both ductile and productive, providing a formative impetus to human life and experience. This new attitude toward matter and processes of materialisation signals a reengagement with the material realities of daily life, and renewed questioning of the place of embodied human subjects in a material world, as well as the ways in which the material environment is generated and depleted. New materialist philosophies are a response to the perceived limitations of the linguistic turn<sup>38</sup> and social constructivist

---

<sup>38</sup> The linguistic turn, in critical theory, refers to a change in emphasis in the humanities and social sciences based on the perception of the relationship of language to reality. Proponents of the linguistic turn argue that reality is never independent of or prior to our textual representations of it.

frameworks that prioritise language and representations, whose explorations of human and non-human realities are circumscribed by the relative dexterity of available ideological and discursive schemas. New materialist perspectives have arisen in response to pressing contemporary economic, environmental, social, and geopolitical challenges.

The complexity of present-day biopolitics and the political economy require alternative understandings of nature and of social and political relationships. Propelled by thinkers such as Karen Barad, Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, and Stacy Alaimo, among others, feminist new materialisms comprise a substantial engagement with processes of materialisation and their entanglement with discursive practices, and aim at the development of more complex understandings of both the human and non-human. Poised to diverge from theories that isolate language and discourse from matter, feminist new materialisms face the challenge of forging “new approaches that can retain the incisive and illuminating force of poststructuralist critique and, at the same time, open out lines of questioning so as to allow for the significance, agency, and substance of materiality” (Alaimo 2010:70). Continued discursive critique enables politically-charged theoretical practices, such as feminist new materialisms, to trace the representations that are historically founded in prejudicial assumptions of race, gender and class, and how these underpin social, political, economic, and environmental policies.



### *Karen Barad's feminist new materialism*

New materialism's resignification of matter reflects a concern with the implications for planetary life of the widespread disregard for non-human nature. As Karen Barad insists,

“[Matter] is not little bits of nature, or a blank slate, surface, or site passively awaiting signification, nor is it an uncontested ground for scientific, feminist, or Marxist theories. Matter is not immutable or passive. Nor is it a fixed support, location, referent, or source of sustainability for discourse” (Barad 2007:151).

Despite such caveats, non-human materiality continues to suffer deplorably at the hands of humans, as the current climate crisis attests. Barad wrestles with the “the complex interactions between the natural and the social, the discursive and the material, the sciences and the humanities” (Alaimo 2010:71), while forging a model of materiality that aspires to demonstrate how the material forces of nature interact with and impact social systems. Barad's theory of agential realism entails important ethical and political implications: acknowledging the agency of non-human matter makes it ethically impossible to continue to perceive nature as an exploitable passive resource. The result is an intra-active<sup>39</sup> posthuman ethics:

Intra-acting responsibly as part of the world means taking account of the entangled phenomena that are intrinsic to the world's vitality and being responsive to the possibilities that might help us and it flourish. Meeting each moment, being alive to the possibilities of becoming, is an ethical call,

---

<sup>39</sup> Karen Barad's intra-action refers to “the mutual constitution of entangled agencies” (Barad 2007:33). Through intra-action, worlds are (re)configured in diffraction patterns.

an invitation that is written into the very matter of all being and becoming.

(Barad 2007:72)

Barad's concept of intra-action, which refers to the mutual constitution and entangled agency of human and non-human matter, decentres the notion of agency as solely anthropomorphic. Instead, entities only and always intra-act, their ability for action emerging from their mutually constitutive encounters and never from outside these meetings. The concept of intra-action highlights the irreducible inter-dependence of all things, which potentially could lead to imagining alternative, sustainable political economies. In this way, Barad proposes a new narrative that can replace the hegemonic view of the world that has proved so deleterious to the wellbeing of the planet. Her notion of the ontological inseparability of all matter implies also abandoning subject/object hierarchies, thereby interrogating the power imbalances that lie subjacent to a dichotomous worldview.

### *Donna Haraway's situated storytelling*

The importance of narratives conveyed by Barad's work and how these condition how we think about the world and its associated policies and practices is underscored by Donna Haraway in *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016):

It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories.

(Haraway 2016:12)

For Haraway, an integral part of the craft of storytelling is learning to listen to stories other than our own. The collision of different narratives is about phenomena interacting, about understanding the interconnectivity of everything. Borrowing from the Baradian idiom, storytelling, when conceived as a session of play, allows for the intra-active emergence of patterns. Each session of play recombines the elements of the story in different ways, with some patterns surviving and others not. The possibilities for combining and not combining elements, arising from the act of storytelling, destabilise established narratives by calling into question the notion of tightly determined histories. By storying otherwise<sup>40</sup> we are able to shift paradigms and rebel against hegemonic ways of thinking and doing through entangled processes of materialisation and discursive practices.

To Haraway, storytelling can be a means of earthly survival, a form of response to the Anthropocene crisis.<sup>41</sup> In November 2017, over 15,000 scientists signed a “Second Notice” to humanity alerting the world to the environmental devastation caused by industrialisation in our current era. The havoc wrought by modern industrialisation includes catastrophic climate change and the onset of the sixth mass extinction “wherein many current life forms could be annihilated or at least committed to extinction by the end of this century” (McKagen 2018:1). In opposition to western ideas of modernity and progress, whose positioning of the white European male at the centre of all things entailed the creation of hierarchies that kept humans separate from nature, Haraway, in the new materialist vein, proposes the more radical and visionary project of multispecies

---

<sup>40</sup> This expression is taken from the documentary *Donna Haraway: Story telling for earthly survival* (2020). Available at: <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/donnaharawaystorytelling>. (Accessed 3 April 2021).

<sup>41</sup> The Anthropocene, originally labelled by atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen in a 2002 article in *Nature* magazine, refers to a geological epoch when humans have a lasting and negative impact on planetary systems through the industrial revolution and accelerated technological progress.

collaboration. Haraway's focus on storytelling is grounded in her understanding of the material nature of the act of thinking, and the power, scope and impact of narratives, Haraway's approach to storytelling is deeply sensitive to questions of who owns stories, who has access to these stories, who is in a position to tell these stories and who may die because of them. This notion is strongly developed in decolonial theory, which I will discuss later in this chapter. In this sense, storytelling is akin to worlding, a bringing into being of existence that acknowledges the immutable connectivity of all things. Haraway's multispecies collaboration narrative advocates for a more collaborative understanding of planetary life, in which the lost voices of all that is excluded by the western classification of the human are recognised. Multispecies collaboration demands that the imbricated nature of humans and non-humans is acknowledged, thereby thwarting the notion of the ontological exceptionalism of humans. In this way, there is room for the development of more inclusive, ethical relationships and the creation of narratives leading to more socially and environmentally just multispecies communities.

In creating an alternative to the western narrative of modernity and progress, there is hope for resignifying and reconstructing local and regional domains. The historical narratives of modernity, entangled as they have been with the European imperial projects of expansion through colonisation, were dependent on practices of violence and repression whose legacy continues to shape modern life. While Haraway briefly explores the conditions underlying the myth of modernity, the work of Rosi Braidotti fully

deconstructs the western ideal of the human subject and replaces it with the proposition of a posthuman subject.<sup>42</sup>

### *Rosi Braidotti's posthuman philosophy*

Rosi Braidotti's work theorises the subject's relation to the world by going beyond dialectical and oppositional humanist models of thought. This process has led her to write seminal work on the posthuman condition. Braidotti identifies two pivotal aspects of posthumanism. The first is the critique of humanism. According to traditional European humanism, the human serves as a marker of access to privileges, entitlements, visibility, values, powers, and rights. Posthuman critique raises crucial questions about the limits of humanism and the humanist ideal of man as representative of all humans, exposing the exclusion of sexualised, racialised and naturalised others from this ideal and their disqualification as subjects of knowledge under this model.

The other aspect of posthuman philosophy is the critique of anthropocentrism; it questions human exceptionalism and the assumption that all natural entities and species are exploitable, accessible, and usable. Anti-anthropocentrism criticises species hierarchy and promotes ecological justice. Braidotti argues that we are currently in the midst of a historical convergence of the fourth Industrial Revolution and the sixth Great Extinction (the Anthropocene), the complexity of which demands subtle power analyses so as to make sense of the reorganisation of the human as a result of this monumental

---

<sup>42</sup> Braidotti's work (2013) on the posthuman subject can be viewed as extending on Haraway's 1985 essay "A Cyborg Manifesto" in which the figure of the cyborg is used to deconstruct the boundaries between the human and the animal, and the animal and the machine.

convergence. The question she poses is how we can become posthuman subjects worthy of our times, without lapsing into fatalism or utopian naivety. Braidotti proposes that we work on becoming multi-layered nomadic, technologically-mediated entities, who relate to both human and non-human agents and are animated by affirmative ethics. By nomadic, Braidotti means subjects as heterogeneous, relational assemblages, in process of becoming and in connection with a variety of other beings.

It is not possible fully to explore the subtlety and complexity of Braidotti's work within the limits of this literature review. In summary, she takes the binary logic of European universalism to task, along with the teleological vision of progress in the humanist project, thereby redefining feminism's relationship to humanism. In this way, she introduces a more complex vision of feminist political subjectivity, defined by an expanded relational vision of the self "premised on the idea that matter, including human embodiment, is intelligent and self-organizing and not dialectically opposed to culture, nor to technological mediation but rather continuous with them" (Disch & Hawkesworth 2015:681). This espousal of monistic vitalist ontologies, which embrace the notion of a nature/culture continuum, implies a shift in perspective that has methodological and political consequences. Its dissolution of the self/other dialectic and of the notion of difference as pejorative positions feminist theory at the centre of the reconfiguration of knowledge production by disengaging from the dominant models of subject formation, thus providing alternative grounds for the formation of the self. The self Braidotti wishes human beings to become is a "posthuman feminist knowing subject [...] a complex assemblage of human and non-human, planetary and cosmic" (Grusin 2017:29), whose relational capacity is not limited to the human species, but includes all non-anthropomorphic forms.

Braidotti is consistently focused on subjectivity formation, which in her work constitutes a potential line of flight<sup>43</sup> from capitalist machinery. Dialectical oppositions such as man/woman, black/white, and heterosexual/homosexual identify difference negatively in oppositional or pejorative terms. This dialectical framing signals a deficit in representation in the structural transformations of subjectivity, which lead to the repeated consolidation of the social, cultural and political spheres. It also restricts the relational field to dualistically defined fields of interrelation. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, Braidotti suggests as an alternative a monistic and vital-materialist analysis of subjectivity formation that foregrounds its relational, emergent and affirmative elements. In Braidotti's view, therefore, a vital-materialist politics equates ethical good with radical relationality aimed at affirmative empowerment. The ideal is to be able to enter into modes of relation with multiple others — both human and non-human — taking into account our connection to the environment and questions of ecological sustainability. The ethical instance is thus not restricted to the limits of human otherness, but is opened up to non-human others, introducing an eco-philosophical dimension that acknowledges the multiple ecologies in the nature-culture continuum. In this way, “oppositional consciousness is replaced by affirmative praxis; political subjectivity is a process or assemblage that actualizes this ethical propensity” (Braidotti & Dolphijn 2015:25).

---

<sup>43</sup> The expression “line of flight” derives from DeleuzoGuattarian philosophy, in which human bodies, along with all other material, social and abstract entities, are regarded as relational, possessing no determinate ontological status or integrity prior to participation in assemblages with other similarly contingent entities through their capacity to affect or be affected (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:88). These capacities, labelled as affects by Deleuze (1988:101), can lead the body to experience a “line of flight”, a transition into an alternative physical, psychological or cultural state.

In addition to proposing alternative parameters of thought that transcend dialectical thinking and allow for the imagining of affirmative and radically relational subjectivities, Braidotti's process ontology, through creative affirmation and the rejection of the dialectical scheme, also implies a temporal shift. Thus the conditions for change are not tied to the present through negation, but, rather, to affirmative praxis projects that nurture empowering relations and make alternative futures possible.

*Stacy Alaimo's concept of transcorporeality*

Similarly to Braidotti's idea of the posthuman subject, Stacy Alaimo's concept of transcorporeality, which she develops in *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (2010), aims to provide an alternative to the western idea of a transhistorical man acting upon the inert external world. Influenced by Barad's notion of intra-action, transcorporeality advances the idea of all embodied creatures as enmeshed with, crossed and transformed by a vital material world. In line with feminist new materialist thought, transcorporeality, through its inclusion of all living beings, dismantles western human exceptionalism as humans are traversed by material interchanges. In this way, transcorporeality can serve as the preface to a transcorporeal ethics and politics in which the transcorporeal subject, grounded in its entanglement with social, political, economic, technological, biological and other systems, safeguards environmental health and environmental justice. Transcorporeality therefore entails a rethinking of hegemonic ontologies and epistemologies to focus on the radical interrelatedness of all things, where the routine everyday activities of humans, such as the purchase of clothes or food, have wide-reaching impacts on the health of the planet. From the perspective of transcorporeality, detachment from the well-being of the environment is only a fantasy.



In summary, as seen in the work of the theorists discussed above, feminist new materialisms propose a vital materialism, intended to cultivate a sense of connection between the human and the non-human that reconfigures ontological and epistemological production in less anthropocentric and more ecological terms. New materialisms also address the erstwhile dominance of social constructivism, where the material world is reduced to its mediation through language. In this way, new materialisms “invite us to revisit longstanding and foundational questions about the nature and scope of language, meaning, subjectivity, and how these relate to questions of ontology, ethics, and political intervention” (Christopher *et al*: 2016:265). Rejecting the separation between the material world and social constructs opens up the possibility of exploring the effects of each on the other, and comprises the basis for an eco-philosophy that can be used for research seeking to change the world for the better. As Braidotti sees it, the task of feminism, therefore, is to disengage consciousness-raising from the logic of negativity and connect it to creative affirmation.<sup>44</sup> Actualising affirmation as an ethical practice involves multiple micropolitical practices of daily activism and interventions in the world. This view is at once philosophical and practical. Practices of empowering affirmation require daily activism. The practical implementation of these ideas can find inspiration in the work of Silvia Federici as she explores what these practices could look like from a sustainable perspective.

---

<sup>44</sup> Braidotti’s (2018) use of the term “affirmation” does not refer to any sort of “New Age” practice of affirming prosperity, health, etc. Rather, affirmation refers to outward-facing scholarship that eschews passive acceptance of circumstance and instead practices transformative and critical thinking, embracing otherness and diversity.

### *Silvia Federici's notion of the commons*

In *Revolution at Point Zero* (2012), Federici explores points of urgent concern for feminism today. Two points of particular relevance for anti-capitalist feminist initiatives are: Federici's view on neoliberal capitalism as constituting a new form of primitive accumulation and the ways in which this new global economy is especially exploitative of women; and her work on wages for housework. Federici highlights the centrality of social reproduction in the economic and political system and the enormous amount of (often unpaid) work done by women that this involves. Her exploration of alternatives to the ways in which wage relations structure daily life is fertile ground for imagining new forms of political organisation that can shape alternative political subjectivities.

Federici understands the globalisation of the world economy as a restructuring of class relations. She believes that a new colonial order has emerged, in which the populations of Africa, Asia and Latin America comprise the formation of a new world proletariat without access to means for their daily sustenance. The politics of economic liberalisation, as epitomised by the massive cuts in government spending on social services, repeated currency devaluations, wage freezes and continued land expropriation for the commercialisation of agriculture — the blueprints of the structural adjustment programs endorsed by the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) — have created the paradoxical situation where populations in the global South are dependent on monetary relations for their survival, yet have no access to monetary income. The crisis of social reproduction that this global economic restructuring has instituted is largely borne by women, who now increasingly bear the burden of ensuring the reproduction of the workforce. Very often, the women of the global South spearhead grassroots

movements that “demand the return of the expropriated lands, the nonpayment of the foreign debt, and the abolition of structural adjustment and land privatization” (Federici 2012:75). In other words, it is the women of these regions who most vehemently oppose capitalist measures that undermine their livelihood and autonomy, and who have traditionally supported non-capitalist use of the land, forests, and water<sup>45</sup> against the capitalist drive to commercialise natural resources. Because of their role in protecting nature and their means of subsistence from the predations of capitalism, Federici sees global capitalism as a war against women, who bear the brunt of its devastating consequences.

Federici argues that, for feminist movements, a fundamental step towards achieving solidarity is recognising how capitalist globalisation has led “to the emergence of a new colonial order and created new divisions among women that feminists must oppose” (Federici 2012:65). The power imbalance among women is visible, for example, in the role North American and European women play in non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which, in compliance with the dictates of the WB and IMF, act as modern-day missionary outposts, whose purpose is to harness and supervise the reproductive work of local women; to provide training and instill attitudes that will ensure integration into the global capitalist order. From this perspective, the feminist project adopts a reductive conception of equality as correlated with obtaining equal status with men in the labour market and transforming women’s lives to suit capitalist notions of productivity, an

---

<sup>45</sup> The link between patriarchy and environmental degradation is explored from an ecofeminist perspective by Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva in their book *Ecofeminism (Critique.Influence.Change)* (1993). Shiva has also written an important book entitled *Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution and Profit*, which is directly concerned with water as a resource.

approach Federici rightly sees as doomed to failure. The institutionalisation of feminism, as in the case of the aforementioned NGOs, neutralises feminist politics through an ideological alignment with the neoliberal agenda. In effect, as Federici surmises, “on the basis of this situation it should be possible to see that any feminist project exclusively concerned with sexual discrimination and failing to place the ‘feminization of poverty’<sup>46</sup> in the context of the advance of capitalist relations, is condemned to irrelevance and co-optation” (Federici 2012:65). Any feminist project that wishes to address inequality must therefore begin by recognising how a global economy based on accumulation and patriarchy comprises the structural and ideological framework of women’s lives today.

Federici’s work exposes the extent to which capitalism is reliant on women for the daily reproduction of the workforce. The demystification of the role of housework under capitalism provides a fertile point from which feminists can organise politically and imagine alternatives to the economic and political status quo. As the foundation of every economic and political system, the reproduction of human beings is potentially a means for undermining hegemonic capitalist relations and reorganising society on terms other than those of production. One way in which such a transformation may take place is through the introduction and eventual transnational dissemination of commoning practices. These are “new collective forms of reproduction, confronting the divisions that have been planted among us along the lines of race, gender, age, and geographical location” (Federici 2012:12). In effect, Federici’s suggestion is that commoning practices,

---

<sup>46</sup> Naila Kabeer (2008) interrogates the feminisation of poverty and its incorporation into anti-poverty programmes. Her work explores how women’s empowerment is to be achieved from an institutional perspective, such as how the conceptual and methodological basis of the feminisation of poverty construct can be sharpened in relation to the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals.

which might be interpreted as the setting up of alternative communities where the reproduction of daily life is reorganised according to principles of equality and well-being rather than monetary relations or individual profit, comprise the groundwork, not only for new political realities, but also for the emergence of new political subjectivities. In this respect, commoning addresses feminism's utopian call for social change as well as furnishing concrete daily strategies that, in practice, run counter to the general assumption of capitalism's immutability.

An interesting aspect of Federici's thesis on commoning involves the way commoning allows for the development of relational bonds arising from an alternative social organisation. The alternative space provided by the commons allows people to perform daily activism through diverse social organisations, giving rise to affirmative relational bonds. Concomitantly, alternative knowledge production and epistemological rebellion are also enacted. The commons is a space apart in which a community is organised to reflect and enhance what Braidotti (2013) terms the feminist posthuman subject, where subjects are bound together, not by loss, guilt, debt or vulnerability, but rather by an acknowledgement of mutual relatedness. The commons represents an experimental approach to changing our collective modes of relating and a space to mobilise our desires and imagination differently, manifested in actual material relations.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> The Pachamama community in Costa Rica, founded in 1999 by Tyohar and fellow travellers, is an alternative off-grid village, and is one example of a functioning commons. See: [www.pachamama.com](http://www.pachamama.com). There are a number of these around the world. See : <https://www.thesmartsurvivalist.com/off-grid-communities-around-the-world-the-complete-guide/>. (Accessed 25 October 2021).

## Postcolonial feminism

In line with the idea of the need for discursive rebellion, postcolonial theory has resisted colonial power and discourses that still exert an influence on non-western cultures. Feminist postcolonial theory, in particular, has been preoccupied with the representation of women in the global South by hegemonic western discourses. Here there is a focus on the construction of gender differences or the representation of gender, such as in the work of Oyěwùmí and Lugones, as I already discussed in chapter one. A primary concern in postcolonial feminism has been the relationship between white feminists and feminists of colour.

### *Chandra Talpade Mohanty's Under Western Eyes*

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes' Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles" (2003) is an emblematic work in its critique of western feminist scholarship on Third World women and the discursive colonisation of the lives and struggles of women in the global South. Through her examination of the power-knowledge nexus in feminist cross-cultural scholarship, Mohanty's intention in this iconic essay is to expose the falsity of the presumed universality of Eurocentric philosophy and its basis in masculinist assumptions, as well as its attendant methodologies. Implied in this critique is Mohanty's opposition to the hegemony of neoliberalism and the naturalisation of capitalist values wherein difference and multiculturalism are appropriated for the purposes of commodification and consumption. The particular location of women in the global South highlights the politics of knowledge production and the power relations invested therein.

In *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (2003), Mohanty delves into postcolonial feminism and looks for ways to subvert the discursive effects of western ideology on people of the global South, and on women and girls in particular. She directs her energy towards the logistics of dissolving the barriers between feminisms of the South and North. She calls for a transnational feminist politics, which points toward a reconciliation or a search for common ground between feminisms of the South and North. This latter objective is embodied in Mohanty's repeated call for solidarity, which, together with decolonisation and anti-capitalist critique, compose her particular tripartite strategy for realising a vision of social and political transformation. Obviously taking into account the troubled ongoing relations between feminisms of the global South and North, and the persistence of what she understands, in "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (1984), as colonising and privileged feminisms from the U.S. and Europe, Mohanty looks for ways to build transnational feminist solidarity by demonstrating how the particular relates to the universal through case studies of women's work (for example), in order to establish common contexts of struggle. Implicit in this course of action is understanding difference and diversity as "central values to the practice of solidarity" (Mohanty 2003:7), as opposed to facile notions of a global sisterhood, or of "an enforced commonality of oppression" (Mohanty 2003:7). Mohanty claims as one of her central commitments the building of connections between feminist scholarship and political organising. Solidarity foregrounds communities of people who have chosen to work and fight together. Identity thus plays a central role in achieving solidarity and practising anti-capitalist critique. As Mohanty puts it, identity is a source of knowledge and a basis for progressive mobilisation.

This particular concept of identity is linked to another of Mohanty's central values: decolonisation. Mohanty writes: "Decolonisation involves profound transformations of self, community and governance structures" and "it can only be engaged through active withdrawal of consent and resistance to structures of psychic and social domination" (2003 7). The concept of decolonisation, as Mohanty deploys it, implies an extensive and radical transformation of capitalism. For Mohanty, capitalism is "seriously incompatible with feminist visions of social and economic justice" (2003:9). Consequently, the feminist struggle must go beyond an inflection of gender concerns in governing institutions so as to secure their democratisation and legitimacy. Mohanty's critique draws on postcolonial theory with its emphasis on anti-imperialism, and in particular on postcolonial feminism's rejection of liberal feminist measures. She is arguing for a radical feminist transformative project. She moves from specifying what she means by third world feminism to a vision of common contexts of struggle. She looks for ways to establish a common political project with white feminism, believing that the starting point for such an inclusive transformative project must reside in the experiential and epistemic realities of marginalised communities of women: that is, in the lives of "poor women of all colours in affluent and neocolonial nations; women of third world/South or the Two-Thirds World" (Mohanty 2003:231). From this point, feminists can read up the ladder of privilege and demystify capitalism in its racial and sexual dimensions, and, through the micropolitics of resistance of these communities of women, the macropolitics of global restructuring are illuminated. Mohanty's engagement with the development and eventual deployment of what she terms a "feminist comparative solidarity model" of analysis underpins her belief that inadequate analytic frames "engender ineffective political action and strategizing for



social transformation” (2003:236). The main thrust of her argument is, therefore, the need to develop an inclusive pedagogical model that enables cross-cultural scholarship and activism. Mohanty’s argument consistently alludes to the power relations of knowledge production, the need to demystify and democratise the analytical and conceptual hegemonies that structure thought, perception and action. Mohanty identifies, not only the academy, but also the growing field of social justice movements as a locus for the production of feminist knowledges (which should link directly to activism outside the academy). Her concern is that, while feminist scholars recognise that the “reorganisation of gender is part of global strategy of capitalism” (Mohanty 2003:245), and while girls and women are central to the labour of global capital, anti-globalisation work does not seem to draw on feminist analysis or strategies. Mohanty clearly recognises that an alliance between feminist and social justice movements will be necessary if feminism hopes to gain a real political foothold. She leaves the following question pending: “What does it mean to make anti-globalization a key factor for feminist theory and struggle?” (Mohanty 2003:237). If an effective analytical model requires a conceptualisation of justice in transnational terms, this implies that anti-globalisation necessarily plays a part in strategies of resistance to capitalism.

#### *Vandana Shiva’s decolonial ecofeminism*

Postcolonial feminist Vandana Shiva has dedicated much of her life to exposing the gross inequalities and planetary ruin that arise from capitalist globalisation. Similar to the theorists I have discussed so far, Shiva is concerned with the power relations implicit in knowledge production and the practical consequences of the existing imbalances. In *Oneness vs the 1%: Shattering Illusions, Seeding Freedoms* (2020), she is critical of

current dominant models of knowledge of wealth creation and representative democracy, which, as she brings to light through her work, violate planetary integrity, the rights of species and human rights and freedoms. In order to make a stand against what she terms the “fake freedoms of fair trade, corporate rule, algorithm-run democracy and consumerism” (Shiva & Shiva 2018:7), Shiva insists that we harness our intelligence and creativity against the illusion of linear progress promulgated by the dominant model of thinking, whose real-life consequences are destroying the earth’s capacity to sustain life. In opposition to capitalist modes of thought, through her work Shiva demonstrates that oneness is the source of our existence. In her understanding, human freedom is inseparable from the freedom of the earth on which life is intelligent and self-organised: “every cell, every amoeba, every being is autonomous and autopoietic, self-organized, and [...] dynamic and evolving, interconnected and non-separable” (Shiva & Shiva 2018:12). Her emphasis on the interconnectedness of all planetary life resonates with feminist new materialism in its conception of the entanglement of all life forms, a viewpoint Shiva underscores with her claim that freedom is not atomistic but relational and interconnected.

In *Biopiracy – The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (2016), Shiva returns to the question of economic inequality and polarisation caused by the dominant models of knowledge through an exploration of the ethical, ecological and economic consequences of patents on life. This book is a study of the effects of big biotech companies who have declared seed to be their invention and thus their patented property. Shiva discusses how global intellectual property and patent laws have been shaped by corporations like Monsanto to prevent farmers legally from saving or sharing seed. Against this manipulation of

intellectual property and patent laws and the perverse underlying notions of the ownership of life and control over life essentials such as seed and medicine, Shiva argues in support of an “intellectual commons, a public domain where biodiversity is not commodified” (Shiva 2016:48).

By framing capitalism as another form of colonial exploitation and extraction, Shiva’s body of work highlights just how crucial the decolonisation of knowledge is as a form of anti-capitalist resistance.

#### *Arundhati Roy’s critique of neoliberalism*

Working in a similar vein, based on similar postcolonial principles, Arundhati Roy has protested against “capitalist globalization, imperialist war, military occupation, and emergent forms of ultra-nationalism, especially as it relates to Subcontinental politics” (Maehofer 2015:119) for over a decade. Roy also explores the machinations of cultural hegemony, similarly to Shiva, pointing to different ways in which discursive hegemony is exercised by certain sectors affiliated with the ruling classes, such as NGOs. She argues that NGOs actually work to consolidate capitalist ideology, despite appearing to disconnect from state power, by commodifying the idea of social justice “as a way of limiting forms of dissent and channeling resistance through the narrow prism of human rights discourse” (Maehofer 2015:120).

In *My Seditious Heart* (2019), a collection of essays written over a period of twenty years, Roy discusses “nuclear weapons, dams, privatization, caste, class, war, imperialism, militarism, terrorist strikes, government-backed massacres and the rise of Hindu nationalism” (2019:13). The common thread running through all of these phenomena is

capitalist greed, which jeopardizes all forms of life on this planet. Roy is uneasy about what the future will bring and issues a warning for those who wish to resist capitalist globalisation: she says such activists should arm themselves with the tools required to “think about the unthinkable” (Roy 2019:13).

The postcolonial feminists I have mentioned (Mohanty, Shiva and Roy) are united in their common call for alternative epistemologies that will allow for different world views. The urgency of epistemological rebellion is equally pronounced in decolonial theory.

### Decolonial Theory

Decolonial theory is concerned with an analysis of the colonial inheritance and the patterns of domination whose configuration responded to the idea of race and had far-reaching implications for the historical perspective on the relations between diverse types of humans. These relations were established in South America in the sixteenth century, as discussed by Peruvian Anibal Quijano.<sup>48</sup> Decolonial theory, following Quijano, has been occupied with the history of the formation of the colonality of power, as a starting point from which to understand the historical transformations in the world in the centuries since colonisation. In this way, the theory arose that modernity began in 1492 as a new form of world organisation, based on European subjectivity that awarded itself a superior civilisational position compared with the colonised other. Decolonial theory deconstructs a series of colonial ideas, which can be briefly enumerated as follows: the construction of

---

<sup>48</sup> Aníbal Quijano (17 November 1930-31 May 2018) was a Peruvian sociologist best known for developing the concept of the “coloniality of power”. His work has been particularly influential in decolonial studies.

the image of the colonised as not quite human; the dualism of civilisation and barbarity, in which the colonised other was labelled as barbarian; the mechanisms of racial stratification imposed on the colonised territories; the establishment of a European scientific rationality that invalidated other non-Western epistemes; and the sex-gender construction that invisibilised the existing diversity in the pre-colonial populations through the imposition of heterosexual norms. All of these factors came to characterise the decolonial debate in terms of the coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge, coloniality of being and coloniality of gender, as made evident in the discussion of specific decolonial theorists below.

*Maria Lugones's coloniality of gender*

Here it is important to highlight the incorporation of the Argentinian feminist philosopher Maria Lugones in the nucleus of decolonial thought, which includes theorists such as Walter D. Mignolo, Anibal Quijano, and Nelson Maldonado-Torres. Lugones integrated into decolonial debate the question of the coloniality of gender. As discussed in chapter one, her argument about the coloniality of gender theorises how colonisation's most significant classification was the division between human and non-human. The invention of gender coincides with the supremacy of the white male, who possesses rights over women in his own group; however, this is a relationship reserved for humans. The white woman, as partner and reproducer of the race and capital, is human. On the other hand, a natural order in service of white supremacy was imposed on people of the non-western world, so it was impossible to assert that the gender system functioned for the colonised. In this way, for Lugones, race, gender and sexuality are co-constitutive categories of the modern colonial episteme and cannot be thought of separately or outside this episteme.

Lugones' work functions at the intersection between decolonial thought and feminist theory. This intersection has generated political-epistemological displacements in its critical analysis of modern heteropatriarchy through its intrinsic connection between racism, capitalism and coloniality. Feminist theory enriches decolonial thought with its critical reflections on gender, beginning with the question of the pertinence of the category of gender for the analysis of the dynamics we wish to understand. If the colonial project was based on the imposition of ways of thinking and of producing knowledge, to the detriment of multiple other forms of knowing, with profound consequences, such as the coloniality of thought, decolonial feminism recognises the existence of an epistemological struggle that is vital to decolonisation and emancipation from Eurocentric knowledge. This epistemic struggle mirrors the postcolonial complaint about feminisms of the global North and their discursive colonisation of global South women's lives. Specifically, decolonial feminist criticisms of Eurocentric feminism include: the dependency on feminist thought produced in the global North and the difficulties for the production of a Latin American theory, originating in Latin America, and attentive to the particularity of the feminist Latin American subject; and the institutionalisation of feminism, its complicity with the international cooperation agenda and the bureaucratic state logic of liberal democracies (Correal *et al* 2014:20).

Decolonial feminists of the global South are committed to the development of independent thought and a politics that confronts both the discourse and the programme for women in the international development agenda. In search of contributions to other possible worlds in the global South, decolonial feminists prefer a combination of theory and praxis, combining activism or the support of activist movements with the production of thought.

In terms of knowledge, there is a preference for the critical anti-racist and decolonial perspectives of thinkers and activists in positions of subalternity, or whose political commitment positions them with other marginalised groups, combined with a suspicion of positions of enunciative privilege.

Decolonial feminists have a commitment to class and race justice, and draw knowledge and inspiration from indigenous and afro-descendant movements, finding in them new sources of knowledge, experiences, interpretations of oppression and proposals for a good life (Correal *et al*/2014:27). These voices dispute classical white bourgeois feminism and its interpretation of oppression. Significantly, decolonial feminism radically questions the hegemonic Western feminist version of the history of women conquering their rights as having started in Europe and the United States and later extended to the rest of the world. This interpretation sets up Western feminism as a progressive universal phenomenon, whose salvationist undertones are vehemently opposed by decolonial feminism. This explains the need for a feminism that is nurtured by theoretical understandings of the coloniality of race and the perversity of the colonial inheritance. Coloniality has marked the global South and the bodies and lives of its people as well as many of its feminist projects; it has resulted in ideological, political and material dependency. Decolonial feminism places at its centre analyses of race, class and other forms of social classification that function as elements of symbolic and material exclusion, and rejects models of political and social organisation proposed by the modern Eurocentric programme. This feminism is decolonial, anti-racist, and counterhegemonic, and precisely the kind of feminism that is most relevant for my discussion of *Mujeres Creando*.

### *Walter Mignolo's concept of delinking*

The act of delinking is an important step in the decolonisation of thought through practices of critical deconstruction because, as decolonial theory demonstrates, capitalism is rooted in colonialism. These ideas are well developed in decolonial theory, whose basic premise is that coloniality is constitutive of modernity, and that the ideas of progress underlying modernity — as a European grand narrative — are dependent on the classification of certain populations as disposable, and on the normalisation of their disposability. As Walter Mignolo (2010) explains, whereas historically coloniality was imposed through strategies such as the slave trade, nowadays coloniality is maintained through financial manipulation and the management of public opinion to secure the belief in modernity as a saving grace. In opposition, decoloniality offers a code for being, doing, feeling and thinking that disobeys the cognitive and aesthetic codes of modernity, and revives the singularity of local histories over homogeneous globalised techniques. The focus on local histories echoes Jean-François Lyotard's postmodern preference for "*les petits récits*", local narratives deriving from what could be described as a pragmatics of knowledge, over "grand narratives"<sup>49</sup> that function to normalise social inequalities and injustices in service to global powers. The practice of decoloniality, carried out through theoretical reflection on the geopolitics of knowledge and epistemic and political delinking, therefore

---

<sup>49</sup> Jean-François Lyotard (1924–1998) was a French philosopher whose best known work was *The Postmodern Condition* (1979). According to Lyotard, the notion of a grand or metanarrative referred to a totalising account of historical events based on an appeal to universal truth or values.



represents a form of disobedience of the canons of modernity, which currently find global expression in neoliberal hegemony.

In *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (2011), Mignolo outlines his ideas for global futures. The concept is deliberately expressed in the plural form as, in his view, the future will consist of no single hegemonic social arrangement, but rather of a number of co-existing alternatives. A polycentric world, by providing alternatives, would subvert the dominance of neoliberalism as a single ideology; decentering the control of economic regulations and political decision-making would potentially give way to dialogue and alliances between nation-states rather than to struggles over resources; cooperation would supplant competition; and local memories and knowledge would allow for sustainable growth in harmony with the planet.

#### *Nelson Maldonado-Torres's coloniality of being*

Nelson Maldonado-Torres provides insight into the inescapable link between neoliberal systems of power and subjectivity formation, which influence how individuals understand their world and manage it. In this way, Maldonado-Torres directs attention to epistemological issues and questions of identity formation, and suggests a return to ethics.

The urgency to develop alternative epistemologies to the existing hegemonic neoliberal paradigms, insofar as these impact upon our views of ontological purpose and wider ethical questions of how we inhabit our environment, is brought into focus in Maldonado-Torres's article "On the Coloniality of Being" (2007). In his article, Maldonado-Torres engages in a philosophical discussion, arguing for the radical subversion of

western/colonial philosophy so that in no way will philosophy prove complicit or blind to dehumanisation and suffering. His main aim, similar to Mignolo, is to expose the ways in which colonialism extended beyond the occupation of territories to influence relations of power that shaped notions of authority, sexuality, knowledge and the economy, as well as our general understanding of being, notions that underpin the current system of neoliberal capitalism. Thus, he concludes that colonality has endured past colonialism, to the point where, in his view, as modern subjects we breathe colonality all the time and every day.

Maldonado-Torres sees the western colonising project as the basis for modern models of power and identity framed by a dominant, globalised, and structurally racist system of capitalism. Similarly to Mignolo, Maldonado-Torres focuses on bringing to light and deconstructing modern forms of colonialism, which, in his view, are characterised by the naturalisation of an ethics of war based on a deeply racialised and gendered world view. He understands this frame of reference as exemplified by the often hellish conditions in the colonised world. In the current system, he argues, the non-ethics of war have become a part of the alleged normal world: “coloniality of being refers to a process whereby the forgetfulness of ethics as a transcendental moment that founds subjectivity turns into the production of a world in which exceptions to ethical relationships become the norm” (Maldonado-Torres 2007:21). In this way, colonisation, manifested as neoliberal capitalism, involves not only political or economic realities, but also has metaphysical and ontological consequences.

Decolonial theory, as an epistemic perspective, examines oppressive hegemonic narratives and how the logic of colonality has affected the creation of policy. In

questioning the longstanding claims of Euro-American epistemology, decolonial theory takes into account the voices of the oppressed. Similarly to feminist new materialisms, it emphasises the pivotal role of epistemology and narrative in challenging the status quo and motivating political action. In this way, decolonial theory lends itself to an exploration of the micropolitical factors leading to the formation of anti-capitalist subjectivities that make up a significant part of my research.

### Subjectivity Formation

#### *Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff's postfeminism*

In *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism, and Subjectivity* (2013), Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff edit a series of essays dealing with the particular challenges that come with inhabiting a postfeminist media culture. Throughout the volume, the term “postfeminist” is used to refer to the role of the media in perpetuating the notion that feminism, in its second-wave version dedicated to collective social and economic transformation, is no longer relevant. In this sense, postfeminism, or what the authors term a postfeminist sensibility, amounts to a conservative political shift. This is achieved through a media strategy in which the traditional aims of second-wave feminism are condensed into an apolitical ideal of female empowerment, and feminism is reduced to a style decision to be obtained through specific consumer choices. In other words, postfeminist media culture harnesses the feminist ideal of women's emancipation to capitalist accumulation.

As the essays demonstrate, while seemingly promising liberation, the commodification of female empowerment actually imposes new forms of domination. Firstly, postfeminist discourse re-packages feminism as the pursuit of personal fulfillment. Female

achievement is transfigured into projects of individualised make-overs and cast as forms of feminist activism, even while these endeavours are eviscerated of any political content. The idealised feminine subject, who “is flexible, individualised, resilient, self-driven, and self-made and who easily follows nonlinear trajectories to fulfilment and success” (Gill & Scharff 2013:284), obscures the influence of structural realities on trajectories of personal success. Not only does the discourse of individualised self-definition atomise selfhood, thereby undercutting the basis for solidarity and the possibility for effective collective political action, but it also imposes a far more pernicious form of self-surveillance by internalising the objectifying male gaze. In *Gender and the Media* (2007), Gill discusses how, increasingly, “all representations of women in adverts are being refracted through sexually objectifying imagery” (Gill 2007:81). Women’s appearance is everywhere under surveillance in the media as the possession of a sexy body is promulgated as the key to success. As long as women are busy trying to live up to this by now self-monitoring feminine ideal, which, in addition to youthful physical perfection, also demands that women be intelligent, accomplished, and nurturing, their attention is distracted from how this ideal aligns with a neoliberal agenda that is ultimately founded on ageist, sexist and racist exclusions.

Gill suggests that subjectification is the way objectification is accomplished under a neoliberal regime. The link between media representations and subjectivity formation once again draws attention to the crucial role of epistemological/cultural hegemony for emancipatory movements. *Gender and the Media* (2007) is therefore instructive as an introductory perspective on how some contemporary Western feminisms are engaging with neoliberalism at the ideological-discursive level on questions of representation. The

underlying premise of the book is that representations matter, and that feminist analyses are motivated by the “desire to understand how images and cultural constructions are connected to patterns of inequality, domination and oppression” (Gill 2007:7). This dual proposition is, in my view, complemented by a third observation, namely that it is “probably fair to say that most feminism in the west now happens in the media, and for the majority of people their experience of feminism is an entirely mediated one” (Gill 2007:40). Research into the ways in which representations matter, that is, an investigation into the relationship between gender representations in the media and broader questions of inequality, oppression and domination, is a valuable political project, and as Gill contends, these are “analyses in the context of ethical and political commitments to creating a more just world” (Gill 2007: 7). Certainly, if we understand that, in spite of media studies being a heterogeneous area of research, with “different understandings of how media images relate to individuals’ sense of identity and subjectivity” (Gill 2008:8), and “with different epistemological foundations, such as beliefs about the relationships between representations and reality” (Gill 2007:42), this does not invalidate the assertion that gender representations have the power to infiltrate the individual as a subject and impact on the individual’s sense of themselves as a political agent. The different understandings of these questions are conditioned by different theoretical approaches, and in her book Gill explores the differences between these different theoretical tools, listing poststructuralism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, semiotics and discourse theory, among others, as relevant theories.

Gill’s work is valuable because it exposes the falsely naturalised nature of representations, and makes an important link between what she terms a postfeminist

sensibility and a neoliberal agenda. Gill sees the postfeminist subject as the ideal neoliberal subject since there appears, at least on the surface, to be a coincidence of the emancipatory aims of postfeminism and neoliberalism. Gill demonstrates how neoliberal discursivity has appropriated the emancipatory agenda of second-wave feminism, but has recast it in individualistic terms so that the result is a depoliticised, disciplined<sup>50</sup> subject. As Gill explains, “the grammar of individualism underpins notions so that even experiences of homophobia, racism, are framed in exclusively individualistic terms in way that turns the idea of the personal as the political on its head” (2007:259). Consequently, the postfeminist sensibility in the media is typified by a “total evacuation of notions of politics or cultural influences” (Gill 2007:260).

Taken together, Gill and Scharff’s ideas highlight two important issues for my research. First, they explore the kinds of subjectivities formed under capitalist hegemony, which are ultimately politically conservative in their consolidation of the status quo, and second, they point to the co-option of feminist principles by market forces.

### *Jorge Alemán and Suely Rolnik’s poststructuralist technologies of the self*

The work of Suely Rolnik (2007/2011/2017) and Jorge Alemán (2015/2017) underscores the centrality of the micropolitical aspects of resistance for anti-capitalist projects. Alemán is concerned with how capitalism produces subjectivities that are functional to its political and economic purposes. He radicalises the Foucauldian idea of biopolitics, where

---

<sup>50</sup> The notion of a disciplined subject necessarily invokes the Foucauldian idea of docile bodies. The latter term, developed by French social theorist Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), refers to a new economy and politics of the body in which docility represents a new form of control — the docile body is controlled through its alignment with the norms in place and through more or less subtle forms of regulation that are learned and embodied.

subjectivity is a historical construction wrought through various mechanisms and technologies of power, but where alienation is still potentially reversible. Alemán perceives something far more radical and infinitely more serious in capitalism's neoliberal phase: for him, the penetration of capitalism into the individual's life is unlimited. Through the now-familiar genres of self-help and other measures, the individual is turned into an entrepreneur of the self; personal worth is measured according to the parameters of profitability and optimisation of resources so that all aspects of existence — sexuality, work, sport, and relationships — are treated as commodities. Alemán's reading of capitalist reality is based on the Lacanian understanding of reality as symbolically constructed. A central psychoanalytic insight concerns the inability of the symbolic to represent reality fully, resulting in experience always being characterised by lack. As part of the condition of participating in reality through the symbolic, the individual is driven to spend their life seeking to suture this lack, and through this ever-unattainable and complex psychological process the social fabric maintains its stability. Capitalist discourse, on the other hand, aims to appropriate the entirety of symbolic space, working to eradicate the essentially contingent nature of the symbolic through manipulation of the individual's desire, or *jouissance*,<sup>51</sup> in Lacanian terminology. For Lacanians, the symbolic lack is of primary interest as it potentially allows for a breach in capitalist discourse and the production of heterogeneous, anti-hegemonic subjectivities. Alemán's work is thus largely an exploration of ways in which Lacanian insights can be used to approach political realities, not only to reveal how discourse moulds subjectivity, but also how Lacanian

---

<sup>51</sup> The concept of *jouissance* was developed by Jaques Lacan in his seminar "The Ethics of Psychoanalysis" (1959-1960). Lacan theorised that *jouissance* compelled the subject to transgress the prohibitions imposed on enjoyment, thereby propelling the subject beyond the pleasure principle.

psychoanalysis might constitute a tool for anti-hegemonic resistance and intervention. In this way Alemán speculates that it might be possible to form different subjectivities from those prescribed by homogenising neoliberal biopolitics.

Rolnik's work, likewise, points to the indispensability of micropolitics in the struggle against the forces of capitalism. Complementing Alemán's idea of capitalist hegemony's aim to bridge the symbolic and reality by subsuming all representation to the circuit of commodities, Rolnik explores how capitalist discourse claims to resolve the primordial lack (which is felt by all subjects) through the impossible promise of an earthly paradise. She sees the necessarily unattainable character of this promise as causing ailing subjectivities. In her understanding, neoliberal capitalism has gone beyond the appropriation of the physical labour of the proletariat to extracting their creative forces, which is why she describes the current capitalist model as "cognitive capitalism" or "cultural-informational capitalism" (Entrevista a Suely Rolnik 2006:n.p.). Referring to the work of Maurizio Lazzarato,<sup>52</sup> Rolnik discusses how neoliberal capitalism is no longer focused on the production of commodities, as it was in the time of industrial capitalism. Neoliberal capitalism is now occupied with the production of worlds: symbolic worlds are fabricated through advertising and culture for the masses. An analysis of how capitalism produces these worlds reveals how its images invariably relay the message of paradises in the current world and imply that some might have the privilege of inhabiting them. Additionally, the idea is transmitted that in order to become one of these select individuals,

---

<sup>52</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato (2004/2014) is an Italian sociologist and philosopher. His work concerns the ontology of work, immaterial work, biopolitics, and cognitive capitalism.



it is enough to invest all of our vital energy — our desire, affect, knowledge, intellect, eroticism, imagination and actions — into the consumption of the objects and services the images proffer (Entrevista a Suely Rolnik 2006:n.p.).

In “The Spheres of Insurrection: Suggestions for Combatting the Pimping of Life” (2017), Rolnik extends her discussion of the neoliberal production of worlds by showing how it corresponds to a dominant politics of subject-formation, without which no regime is able to survive; it therefore comprises a crucial means for securing the existence of the capitalist system. Neoliberal discourse, as a force for subjectivity formation, channels the life forces of creation and transmutation into the building of worlds that suit the purposes of the dominant regime. Rolnik explains that as a result of this perversion of the vital life force, desire is corrupted and subjectivity — now traumatised — rather than following the impulse to preserve life, is led to behave contrarily in service to “the accumulation of economic, cultural and narcissistic capital” (Rolnik 2017:5). Her main concern is to harness psychoanalytical tools to deconstruct current modes of subject-formation and to explore the interface of art and politics as a path to resistance and create a rupture with hegemonic capitalist discourse.

In addition to proposing that psychoanalysis can potentially enhance our understanding of hegemonic political formations as well as providing insights for intervention, an important consideration underpinning the work of Alemán and Rolnik is that emancipatory projects must necessarily develop along two ultimately inseparable fronts if they wish to make political headway: they must address both the macro and micropolitical horizons of experience. Rolnik comments on the Left’s inability to mobilise populations, which she perceives as due to their insistence on operating strictly within the macropolitical sphere.

Traditionally, the Left promotes the inclusion of the less advantaged into the existing system. While this is a laudable agenda, it assumes that the dominant mode of existence is the universal reference point, leaving intact the logic of the very regime the Left wishes to displace. In other words, an exclusively macropolitical approach to emancipatory politics denies the possibility of alterity, and therefore ultimately participates in the perpetuation of hegemonic modes of subject-formation and of the dominant system. In order to avoid the cycle of the reproduction of the same, the micropolitical, which is the sphere of unconscious formations, must comprise an integral part of any revolutionary undertaking. Rolnik's insight into the inextricable connection between the micro and macropolitical spheres has both influenced and guided my research process.

*Judith Butler's philosophy of precarity and Melanie Klein's understanding of sympathy and rage*

In *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2020), Butler proposes precarity as the shared human condition in which one's life is always in the hands of the other as a result of living socially. Concomitantly, one is always susceptible to being impinged upon and exposed to the tangibility of the other. Ideally, precarity should run both ways, not necessarily as the result of relationships of care or love, but as bonds of mutual obligation in which every life is deemed grievable if lost. This latter point contrasts the reality of today's world where the question of whose lives are mourned is organised according to an inegalitarian and often racist logic. Butler's concern, therefore, is to probe the subject of whose lives are considered valuable and to argue for more inclusive and just ways of recognising precariousness. Her argument raises pertinent questions about the regulation of affect and what such regulation would imply.

The work of Melanie Klein on love, guilt and reparation (1998) provides a productive foil to Butler's theory of precarity by highlighting how an understanding of our shared formative psychological experiences might be harnessed for the provision of institutional counterweights to violence.

The combination of Butler and Klein's ideas comprise a productive framework for analysing the relationship of *Mujeres Creando* with others as a basis for solidarity-building.

### Aims and rationale

My aim in this thesis is to explore my research question through a case study of *Mujeres Creando*. Specifically, through this case study I will explore the ways in which this group has dedicated itself to feminist principles, both in theory and in praxis, and how their particular form of combining the two has resulted in anti-capitalist resistance for nearly thirty years in ways that are suggestive of alternative and authentically democratic social collectivities. It is my intention, through this case study, to engage with and contribute to the ongoing conversation on feminist micropolitical resistance.

The aim of my research is not to impose predetermined concepts for testing or evaluating, but rather to provide a framework for an iterative process, comprising the dual movements of exploration and interpretation, where theory and hypotheses are developed during the course of the study in contribution to existing dialogues on the subject of feminist anti-capitalist micropolitics of resistance. For this type of research, and in order to address my main questions, I require a research design that will allow me study what, how, when and where of the matter at hand; in other words, the type of data I will be studying is not

amenable to quantitative analyses that “serve [a] positive-science ideal by providing rigorous, reliable, and verifiably large aggregates of data and the statistical testing of empirical hypotheses” (Berg 2001:10). A qualitative design is better suited to the subjective nature of the matter and my need to access unquantifiable aspects about the members of the group *Mujeres Creando*, such as the effects of colonisation on the lives and struggles of marginalised women and how they make sense of their socio-political context and engage with dominant discursive practices on a daily basis. For these reasons, a qualitative case study is appropriate for my purpose of achieving a rich understanding or “thick description”<sup>53</sup> of the socio-political and cultural particularities of the group *Mujeres Creando*, as it will allow not only for the presentation of facts, but will also allow me to give details, interpretation, contextualisation and commentary on the social and cultural patterns of the group. Conducting “live” research by going to meet the group members was curtailed by the group’s explicitly anti-academic stance and refusal to be interviewed for scholarly purposes, as discussed in the introduction.

### Methodology

Due to the broad nature of my project, it is important to include and enable as many perspectives as possible. I will therefore work across epistemologies and combine elements from different discursive standpoints that share an anti-essentialist view of the world, in the understanding that knowledge is contingent and not founded on a metatheory that transcends human action. As the conceptual underpinnings of my research are drawn from my readings of texts animated by the impulse to forge new

---

<sup>53</sup> Anthropologist Clifford Geertz “holds that anthropology’s task is that of explaining cultures through thick description which specifies many details, conceptual structures and meanings, and which is opposed to ‘thin description’ which is a factual account without any interpretation” (1973:6).

epistemological frameworks and modes of analysis, the methodology for my research will be discourse analysis, as proposed by Jorgensen and Phillips (2002), based on a series of interdisciplinary approaches drawing on deconstructive, postcolonial, decolonial, postmodern and feminist influences. Multi-perspectival work should serve as a contribution to existing dialogues on the subject matter, through the deconstruction and reconstruction of ideas, promoting new insights and hypotheses that may be extended to subsequent studies. My methodology reflects my approach to the question of the micropolitics of feminist anti-capitalist resistance. This methodology is not intended to provide absolute answers: in fact, such a position runs contrary to the nature of discourse, which is dynamic and cross-fertilising, regenerated daily and continually relocated. Discourse analysis is not a hard science, but rather a means to arrive at insight or knowledge, based on continuous debate and argumentation.

Engaging with the activities of *Mujeres Creando* enables an understanding of their ontological positioning in relation to the question of how to bring about an alternative society. The group's stance is therefore based on a social constructivist view of reality as socially constructed, rather than inevitable. People's conception of reality thus stems from how forms of knowledge correspond to forms of power: what is often taken as inevitable is actually the product of the institutionalisation of constructed truths. From this perspective, language and texts have real social and political ramifications and are the locus of power struggles. A focus on discourse as a social practice highlights how users can choose to harness discourse to resist existing social and political structures and change the ways they interpret and construct their social reality. Specifically, applying a critical discursive analysis to the group's activities as a research method allows for an

investigation into “the complexity of processes of social construction of identity and its implications for power relations between different groups in a specific socio-economic context” (Ainsworth 2004:3).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA), a sub-discipline of discourse studies, remains resistant to precise delimitation, but van Dijk (1995) offers a list of guiding principles. In particular, he states:

It is problem- or issue-oriented, rather than paradigm-oriented. Any theoretical or methodological approach is appropriate as long as it is able to effectively study relevant social problems, such as those of sexism, racism, colonialism and other forms of social inequality.

In order to study social problems or issues adequately, CDA work is typically inter- or multidisciplinary, and especially focuses on the relations between discourse and society (including social cognition, politics and culture).

When studying the role of discourse in society, CDA especially focuses on (group) relations of power, dominance and inequality and the ways these are reproduced or resisted by social group members through text and talk.

The attempt to uncover the discursive means of mental control and social influence implies a critical and oppositional stance against the powerful and the elites, and especially those who abuse their power. (van Dijk 1995:2).

According to these principles, CDA is uniquely suited to my research purposes. My selection of social constructivism and of critical discourse theory as guiding principles are based on the fact that social constructivism will enable me to investigate the relationship between epistemological/textual production and subjectivity formation. It will also allow me to contribute to the debates on the micropolitics of feminist anti-capitalist resistance as a path to the creation of sustainable, authentically democratic anti-hegemonic societies. A social constructivist framework advances a view of discourse as a social practice, through which individuals both interpret and create their social experience, while

CDA, in particular, focuses on how power differentials and structural inequalities are reproduced. Both perspectives reinforce the notion that social experience and identity are open-ended processes brought about through social interaction accomplished through language and communication. If “discourse is of central importance in constructing the ideas, social processes, and phenomena that make up our social world” (Nikander 2006:2), and discourse analysis comprises a means through which to interrogate “the nature of social action by dealing with how actions and/or meanings are constructed in and through text and talk” (Nikander 2006:6), this approach underscores the contingent and culturally situated nature of our terms of understanding the world, thereby bringing into view “the processes by which human abilities, experiences, commonsense and scientific knowledge are both produced in, and reproduce, human communities” (Potter 1996:5). In the case of *Mujeres Creando*, CDA allows me to explore how the group aims to produce a radical feminist community through discursive resources. I am also able to discern how, through the formation of a community and their use of alternative symbolism, the group has a transformative impact on wider cultural forms where dominant ideologies are contested. The political and social implications here lie in recognising that if people’s understanding of a social phenomenon changes, social actions related to it may change (Burr 1995:2-5).

In summary, a social constructivist view of existence implies adopting a specific ontological approach to materiality, whereby all phenomena in the social realm are discursive and part of an ongoing struggle among competing discourses to establish hegemony. Politically, this is a fertile approach because, despite the appearance of neutrality, every discourse is necessarily contingent and context-bound: this realisation

opens up possibilities for intervention and the emergence of alternative organising discourses. The challenge for emancipatory movements, such as *Mujeres Creando*, is how to dislodge sedimented discourses and creatively produce alternative signifying practices that will contribute to the construction of authentically democratic subjectivities united across a multiplicity of political and social demands.

I chose *Mujeres Creando* for my case study because of their political and epistemological integrity and the way in which these two aspects are articulated in their daily practice. Throughout their twenty-nine years of existence, *Mujeres Creando* have consistently agitated and fought for feminist political change through a variety of means and in solidarity with various marginalised groups.<sup>54</sup> Their political commitment has been consistent, many times at considerable personal cost and discomfort. Concomitantly, the group has persistently been involved in knowledge production based on their lived experience as anarcha-feminists in Bolivian society. This production is disseminated to the general public through a variety of channels, such as their radio station, book publication, website and street art interventions.

Since I could not pursue fieldwork with the group in Bolivia, as I discussed in chapter one, all the resources I had access to are textual. The data I will be using in my study derives from four main sources: firstly, from the books published by the founder of the group (María Galindo) and compilations of texts by the group and associated groups, namely *La Virgen de los Deseos* (2005), and *Feminismo Urgente: A Despatriarcar!* (2014)<sup>55</sup>, the *Mujeres Creando* website, DVDs produced by *Mujeres Creando* documenting their street

---

<sup>54</sup> Their work in this regard is explored in later chapters in this thesis.

<sup>55</sup> From Portugal, I have been able to access the group's publications mostly online. However, I did locate a bookstore in Spain who sells *Mujeres Creando*'s books. See: <https://www.traficantes.net/>



art and interventions, and press articles on the group. The relevance of the books, DVDs and website is self-evident. The texts represent the group's ethos and political standpoints; the website documents their activities within the community and allows for an insight into their impact on broader society; and the DVDs are a record of their artistic activism. Insofar as these sources allow for a view into the group and its dynamics, they are indispensable for my research. Additionally, they are easily available and open to public use. Their credibility derives from their authorship by the group itself. There is still the question of whether the group's representation of itself and of the efficacy of its mission might not suffer from an inevitable subjectivity; but this can be weighed against the general press articles available mainly in Latin American media on the group, which may be used to provide a more balanced or outsider view on the group and its activities.

An important aspect of my study is the group's use of art as a tool for political intervention. The numerous and varied street art interventions by *Mujeres Creando* comprise a central part of their discursive production and a primary means through which the group interpolates institutionalised knowledge that shapes the social construction of identity and social and political practices. To the extent that the work of *Mujeres Creando* is grounded in assumptions about the influence of language and textual production on social interaction, their approach coincides in significant ways with social constructivist principles. An underlying tenet of the social constructivist view of reality is "that the social meaning of this existence is discursively generated, rather than inherent and internal to the person or object itself" (Ainsworth 2004:3). As Ainsworth points out, discourse analysis (one approach within the broader theoretical framework of social constructivism)

“can be used to reveal the concealed power struggles immanent to the creation of those texts, as well as the power differentials behind the production of each one, contributing to the construction of social identity” (Ainsworth 2004:3).

Art activism raises interesting questions regarding “concepts of voice, issues of social justice, and ideas about sustainable change and transformative processes” (Frostig 2011:50). As an activity that typically engages community participation to address and transform contested sociopolitical issues and effect social change, art activism is characteristically a collaborative and relational practice. Feminist art activism in particular foregrounds “the values of collaboration, participation, empowerment, consciousness-raising, and the belief in art's ability to create change” (Aagerstoun & Auther 2007:2). This view implies that the audience will respond: a full response involves both emotional and cognitive engagement. Given the open-ended nature of imagination, and the temporal unpredictability of a response, measuring whether or not art activism has provoked the desired political response resulting in the rethinking of ideas and practices can only be reflected in changes in discourse and the social and political practices of a community over time. In the case of *Mujeres Creando*, their art activism imaginatively engages with issues that are generally not explored in the public arena, with the intention of stimulating critical interrogation of hegemonic discourse and practices. Their art activism is concerned with themes usually left untouched at the institutional level, such as feminine sexuality, violence and the domination of the female body, and the parody of religious and political icons. They appropriate the streets, the walls in the city; they perform; they question tradition, identity politics, and the idealised model of women in their society;

these actions erase the division between the public and the private, practising a decolonised feminism that is critical of any universalising or essentialising tendency.

Feminist theory is inherently intertextual, interdisciplinary and dialogic. It is appropriate, therefore, for me to use the interconnected epistemologies of posthuman feminist, decolonial and postcolonial theories as my theoretical framework in my analysis of *Mujeres Creando*'s constitution, political and art activism.

## Chapter 3

### MUJERES CREANDO

In this chapter I will be introducing *Mujeres Creando* and their work. This chapter is structured as follows: I will commence by discussing the political background of Bolivia and how women have been positioned within the polity. I will proceed with a description of some of the members of *Mujeres Creando* together with an explanation of the group's *modus operandi*. The remainder of the chapter will be dedicated to discussing how the group pursues solidarity by working to dissolve the subject/object divide, and how this has served as the philosophical basis for the development of a number of key aspects of their identity, such as their commitment to decolonisation and depatriarchalisation, complex political subjectivities, anarcha-feminism, the collapse of the personal/political binary, and intersectional political alliances.

#### The political background of Bolivia

Prior to colonisation, Bolivia was part of the Inca Empire. In the sixteenth century, the Spanish *conquistadores* took control of the region. During the colonial period, Spain was able to enrich its empire thanks to the silver extracted from Bolivia's mines. In 1809, a first attempt was made at independence, but sixteen years of struggle against colonial rule were to pass before the establishment of the Bolivian Republic.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, political instability has been constant in Bolivia, typified by the alternation of power between parties of opposing ideologies. In recent years, prospects have appeared to favour leftist progressive politics, especially since the nation's re-democratisation process following the dictatorial period (1964-1982), and the

constitution of the Plurinational State in 2009. Evo Morales, the first indigenous president, whose presidency lasted from 2005-2019, consolidated the construction of the Plurinational State in Bolivia and formed the Socialist Movement for the Sovereignty of the People, intending to give more power to the indigenous majority. This process began with the populist, anti-liberal struggles, prominent among which are the water war (2000-2001), the gas war (2000-2003) and the coca war (2002), which resonated internationally and proved the limitations of the neoliberal policies that had been implemented in Bolivia since 1980.

The Morales government generated considerable expectations for social change. However, its various shortcomings over the years, as well as the contradictions between the actions of the state, state statistics and the actual reach of state-sponsored social transformation, led to diminished popular support. Additionally, the recent *coup d'état*, orchestrated by the conservative sectors of Bolivian society, testifies to continued political instability, a context in which the demands of women and the proposal for the depatriarchalisation of the state<sup>56</sup> have been set aside. Depatriarchalisation entails the removal of patriarchal rule from power in every instance, in both private and public domains. For feminist groups in Latin America, given the historical complicity of the

---

<sup>56</sup> The new Political Constitution of the State, approved in Bolivia on 25 January 2009, was intended as the base for the reconstitution of the Bolivian state. The new political constitution included, among other things, ethnic and cultural diversity, the expansion of democracy, and a charter of rights for women and men. Different organisations and women's movements were part of this process. It was through their actions that their demands for the rights of women were included in the new constitution. Despite these advances, it was not possible in this process to include the proposal and the recognition of the principle of depatriarchalisation as a pillar of transformation, inclusion and de-structuring of power relations that exclude and oppress women (Gamarra 2010).

coloniser with the colonised,<sup>57</sup> where the dispute for sexual control of indigenous women and the exchange of those same women was often the basis for cementing political alliances, decolonisation cannot take place without depatriarchalisation. The government's apparent endorsement of a process of depatriarchalisation seems not to have yielded tangible results, and has been criticised as empty rhetoric and camouflage for ongoing liberal politics (Galindo 2014:19-20).<sup>58</sup>

Nowadays in Bolivia, despite the passing of a law for the eradication of violence against women in 2013, violence, social inequalities, acts of intolerance, conservative politics and hate speech are rife and directly attack historically marginalised groups. Women's rights are infringed daily through lower salaries, physical and psychological aggressions and femicide (IPEA 2019)<sup>59</sup>, among other forms of human indignity. Against this panorama, women, alongside other socially-oppressed groups in the Bolivian population, continue to fight for their rights in a country whose historical colonial, patriarchal and racist structure solidly prevails (Espinosa-Miñoso 2014:7-12).

### *Mujeres Creando* — the beginning

Decolonising practices, together with the depatriarchalisation of the state, remain as urgent in Bolivia today as they were in 1992. It was then that *Mujeres Creando* was created, two years after the return of María Galindo and Julieta Paredes from Italy where,

---

<sup>57</sup> The role of gender in colonised territories in Latin America has already been discussed with reference to the work of Maria Lugones and Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí in previous chapters.

<sup>58</sup> See: <https://www.paginasiete.bo/opinion/2014/5/21/despatriarcar-21992.html> (Accessed 11 June 2021).

<sup>59</sup> IPEA - Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada Brasil (Institute for Applied Economic Research – Brazil). Available at: [https://www.ipea.gov.br/portal/index.php?option=com\\_alphacontent&section=30&category=420&Itemid=352](https://www.ipea.gov.br/portal/index.php?option=com_alphacontent&section=30&category=420&Itemid=352) (Accessed 11 June 2021).

for a period, they had sought refuge from lesbophobia and political persecution. They returned to Bolivia convinced of the need to build an alternative space for women in which a new society could be imagined (Creando 2005). The pair were unconvinced by both white European feminism and by what they perceived as the fraudulent commitment of many NGOs to the structural transformation of social inequalities. When María and Julieta met Mónica Mendonza, *Mujeres Creando* emerged from the conjoined ideals of the three women. All were middle-class university graduates who resided in urban areas.

Today, *Mujeres Creando* is a heterogeneous group whose recruitment process varies. New members are recruited by various methods. One is at women's meetings, advertised through interviews, posters and social networks. A first call is made for all those who are interested. Annually, over one hundred interested people are in attendance in La Paz and Santa Cruz. At the end of the meetings, at which diverse workshops are held, those who are committed to continuing with the group register as members. Others, such as domestic workers, have joined the group through coordination with other social sectors; some women have joined through their participation in the group's radio station; others derive from specific struggles, such as the defense of the Isiboro-Secure Indigenous Territory and National Park (TIPNIS) in 2012. There are, therefore, a number of routes through which new members, of diverse origins and generations, may join. *Mujeres Creando*, however, reserves the prerogative of having its members undergo constant instruction (Mendonça 2018:55-56). The group comprises an average of twenty members at any one time. However, it is difficult to specify the exact number of members, since there is always an itinerant group of supporters.

*Mujeres Creando* does not adopt the mores of traditional indigenous culture unquestioningly. While temporary alliances may be established between the group and indigenous women, the latter have their own priorities and each movement has its own path. *Mujeres Creando's* is an intersectional political practice. The paths of *Mujeres Creando* and other groups may cross, but this does not necessarily result in permanent collaborations. Additionally, certain aspects of traditional indigenous culture have legitimised violence against women. *Mujeres Creando* is opposed, in principle, to any dominant philosophy. This is evident in the group's heterogeneous forms of self-expression, where there is often a mix of traditional and contemporary symbols<sup>60</sup> (Mendonça 2018:82).

In order to illustrate the heterogeneity of *Mujeres Creando*, it is useful to provide a brief description of some of its members. Yola Mamani arrived in the city of La Paz at the age of nine with an aunt, speaking only Aymara, the language of her community. From the age of twelve she began working as a domestic worker. At the same time, she was able to finish school. At the age of thirteen, she was asked to abandon her traditional chola dress, which she refused. She continues to wear the traditional dress as part of her identity and has carried out analyses and critique regarding its use. She became part of the National Federation of Domestic Workers of Bolivia, FENATRAHOB, where she met *Mujeres Creando* and came to know of its Radio School, *La Voz de mi Deseo* (*The Voice of my Desire*). Since July 2009, she has been conducting a radio program entitled "I am a domestic worker, with pride and dignity" broadcast by *Radio Deseo* (*Radio Desire*, *Mujeres Creando's* radio channel). On the programme, complaints about the situation of

---

<sup>60</sup> This will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.



domestic workers in Bolivia are openly discussed. The programme also features topics such as traditional medicine, analyses of the national situation of women and national current events.

Esther Argollo is an artist: she paints, welds, sculpts and performs various other activities in the group. She chose not to pursue an academic career so as to escape scholasticism and freely dedicate herself to her work. Danitza Luna has been a member of the group for over five years. She studied Arts at the Mayor University of San Andrés (UMSA), specialising in sculpture, but does not consider herself part of the system, nor of the institutionalised and privatised Bolivian cultural circuit (Mendonça 2018: 52-53). Emiliana Quispe is a chef who was raised on the shores of Lake Titicaca in the town of Guaqui. After twelve years' membership of *Mujeres Creando*, she is grateful for her radio experience, participating in the programme "*Trabajadoras del Hogar*" ("*workers in the home*"). Julieta Ojeda, who comes from La Paz, has a migrant father and a grandmother of Peruvian Aymara origin. She sees herself as the product of a mixture of cultures and origins, and her family, who did not have access to university, were peasants. She joined the group while studying sociology, in search of a militant practice (Mendonça 2018:55-81).

María Galindo is the group's most recognisable member and is often confused for the group itself. She is the most active member in the media and on social networks. Galindo has an upper middle-class background and her family reportedly exercise some influence on the conservative side of the political spectrum. It is public knowledge that her deceased older brother, José Antonio Galindo Neder, was minister to the former president, Carlos Mesa, from 2003-2005. Atheist, writer, speaker, professor of sociology at the University

of San Andrés, and publicly declared lesbian since the age of 25, Galindo broke ties with her family early on in rejection of their politics and expectations of her, as these called her own politics and sexuality into question (Mendonça 2018:83). Julieta Paredes, the co-founder of *Mujeres Creando*, is an Aymara Bolivian poet, singer-songwriter, writer, graffiti artist, and decolonial feminist activist. She ended her romantic involvement with Galindo in 1998, and left *Mujeres Creando* in 2002 to found her own anarchy-feminist group based in community feminism.

The group has an agenda of defending human rights, which they pursue independently, through a variety of actions, such as graffiti, street performance, radio programmes, video, and pamphlets, among others.<sup>61</sup> For *Mujeres Creando*, political action is a creative and unifying act that not only attracts new members to the group, but also allows for agency and the expression of feminist subjectivities.

### Analysing Mujeres Creando

In this chapter I will discuss *Mujeres Creando*'s struggle for sovereign citizenship and self-representation. I will analyse the ways in which their efforts amount to a rethinking of the political subject and political practice. At the heart of their activism is a specifically feminist view of the distinction between the public and the private. I will deliberate on how *Mujeres Creando*, in their daily lives, have dissolved the private/public binary and how this feminist principle has proved to be the key to rethinking the political subject and solidarity-building. This exploration will allow me to enquire into how the group's social and political practice furnishes tools for confronting the micro and macropolitical

---

<sup>61</sup> The group's art activism will be explored in the next chapter.

challenges facing anti-capitalist initiatives in the twenty-first century. The desire for self-representation, for speaking in the first person through a combination of the diverse voices that have come to compose the group, has led to the elaboration of clear principles that the group consistently translates into concrete political practice. My research demonstrates how this pivotal dialectic and inter-articulation between knowledge production and political activism manifests their identity as anarcha-feminists.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, I will also scrutinise how the group's commitment to independent thought and the development of anarcha-feminist epistemologies create conditions for emancipation through solidarity and populist sovereignty.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the group is strongly opposed to being assimilated by the academy, and did not respond to my requests to visit them for study purposes, leaving me no choice but to respect their boundaries. Although interviews are expected in a sociological study, in this particular case it was impossible due to the group's principled refusal to allow me to interview them. In a recent interview with the Argentinian newspaper *Página 12* (2019), María Galindo's position is unequivocal. She clearly distinguishes her views on the production of theory versus the academy. Theory, in her understanding, emerges from the political practices of social movements, from an artisanal or situated feminism; the academy represents the imposition of hierarchical mediation in the construction of theory and categories of analysis by social movements, adopting a position of political extraction where social movements are converted into

---

<sup>62</sup> Anarcha-feminism originated in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Key theorists include Emma Goldman, Lucy Parsons and Federica Montseny. Perhaps one of the most emblematic historical anarcha-feminist experiments was during the Spanish civil war where the anarcha-feminist group *Mujeres Libres* aimed to empower working class women.

objects of study. She also sees the university as being in acute crisis because its profoundly patriarchal structure means that its thought is constructed from an epistemological basis that is androcentric, patriarchal and Eurocentric. She is more interested in the capacity of social movements to generate thought through praxis, and in imaginaries of political discussion. As she claims in the interview for *Página 12*, “*nos vienen robando el feminismo*” (“they keep stealing our feminism”). For her, the introduction of gender studies into the academy has done little to interrogate the patriarchal basis of the institution. In another article published on the group’s website — *Soy feminista, soy boliviana y estoy loca* (2019) (I’m a feminist, I’m Bolivian and I’m crazy), Galindo once again criticises what she sees as the Eurocentric focus of various feminisms and calls into question how to build a collective feminist voice. This latter point is tied to her personal experience and political trajectory with *Mujeres Creando*: the practical aspects of daily life have led her to develop a situated view of political practice that rejects the idea of political and epistemological sampling of *Mujeres Creando* by the academy.

My analysis of *Mujeres Creando* is motivated by my interest in the group, with the intention of contributing to the construction of a feminist cartography of resistance. Writing about *Mujeres Creando* implies navigating through a space of experimentation and daily creativity. My aim, therefore, is to inquire how the group’s experimentation can contribute to the production of new feminist subjectivities and to the transformation of traditional ways of doing politics. In order to conduct my research, I will analyse texts authored by the group, along with other forms of political resistance, ranging from street performances,

art, and graffiti available on the internet. In the next chapter I will explore how art may be used as a political weapon.

My research path remains open and nomadic.<sup>63</sup> I realise that any answers that may result from my analysis do not necessarily constitute solutions to the problems of women. My work is therefore intended as exploratory and non-appropriative, and as an account of personal re-education through reflection.

A vital aspect of my research into *Mujeres Creando* involves the continued development of their relationships with the other,<sup>64</sup> and their work on dissolving the subject/object divide as a route to solidarity. In this regard, I will be consulting the work of Judith Butler on precarity, and Melanie Klein's theories of sympathy and rage. I will follow this with an examination of some of the key points in understanding the group's political position. Beginning with the group's adherence to the principles of decolonisation and depatriarchalisation, I will go on to explore how the group's self-definition as anarcha-feminists has resulted in the elaboration of complex political subjectivities that allow for intersectional solidarities. My discussion will examine also *Mujeres Creando*'s practical commitment to the feminist principle that the personal is political, and how this is crucial to bridging the divide between macro and micropolitics.

---

<sup>63</sup> The term "nomadic" is derived from Rosi Braidotti's notion of nomadic subjects (2011). The nomadic subject is a processual being, a combination of translations, displacements and adaptations. The nomad is existentially multi-cultural and multi-lingual — a position with which I strongly identify.

<sup>64</sup> Here, "the other" is all others in need of assistance and with whose cause *Mujeres Creando* is able to identify.

### Butler's theory of precarity and Klein's theories of sympathy and rage

In the cases I shall now discuss, *Mujeres Creando* lent its support to women who were not directly affiliated to the group, but whose cause they could defend in accordance with their principles and their understanding of the structural interconnections between all oppressions. In this sense, their anti-racist stand comprises the necessary foundational step driving their unceasing search for the other and their ideological dedication to the formation of an ethical political subject. The group's exploration of alterity, as expressed by their commitment to solidarity, productively evokes Judith Butler's inquiry<sup>65</sup> into why we should preserve the life of the other. I believe that what is implicit in *Mujeres Creando's* inquiry into the other is precisely the wish to demystify the other as different and less deserving of protection than the "I". Butler's analysis, encompassing the disciplines of psychology, philosophy and social theory, raises questions such as what counts as a life and whose lives are worthy of preservation. Imbedded in the grammar of these interrogations are the further questions of who comprises the "I" or "we" who acts to preserve or protect the "they" implicit in these formulations, and, in direct correlation, who embodies the "they". Butler does not mean for her questions to circulate exclusively in intellectual spaces (2016): she stresses that the questions are intended to reverberate at the level of institutional praxis, economic systems and forms of government. She wishes her ideas to induce deliberation and exchange, and eventually to bring about social change.

---

<sup>65</sup> See Butler (2016, 2020).

In a 2016 lecture at Yale University entitled “Why Preserve the Life of the Other?”,<sup>66</sup> Butler explores the question of life’s precarity. The specific location and audience are not incidental to the argument: it is clear that she and her audience, and, by implication, those sharing in a similar position of protection as part of a social and economically advantaged demographic, comprise the “we”. Is this “we” the same “we” from whom vulnerable groups claim protection? Are there false notions of invulnerability subjacent to the occupation of this position? Without a deconstruction of the “we”, the dualism of strong versus weak, which inheres in a patriarchal ethos, remains intact. There is also a wilful ignorance of the vulnerability that extends to everyone in a system that breeds inequality. Butler raises questions about the kind of social bond that such claims by the vulnerable, addressed to the privileged, give rise to. Is there not, she asks, a paternalistic divide between “we” who preserve and “they” who are preserved?

It is fundamental to my research to explore how the activism of *Mujeres Creando* engages with these questions. In my view, the group’s continued reflections on alterity, as demonstrated by the publication of the book *Y si fuéramos una espejo de la otra? (And if we were a reflection of the other?)* (1992), as well as their advocacy of and involvement in the social and political struggles of other movements or organisations, provide philosophical and ethical replies to Butler’s questions. Through continued discussion and inquiry, the group has concluded that the racism underlying social representations not only acts as a divisive social force, but serves to mystify our shared vulnerability so that we fail to apprehend the structural entanglement of privilege and precarity. The group’s insistent self-interrogation has enabled them to reach the insight that, in protecting the

---

<sup>66</sup> See Butler (2016a).

other, we are protecting ourselves. Various philosophers, such as Butler herself, have reached this conclusion; what is remarkable is the group's commitment to organising their life and actions in accordance with this realisation.

Extrapolating from Butler's argument, it follows that as long as "we" and "they" are viewed as separate positions, independently of benevolent impulses, racist and patriarchal structures remain intact, be these physical or psychological. It is necessary, then, to forge alternative forms for understanding sociality so that, as individuals, we become aware of its reciprocal character, which ultimately translates as a shared condition of vulnerability and exposure. Butler is of the opinion that, should people be made aware of the nature of the social bond, this could have wide-ranging consequences for the ways in which the institutions on which we depend for making life liveable are organised.

In order to shed further light on our common social bond, independently of whether we are positioned in hegemonic discourse as privileged or not, Butler draws on the theory of Melanie Klein (1997, 1998) to demonstrate how, since birth, we are all immersed in interrelationships where the "I" is inextricably implicated in the "you". This co-implication begins with the infant's inescapable dependence on its caregiver, who is generally, though not necessarily, the mother. As, independently of the quality of the care provided, the caregiver is never able to be present at all moments, the infant develops frustrations and rage towards their condition of sometimes unbearable dependency and begins to develop murderous fantasies about their caregiver. While, in most cases, these fantasies are not played out in reality, their existence accounts for the destructive impulses that reside in us all, even if unconsciously. As Klein explains "At this point I wish to consider more specifically the processes by which depressive anxiety, guilt and the urge to make



reparation come about. The basis of depressive anxiety is, as I described, the process by which the ego synthesizes destructive impulses and feelings of love towards one object. The feeling that the harm done to the loved object is caused by the subject's aggressive impulses I take to be the essence of guilt. (The infant's feeling of guilt may extend to every evil befalling the loved object—even the harm done by his persecutory objects.) The urge to undo or repair this harm results from the feeling that the subject has caused it, i.e. from guilt. The reparative tendency can, therefore, be considered as a consequence of the sense of guilt” (Klein 1975:17).

Over time, we enter into new forms of dependency that recall the primary ones: therefore, the psychic ambivalence of the social bond persists, wherein we are always desirous, albeit unconsciously for the most part, of destroying that on which we depend. Furthermore, some abiding truth of our infant life continues to inform our political life. Butler’s concern is with developing the means to forestall the damage that might eventually be inflicted given the universality of the destructive potential that inheres in human beings.

Since the urge to destruction inheres in us all, “I” and “you” are not as distinct as we have been led to believe. If we are all tied together through our shared condition of ambiguous differentiation, that is, by an unbearable dependency from which we cannot free ourselves without also disengaging from the conditions of social and psychic life, the realisation of our mutual co-implication could serve as a basis for apprehending our equality. We are all vulnerable to destruction, and all in need of protection. Of course, due to their geographical and social economic standing, in practical terms, some groups are more vulnerable than others. The point is not to deny those differences, but rather to emphasise

that no one is exempt from a social bond whose every member carries the potential for destruction, thereby exposing all humans to the possibility of harm.

Klein's work on the nature of our common social bond is a criticism of the racism underlying many structural aspects of society. The question here, as far as it involves social movements, is how to make the transition from theoretical insight to sustained practice. Klein, as Butler observes in her lecture, indicates a path from theory to practice, which appears to find an echo in the activism of *Mujeres Creando*. Her premise, in brief, is that action precedes empathy and eventually solidarity. In her work, Klein found that when a person acts benevolently towards another, they engage in "sympathetic reparation".<sup>67</sup> That is, through actions to preserve the life of the other, one is actually involved in efforts to replay and reverse scenes of loss and deprivation in one's own life and to re-experience the hatred that comes from non-negotiable dependency. In other words, through sympathetic identification, the individual counters destructiveness through repair. In this way, the individual not only finds ways to repair the damage done, but also anticipates and forestalls the damage yet to come. Thus individuals all have impulses of destructiveness as well as of nurturing and protectiveness. Butler envisions how an understanding of sympathetic identification could be harnessed politically in the fashion of institutional anticipatory forms of restoration and repair. Institutions should safeguard against the destruction of which we are all capable. In this sense, the disavowal of our

---

<sup>67</sup> Sympathetic reparation, according to Klein, "is grounded in love and respect for the separate other, and involves facing loss and damage and making efforts to repair and restore one's objects. Effective reparation involves a type and degree of guilt that is not so overwhelming as to induce despair, but can engender hope and concern" (Bott Spillius *et al* 2011: n.p.).

destructive potential functions as an instrument through which destruction occurs. Preserving and protecting the life of the other thus involves a twofold realisation of the “I” as existing in a reciprocal condition of ambiguous differentiation with the “you”, and therefore of our shared condition of vulnerability and exposure. This constitutes a psychoanalytic approach to curbing human destructiveness. While this is useful, we still need to ask how we can cultivate the affirmative passions driving sympathetic identification. Some of the attendant questions are: What framework can make sense of the outrage people feel? What means of persuasion will cultivate new forms of solidarity? Through which structures should we be acting to create solidarity?

#### Depatriarchalisation and decolonisation

*Café Carcajada* (Café Burst of Laughter), *Mujeres Creando*’s first physical space, was inaugurated in 1993 with the objective of encouraging feminist forms of organisation and interaction between women, and to serve as a financial base for the group through self-managed and cooperative work. This space was later replaced by the house *La Virgen de Los Deseos* (The Virgin of Desires), which has existed since 2006. The current house is in the Sopocachi zone, in La Paz, in the central part of the city, in a neighborhood considered artistic and bohemian, close to the Major University of San Andrés (UMSA). Most of the graffiti and interventions by the group have appeared in this region. It is noteworthy that, in La Paz, social classes are divided by altitude; the lower they are located, the richer the region. The poorest social strata are concentrated on the higher slopes and in the *El Alto* region.

The starting point for *Mujeres Creando* was to question longstanding social representations of their society and of women, interrogating both their veracity and

political repercussions. A crucial part of this process lay in recognising that supremacy works in insidious ways, that the extensive violence resulting historically from the practices of domination and slavery has often been carefully hidden from view, affecting how the world is mapped, how political and economic possibilities are perceived and history is interpreted. Faced with the homogeneous thinking of mainstream society, the founders of the group understood the political crisis largely to be an epistemological one. Entrenched ideas on politics in general, and about women's role in society in particular, continue to act as powerful barriers to social change. Therefore, in order to exercise their right to self-representation in an authentic way, *Mujeres Creando* set about defining themselves. The first aspect they considered would prove to be constitutive of their feminist identity and the foundation of their ideological praxis.

From the beginning, *Mujeres Creando* have defined their philosophy as anti-racist feminism, in recognition and in ongoing interrogation of how racism oppresses everyone. As anarcha-feminists, the group has rejected neoliberal power in general and especially its positioning of women within a global racist social hierarchy that divides women from men and from other women. The group is strongly opposed to the veiled racism of the "gender technocrats" (Entrevista a Mujeres ... 2012), whose multiple strategies include manipulating representation, obstructing autonomous organisations, alienating political subjects from each other, and the creation of official routes of struggle for the oppressed. *Mujeres Creando's* feminism is also directly antithetical to that espoused by institutionalised gender organisations, such as UN Women and its affiliates. The group's opposition to these interest groups is based on two features. On the one hand, these bodies replicate unequal power relations between the global North and South. Extending

colonial patterns, the North, disposing of greater resources, has arrogated to itself the task of defining the feminist agenda. *Mujeres Creando*'s criticism is based on an understanding of these institutions as supplanting the radical energy of feminism with the bromidic corporatism of gender equality. While apparently laudable, programmes that aim to bring about gender equality are elaborated in accordance with a logic of inclusion and therefore perpetuate existing political and social structures, rather than the structural overhaul deemed necessary by anarchist politics. Although there is some criticism by these institutions<sup>68</sup> of certain governmental practices that are detrimental to women, their perspective is, at best, revisionist and falls under the liberal democratic model of progress and development. This latter point accounts for why most of these efforts are aimed at countries in the global South, with gender initiatives in the global North focusing almost exclusively on the wage gap and domestic violence. More recently, they have also focused their attention on the rights of immigrant women.<sup>69</sup>

The primary aim of most of the actions undertaken by these institutions in both the global North and South is to secure women's human rights, on the premise that the provision and guarantee of such rights serve as the basis for development. Once again, superficially viewed, this position appears meritorious. However, the assurance of human rights, positioned within a neoliberal framework, predicated on the idea that justice will be won once women are equal to men, is problematic as this notion leaves the structural and ideological foundations of the hegemonic system untouched. Feminists such as Maria Mies (1999), Ratna Kapur (2005), and Inderpal Grewal (2005), among others, have

---

<sup>68</sup> This is evident in the programs of UN Women, for example.

<sup>69</sup> See, for example, the European Institute for Gender Equality site at <https://eige.europa.eu/>

levelled considerable criticism at human rights discourse. Their critique is primarily aimed at the androcentrism subjacent to the construction of human rights and the false division between the private and public spheres. Feminism has insisted on the demystification of the social construction of human rights as historically contingent rather than as immutable precepts. For these reasons, *Mujeres Creando* rejects all intervention by institutionalised feminism in its own work, for its colonising agenda, which ultimately remains servile to neoliberal interests.

Furthermore, decolonial feminisms recognise that interventions by institutional gender agencies in their territories are counterproductive to real social transformation. The introduction of these agencies serves to disarticulate local political and social networks, installing organisational formats that often encourage competition and jostling for position, rather than cooperation, in communities where resources and jobs are scarce. Further, the dependence of these agencies on external funding enforces a client-based relationship on the organisations themselves, whose objectives will inevitably be influenced by donor interests. Finally, *Mujeres Creando* also repudiate these organisations due to their reductive construction and representation of “woman” as a universal subject. Similarly to the objections posed by black feminism in relation to white liberal feminism<sup>70</sup> decades ago, *Mujeres Creando* see these agencies’ promotion of

---

<sup>70</sup> This sentiment is echoed in Mohanty’s “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” (1984), where she claims: “Clearly Western feminist discourse and political practice is neither singular nor homogeneous in its goals, interests or analyses. However, it is possible to trace a coherence of effects resulting from the implicit assumption of ‘the West’ (in all its complexities and contradictions) as the primary referent in theory and praxis” (1984:334).

women as an undifferentiated mass as a naïve adoption of identity politics<sup>71</sup> aligned with a white, bourgeois, European progressive agenda. *Mujeres Creando* understand this to be a politically limiting position as, contrary to encouraging solidarity, the majority of women fail to recognise their individual life experiences as represented by this universalistic stance. Also, the underlying idea that women will naturally identify with each other due to their “womanness” has long been debunked by feminists.<sup>72</sup> Organising politically according to this latter expectation is a conservative approach as it discourages potentially fruitful ethical alliances between unexpected collaborators.

As instruments of the capitalist patriarchy, *Mujeres Creando*’s rejection of international gender organisations and NGO technocrats is consistent with their primary political aim: depatriarchalisation. “*Despatriarcalización*” is a neologism invented by Galindo, which translates as “depatriarchalisation” or the removal of patriarchy from society. On their website, the group proclaims to practise “*feminismo de la despatriarcalización*”:

---

<sup>71</sup> Identity politics is a broad body of knowledge and stands for a wide range of political activity. Generally, identity politics aims to defend the freedoms of a marginalised group, who organise on the basis of perceived sameness (rather than around belief systems or manifestos) and who aim for self-determination against dominant, oppressive characterisations. Some feminists, such as Nancy Fraser, have been sharply critical of identity politics. Fraser notes that recognition models demand a recognition of a group’s specificity, which reinforces the reified identities oppressive structures produce. Other feminists, such as Butler, object to identity politics on a poststructuralist basis, specifically to the subjacent notion of a metaphysics of substance that presupposes an ontologically cohesive, self-identical subject. From these perspectives, identity politics not only promotes exclusion, but consolidates identities that are dependent on the existence of a hegemonic Other for their self-definition, which ultimately serves to reinforce the logic of oppressive structures. See Butler (1999) and Fraser (1997).

<sup>72</sup> The political subject of feminism has been under constant revision, as evinced by feminist debates on intersectionality, as defined by Crenshaw, which called into question who the “woman” was that feminism claimed to represent. Butler also explores this in *Gender Trouble* (1990). Nowadays, with a growing number of people identifying as gender fluid or non-binary, the constructed and conditional nature of “woman” is exposed as increasingly abstruse and open to resignification.

depatriarchalisation feminism. From its inception, the group has always claimed that their politics and knowledge production are situated practices, suited to their particular social, political and historical context. The group works on concrete, immediate and urgent problems, with people of all types. All their practices are in response to problems (Creando 2005:168). Situated political praxis is a particularly feminist principle, but one that is not without complexities. In the case of *Mujeres Creando*, situated politics is not to be confused with identity politics, at least not in the sense of a settled political position and associated policies, such as a pre-determined agenda of rights to be conquered that allows them to be negotiated and thus conditioned by institutional apparatuses. Attention to the specificities of location does not imply an end to the complicated process of identity production, but rather recognises how it is shaped and conditioned, though not ultimately determined by its context. As Donna Haraway has argued (1988), the production of situated knowledges that derives from the politics of location is concomitantly a gesture of epistemological rebellion against the patriarchal dualism of objectivity/relativism and ontological defiance: through a richer, more nuanced account of the places we inhabit, we are able to live in a more reflexive and critical relation to practices of domination.

### Complex political subjectivities

In contrast, *Mujeres Creando* argue in favour of the creation of a complex political subjectivity that will mobilise the whole of society and whose constitution by an array of realities and viewpoints will creatively contribute to a radical feminist project. One of the group's fundamental maxims is "*Somos indias, putas, lesbianas, juntas, revueltas y hermandas*", which translates as "we are Indians, whores, lesbians, together, revolted, in sisterhood". As Galindo explains in her book *Feminismo Urgente – A Despatriarcar!*



(2016), (*Urgent Feminism – Depatriarchalise Now!*), these three identities have been purposively chosen to represent three specific socio-political loci of oppression, from which *Mujeres Creando* have assembled significant knowledge. Indian women in the Americas, among the poorest and most oppressed members of society, have experienced colonialism and its cultural impacts; whores know in the extreme what it is to be objects in a society where men are judged according to one set of values and women by another; and lesbians transgress one of the oldest laws: mandatory heterosexuality. These three groups serve as mirrors or metaphors for all women and comprise important perspectives from which to consider society from the viewpoint of women, who have traditionally been excluded from public representation. This unlikely trinity is illustrative of the feminist principle of intersectionality, where multiple oppressions, such as race, gender and sexuality converge, cross-cutting across various identities, which despite their differences, strategically come together, motivated by a common ethics and cause. Therefore, from the point of view of *Mujeres Creando*, identity politics results in an unnatural and non-representative approach to politics, where concerns are atomised: a view shared by decolonial feminisms<sup>73</sup> in general. This false separation of issues runs counter to an articulated perspective on how these issues often coincide and a full understanding of their structural basis. Instead, identity politics is seen as leading solely to claims for the recognition or concession of rights, where political subjects are cemented in social scripts that are victimising rather than empowering, and that have congealed in time rather than adapting to changing needs. The creation of

---

<sup>73</sup> Yuderlys Espinosa Miñoso (2017) , Diana Gómez Correal (2021), Karina Ochoa Muñoz (2014) are examples of contemporary decolonial feminists.

complex, mobile and adaptable political identities has the advantage of exposing structural causes to social problems and of responsiveness in relation to emerging challenges, just as the creation of unexpected alliances frustrates scripted responses by government to demands.

### Anarcha-feminism

As María Galindo claims in an interview, anyone in Bolivia can tell you who *Mujeres Creando* are and what they stand for (Flores 2017). As I have discussed, the group's wish to create a space apart from heteropatriarchy, which would be reserved for women, arose from an anti-capitalist and anti-institutional sentiment in reaction to the political situation in Bolivia. The group's members were frustrated by what they perceived as a crisis of representation and institutional interpretations of human rights. Regarding the latter point, *Mujeres Creando* understood the Bolivian government to be using women's empowerment as a cause to attract foreign investment but, in fact, had little intention of dismantling its own patriarchal foundations (Creando 2005). Also, many of the group's initial criticisms were aimed at leftist parties whom they considered racist and sexist, who invisibilised the struggles of indigenous peasants and frequently sidelined the guidelines proposed by women. Under neoliberal influence, the Left has been prone to divide public and private spaces and to subject manual and intellectual work to a hierarchy of value. Critical of any institution dependent on or inserted in the state, *Mujeres Creando's* immediate objective was not to access the mechanisms of power, but rather to enable its own political autonomy. As for the economic and social analyses of the Left, rather than disregard them outright, *Mujeres Creando* have re-signified them, guided by anarchic

ideas evoking the ancestral practices of the women of Abya Yala.<sup>74</sup> A space for women was therefore a location from which to postulate the formation of alternative political subjectivities through new diverse imaginaries and a new creative political language (Galindo 2013). The group's efforts were not without adversity, however. When the café was inaugurated, the concept of a space for women was widely misinterpreted, and the space was often identified as a brothel: the group suffered hostility for more than a year (Creando 2005:41-61).

*Mujeres Creando's* creation of their own space was necessary for them to fulfil their desire for their own self-organised and self-governed community, as well as their ideological identity. Anarchism is a way for the group to radicalise their praxis, to equalise social relations, and to eliminate the hierarchical management of functions or strategies within the group in keeping with the multidimensional, decolonial, anti-racist and non-heteronormative character of *Mujeres Creando*. In a sense, the house represents occupied territory, outside of which the only existing territory belongs to the state, not just materially but symbolically. The house, therefore, represents a space in which to imagine new understandings of the self, of citizenship and of democracy.

*Mujeres Creando's* house, *La Virgen de los Deseos*, is a real-life experiment in social change. Traditionally, social change can be seen to comprise two parts, the second of which, ironically, ultimately cancels the revolutionary impulse of the first. As Jorge Aléman (2017) discusses, traditionally, the first part of revolution is a founding act that is generally unpredictable and a moment of rupture with the established order. At some later point,

---

<sup>74</sup> *Abya Yala* means "Continent of Life" in the language of the Gaundule (Kuna) peoples of Panama and Colombia.

this founding act needs to be owned or adopted by an institution if it is to enjoy permanence. However, this moment of institutional reception is usually fatal to the revolution. Historically, institutions are composed of hierarchies, laws, order, bureaucracy and internal systems: all these are antithetical to the anti-hierarchical and egalitarian nature of the revolutionary founding moment. Institutions generally purge anything that does not conform to their laws and history. The passage into permanence, therefore, always implies losses. Institutions expunge what is authentically creative and inventive in the founding act. The important question, therefore, is: to what extent, when the institutional moment has occurred, does the revolutionary subject remain revolutionary? Alemán's argument suggests that proponents of radical democracy should ask what politics and political subjects are required for sustaining the creative and innovative aspects of revolution.

For *Mujeres Creando*, a partial answer or foothold is the creation of a space apart from the mainstream of society committed to anarchic principles. This position implies an attitude of scepticism towards authority and the rejection of hierarchy, along with a call for the abolition of the state, which is deemed unnecessary and harmful. As anarchists, *Mujeres Creando* are suspicious of calls to institutional reform: instead, they demand that social movements take back the horizon of change for themselves, breaking free from the wish to appeal to government intermediaries in order to effect social change. Their modus operandi is anti-institutional, not only in relation to hegemonic structures, but also internally, in terms of group dynamics. Their commitment to maintaining a non-hierarchical group dynamic and group sovereignty through the creation of a self-sustaining community in which the divide between the private and the public has been

dissolved is, I argue, a model for keeping the revolutionary dynamic alive. With ongoing discussion and analysis of new ideas, and the implementation of agreed-upon practices, revolution ceases to be thought of and undertaken as an exceptional event, but rather is incorporated as a life practice<sup>75</sup>.

Alemán's concern with reshaping institutions so that revolution is not fated to brief heights, only to have its power subsequently domesticated and co-opted by the state, deconstructs the covertly patriarchal conception of revolution that currently predominates in the public imaginary. The question needs to be asked: does the vision of revolution as a pinnacle in history subsume the revolutionary process to a masculine paradigm? Attempting to answer Alemán's question of how to sustain a revolutionary dynamic implies reconceptualising political action: an assumption that presupposes, in turn, a reformulation of political subjectivity. My research on the group indicates that *Mujeres Creando* offers ideological and practical alternatives to the seeming impasse of revolution as it transitions to institutions. By adopting the feminist principle of "the personal is political", the group has reimagined the political subject and political praxis (at least within their current dimensions). Subjectivity and praxis are inseparable; it is through daily commitment to political activism that an alternative political subjectivity is forged. In turn,

---

<sup>75</sup> Viewed from the lens of social movement theory, which aims to explain under which circumstances social mobilization occurs, *Mujeres Creando* can be understood as emerging in response to structural weaknesses in society, such as unemployment or urban sprawl that result in psychological disturbances that ultimately compel participation in forms of political protest. As opposed to classical forms of social movement theory that centre on class struggle, new forms of social movement theory, especially social-constructivist approaches, focus on other indicators, such as identity, ethnicity and gender. See, for example, Philipp Altmann et al., "Social Movements in the Global South. Some Theoretical Considerations", *Emulations—Revue de sciences sociales* 19 (2016), 7-24.

as political subjectivity evolves through its participation in unexpected alliances and different social and political perspectives, this creative mix contributes to enriching political activity. This is a lifelong process, with the circle of alliances and solidarity extending ever outwards. The dissolution of the private/public dualism, therefore, provides alternative anti-patriarchal ways of thinking about revolution. Demystifying the private/public division exposes politics, or revolution, as necessarily daily activities, in which the individual is intimately implicated. The dissolution of the private/public dualism allows the individual's affective implication in politics by restructuring daily life in ways that support the daily reproduction of the individual. Political activism, in this framework, takes on as fundamental a position in the individual's life as having a job, friends, food to eat and a place to live, access to health care and education. In fact, the dissolution of the private/public divide exposes how all these things are inherently political *and* personal.

Galindo's *Feminismo Urgente* (2016) ends with a presentation of the group's manifesto in the form of a "Feminist Political Constitution of the State: The Impossible Country Being Built by Women" (Galindo 2016:181). Their outlook is clearly anarchic and utopian, laying out a vision of an alternative country for men and women. The introduction to the document introduces the subversion of established ideas on policy-making. To begin, the author notes that the constitution was drawn up in a big kitchen while peeling potatoes as the children helped with shelling the peas (Galindo 2016:183). Agreement was built on consensus and the use of rotational speech, where each group member was given the opportunity to voice their opinion. No one was permitted to speak in the name of another, which meant that everyone had the opportunity to speak (Galindo 2016:183). In addition to its primary purpose as a political manifesto, the constitution is also meant to draw

attention to the ways in which women's voices in the official constitution of Bolivia have been mediated, censored and measured by a government that has only legitimated the voices of liberal NGOs and conservative indigenous women.

In opposition to Bolivia's official constitution and the exclusions and hierarchies subjacent to its design, writing a feminist political constitution of the state is meant to demonstrate unequivocally that *Mujeres Creando* command the words to formulate proposals and concrete visions, which might not be inscribed in the law but are ingrained in their daily practices (Galindo 2016:185). In summary, among other things, the constitution calls for a free, independent, sovereign and pluricultural Bolivia, free of nationalisms. Government will be abolished and replaced by administrative mandates aimed at serving others, beginning with children and the elderly. Privilege is to be repudiated. Society will be secular and anti-militaristic. Animals are to be protected and afforded rights. Euthanasia will be legal. Democracy will be safeguarded through direct representation in forums that have decision-making power. The wealth generated by society will be distributed equally, with the health and education of all people granted priority. All forms of exploitation and servitude will be abolished. Domestic work will not be the responsibility of women, but of all people. Manual, creative, domestic and intellectual work will all be afforded the same importance. Sexual education will be obligatory. Marriage will be abolished, along with compulsory heterosexuality (Galindo 2016:186-206).

This constitution is the expression of a social ideal. For the majority of items, the constitution offers a utopian prototype, rather than a series of transformative steps. This in no way invalidates the usefulness of the document. It serves as a tentative road-map to the "impossible country" towards which millions of activists work every day. As Galindo

concludes: “this constitution is a woven fabric combining the daily with the historical, the utopian with the immediate, forming a rainbow of struggles and dreams that we keep building without renouncing a single one of these or other dreams” (Galindo 2016:206). It is also an important step towards subverting the symbolic hegemony of the ruling system insofar as the practice of imagining an alternative social cartography represents an interruption in the pervasiveness of neoliberal culture. Currently, as the predominant episteme, the neoliberal market value system not only determines patterns of social organisation, but also the perception of these as ineluctable. The naturalisation of the neoliberal system in the social imaginary — in which the mass media plays a pivotal role<sup>76</sup> — refers to how the struggle for cultural and political self-determination is intrinsically a battle over meaning. Often it is in the creative arena that the production of meaning is contested: a factor pointing, in turn, to the influence of politics on the aesthetic and vice versa.

As anarcha-feminists, the utopian aim of *Mujeres Creando* is complete self-government. However, throughout their writings it is clear that the group is fully aware of the idealistic character of utopias: that is, due to human nature, utopia is an always-deferred goal. However, as María Galindo explains in *Feminismo Urgente!* (2016), the idea of utopia is harnessed as a motivating horizon, a point towards which feminists can work every day.

---

<sup>76</sup> The media plays a fundamental role in the interpretation and dissemination of ideas. Bourdieu's sociological theory highlights how the media constructs, rather than simply representing reality (Hudson & Martin 2010:8). In this sense, the media is an instrument of neoliberal governmentality and reflects the neoliberal tendency to colonise different aspects of existence :“The field of large-scale production, whose submission to external demand is characterized by the subordinate position of cultural producers in relation to the controllers of production and diffusion media, principally obeys the imperatives of competition for conquest of the market. The structure of its socially neutralized product is the result of the economic and social conditions of its production” (Bourdieu 1984:17).



Social movements have a role to play, precisely, in holding democratic institutions accountable to their constituencies in terms of everyday interactions. However, for *Mujeres Creando*, comprising a social movement is not reducible to making demands on existing governing structures for the recognition of rights. The group critiques this practice on multiple levels. Reducing political action to presenting any faction's demands to government gives rise to a client-based relationship with the state, in which responsibility for social change is firmly placed in the hands of institutional power. Social movements, reduced to occasional confrontations with government, with the intention of presenting their claims and having these heard, position themselves as clients before the state, abdicating their own potential for effecting change.

Additionally, dependency on the state retards the development of the political subject, confining it to reductive patriarchal modes of operation where the state occupies the position of the all-powerful parent while the social movement in question represents the (mostly) disempowered child. In opposition to this set of unproductive political practices, *Mujeres Creando* seeks to demystify the idea that appealing to government is the only route to social change. Instead, they work to re-appropriate their own potential for change, choosing to become protagonists in processes of social transformation rather than remaining dependent on the uncertain mediation of the government. In doing so, they make room to learn new skills and to think and organise autonomously: they create spaces of peer recognition where creativity is foregrounded. Therefore, the way the group conceives of their political role and praxis is constitutive of their identity as political subjects. Their approach to political activity, and specifically their perseverance in the

application of the feminist principle of “the personal is political”<sup>77</sup> addresses both the micropolitical challenge of subjectivity formation and the macropolitical challenge posed by hegemonic institutions today.

### The personal is political

The longevity of *Mujeres Creando* as an anti-hegemonic group is due to the commitment of its members to their manifesto. The endurance and constancy of this commitment, as evinced by the record of their activism, must perforce owe to a strong affective bond undergirding the members’ alliances with each other. This bond, which has proven vital to the duration and robustness of their political project, is the result of daily toil. For the members of *Mujeres Creando*, there is no separation between “daily life” and “politics”. For them, daily life *is* politics and vice versa. Therefore, the commitment and care the members afford to the group is commitment and care dedicated to their own lives, and politics is the basis of their “private” lives. The members enjoy each other’s support and solidarity throughout their activism. I believe that this point is fundamental to the long-term success of emancipatory initiatives.

I have already discussed how, for *Mujeres Creando*, the creation of a complex political subject is a rejection of one-dimensional political identities whose terms of conception appear tied to narrow forms of political practice. In their view, the one-dimensionality of singular political identities adopted by many social movements discourages solidarity between different groups. In addition to the paucity of inter-movement solidarity, *Mujeres*

---

<sup>77</sup> “The personal is political” is a slogan from second-wave feminism and was popularised in 1970 in an essay by feminist Carol Hanisch (2006:1), although she disavows authorship of the expression.

*Creando* also note the inadequacy of internal solidarity within the movements themselves, arising from the scantiness of daily life these movements actually possess. For the majority of social movements, sympathisers convene only to make claims for their particular cause. Members come together for a political purpose, which for the most part is interpreted as separate from daily life. This ideological and practical division replicates the public/private binary. Feminist studies have addressed the disingenuousness of this separation and the strictures it represents both epistemologically and politically. While members of social movements might enjoy the full weight of their movement's support during episodes of political rallying, mostly this support is limited to matters directly related to the movement's official or political agenda: that is, to actions in the so-called public sphere. However, this support dissolves as each member returns to her or his respective private existence. The problem here resides in the persistence of a patriarchal interpretation and subsequent management of what constitutes the political. There is little, if any, recognition of group members' individual problems as inseparable from the social movement itself. Generally speaking, if a member of the group encounters a personal complication, the movement proceeds without them. Politics is thereby falsely divided from the business of daily reproduction. Rather than recognising that politics is the practice of daily activities, for many social movements, politics is a special activity separate from ordinary day-to-day circumstances. As "ordinary" daily circumstances are typically composed of actions of care, contributing to the reproduction of daily life usually carried out by women, it is clear that the dualism of politics/daily life is another patriarchal derivative. The only way a social movement can persist — and *Mujeres Creando*

recognise this as a long-term process — is by collapsing the private/public division. Politics, involving a social bond, is daily life.

Perhaps the most visible example of this is the Zapatista movement<sup>78</sup> in Mexico. The Zapatistas realised that one of the biggest threats facing food security in the world today is neoliberalism (Descolonização, autonomia, igualdade ... 2016:). The consequences of neoliberalism are so extreme and visceral that the Zapatistas qualified free market politics, as embodied by the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), as a death certificate for First Nations. Economic liberalisation meant that imported commodities (such as wheat subsidised by the United States) would inundate the Mexican market, devalue the products of Mexican farmers and lead to generalised food insecurity. In reply, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), led an armed insurrection on 1 January 1994, the day NAFTA took effect. The beginnings of EZLN date to 17 November 1983, when a small group of politicised, militant university students entered the Lacandon forest in Chiapas to form a guerrilla army. From that moment, and despite counter-insurgency by the Mexican government, the Zapatista solution to the problems of neoliberalism, especially food insecurity and associated poverty, has been resistance. For the Zapatistas, resistance consists in revitalising their indigenous visions (predominantly Maian), recovering stolen lands, emancipating themselves from multinational industrial agribusiness and living peacefully in open defiance of global capitalism. The result of this solution was the ability to build an autonomous and locally sourced food system, which

---

<sup>78</sup> For more information on the Zapatista movement see: <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/news-item/the-zapatista-movement-the-fight-for-indigenous-rights-in-mexico/>, and also <https://nacla.org/news/2019/01/18/spark-hope-ongoing-lessons-zapatista-revolution-25-years>. (Accessed 8 June 2021).

was a direct product of their efforts to guarantee a participative democracy, gender equality and food sovereignty. Food sovereignty (a widely debated concept) can be described as the means by which a people is capable of exercising autonomy over its food systems, ensuring, at the same time, that the production and distribution of food is carried out in a socially fair, culturally safe and ecologically sustainable way. For the Zapatistas, food sovereignty involves agroecology, teaching and learning on a local basis, the development of local cooperatives and a commitment to collective work. Because it is crucial for them to exercise autonomy over their land, work, education and food, their teaching and learning methods are inserted in their environmental systems and the cultural practices in which they and their histories are living systems. By refusing to participate in the transformation of teaching and the earth into commodities, the Zapatistas created an integrated system of education and food security that functions as a solidarity economy. This means that their efforts in food production and knowledge production are guided by an ethical imperative that takes into consideration the health and well-being of individuals, communities and ecologies.

There are a number of ideological and practical similarities between the Zapatistas and Mujeres Creando. The most significant point in common, with regard to internal solidarity and ideological continuity, is the organising principle where the private and public separation is collapsed as a daily reality. In the words of one of their graffiti interventions, for the members of Mujeres Creando, being happy is their revenge. They do not consent to silence and, in spite of each difficulty, they are determined to be happy with a life of ceaseless resistance, desiring freedom and rebellion. Their daily sustenance is a sincere, profound and horizontal exchange of experience and information, with the hope that their

efforts will affect other movements and install concrete politics, that their ideas will be welcomed in strength and with possibilities of self-sustainability (Creando 2005: 14).

Collapsing the private/public divide also implies addressing the question of where the space of political struggle resides. For *Mujeres Creando*, the space of their struggle for social transformation comprises social relations; similarly, the spaces for the construction of social relations are the street, clothes, food, the body and life (Creando 2005:147). In this way, *Mujeres Creando* deconstructs the myth of “civil society” as a category to enclose individuals within an innocuous realm that neither interpolates nor transforms: instead, the category of “civil society” serves to position the individual as a passive recipient/beneficiary of political society (Creando 2005:147). Extending the domain of politics to embrace social relations means that the false dualism of civil/ political society is dissolved. The politics of social transformation ceases to be construed in traditional patriarchal terms as sacrifice or as heroic immolation, which provides sporadic peaks to linear trajectories of struggle. *Mujeres Creando* define politics differently: for them politics is the capacity, the dream, the commitment to transforming society: a vital and revitalising task, which they accept as interminable and pleasurable (Creando 2005:148). Politics is conceived and experienced as a way of life that is worthwhile, in which inevitable sorrows, joys and pleasures are not a burden.

### Intersectional political alliances

In the history of *Mujeres Creando*, there are many examples of solidarity-building in keeping with their philosophical viewpoint, alliances that have been and continue to be constitutive of the group’s sense of themselves as evolving political subjects. *Mujeres Creando* has lent its concrete and militant support to a number of anti-capitalist causes.

One such instance involved micro-credit practices in Bolivia. In their analysis of micro-credit practices, *Mujeres Creando* understood the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) to have identified two main areas of intervention for NGOs in Latin America: reproductive rights, aimed at lowering birth rates independently of each woman's wishes; and micro-credit as an important palliative measure for social revolt and unemployment in these countries (Creando 2005: 91). *Mujeres Creando* had concluded that much unemployment was a consequence of the structural adjustment policies imposed by the IMF and the WB. In this context, women in the informal economy represent sources of employment, lowered costs of services, and, through the operation of micro-credit, the possibility of transferring millions of dollars from the informal economy to the formal economy through banks, financial institutions and NGOs (Creando 2005:91). Traditional initiatives that generated an important circulation of resources in the informal economy through practices of *trueque* (a system of exchange of goods), *anyi* (based on the reciprocity and exchange of goods and services), *pasanaku* (the rotation of capital between women friends) and direct loans between people were supplanted by micro-credit schemes. Micro-credit takes funds from the informal economy and channels them into the formal economy, in this way expropriating the free circulation of money from one sector to another (Creando 2005:91). Specifically, *Mujeres Creando* analysed the social and psychological mechanisms used by micro-credit projects to trap debtors through social pressure that often led to suicide (Creando 2005: 90).

In their research into the operation of micro-credit schemes, *Mujeres Creando* noted how NGOs, in particular, in addition to the offer of credit, also offered other services. The debtor did not have the right to choose, criticise or refuse these services. These NGOs

consisted of groups concerned with training in reproductive rights and the provision of mediocre medical services, which the debtors were obliged to use if they wished to obtain access to credit. Once the credit was conceded, the debtors were obliged to participate in these services through debt and fines, calls to attention and what could be termed permanent psychological pressure (Creando 2005: 92). From the group's point of view, these mechanisms have destroyed social relations and solidarity among women. These programmes are based on taking advantage of the social prestige each woman has attained in her environment and of her relationships of trust, respect and affect built in her neighbourhood, among her friends, and through her business. These relationships are used to exert psychological pressure, because, although the micro-credit debt is personal, the guarantee is group-based, and each woman assumes the responsibility of pressuring the other to pay her debts. This has meant the systematic and sinister destruction of relationships of solidarity among women. Each debtor is cast as both a desperate debtor and a cruel collector (Creando 2005:93). The debtor, who may have lost her capital due to illness, bad investment, or any other reason, at the same time is stripped of social prestige and is subjected to torturous psychological pressure.

*Mujeres Creando* supported women debtors through their investigation and promulgation of their findings. In this way, they contributed to empowering women with knowledge by exposing the machinations of micro-credit schemes. In this way knowledge can function preventatively, as women who join these micro-credit practices after being informed of their operations would do so fully cognisant of the implications, and many women would be dissuaded from joining them altogether. Also, *Mujeres Creando* makes available information on accessible legal and financial counsel for these women; often these



services are provided at the *Mujeres Creando* house. These initiatives are examples of the group's policy of horizontal cooperation through continued participation in the struggles of the population.

Other unlikely alliances include the work the group has done with women "in a situation of prostitution" (the group's own terminology).<sup>79</sup> Together with women in a situation of prostitution, *Mujeres Creando* proposed a new law legislating that sex workers<sup>80</sup> and their children could receive comprehensive care from the national health system. These actions were undertaken in rejection of the inhumane treatment proffered by CEDES: The Bolivian Business Council for Sustainable Development, a non-profit organisation, whose mission, according to their LinkedIn page, is the contribution to a dignified life for all Bolivians, creating economic opportunities in the present and future to mitigate poverty. The members of CEDES consist of a number of high-profile Bolivian companies. At CEDES, only a gynaecological examination was carried out on women working in prostitution. *Mujeres Creando* understood this to preserve the health of the client, but not of the sex worker (Creando 2005: 106). They argued that the amount paid by sex workers under the CEDES arrangement was equivalent to any worker counting on social security

---

<sup>79</sup> The original phrase in Spanish reads: *mujeres en situación de prostitución*. While the text does not explicitly provide an explanation for why *Mujeres Creando* chooses to use this terminology instead of "prostitute" or "sex worker", from the group's politics it is possible to surmise that this terminology is more coherent with a non-essentialising ideological position, whereby a woman's identity is not determined by her work as a prostitute.

<sup>80</sup> Sex workers in Bolivia operate under an ambiguous legal framework composed of a mix of European-type regulationism and abolitionist laws deriving from United Nations Conventions. Prostitution is legal in Bolivia and regulated in licensed brothels. Sex workers are required to register and undergo regular health checks for sexually transmitted diseases. On a daily basis, "the police, the health services and the municipal government alternate between using the tools of regulationism and abolitionism to organize prostitution, while at the same time cracking down on its most unacceptable facets (especially when there are minors involved) (Absi 2018).

and the national health system. The group considered the step an advance in the human rights of women sex workers (Creando 2005: 106).

Under the logic of capitalism women are property, objects of pleasure or commodities. Women's bodies are appropriated, consumed, regulated and subjected to violence within the neoliberal paradigm of objectification. Bolivia's femicide rate is the second highest in South America and one of the highest in the world (Violations of ... 2019). In order to determine the causes of this alarming state of affairs, in April 2018, *Mujeres Creando* dedicated itself to research with the help of the International Human Rights Clinic of the Harvard Law School (IHRC). The research involved the analysis of 200 cases of femicide. The results were alarming, the conclusion demonstrating that, in fact, there is no effective justice for victims (IHRC, 2019). The "No Justice for Me: Femicide and Impunity in Bolivia" report, presented in 2019, identified three areas that compromised government efforts to prevent femicide and hold perpetrators accountable: investigation barriers, judicial barriers and institutional discrimination.

In opposition to the historical regulation of women's bodies by the state, decolonising justice demands the depatriarchalisation of the constitution regarding the body, sexuality and reproduction. The decriminalisation of abortion concerns not only individual rights and public health, but is intrinsic to the idea of decolonising state legislature, and liberation from the colonial judeo-christian legacy. The official state category of "sexual and reproductive rights" is used instead of "abortion" in the official media. Such terminology distorts the reality of women's struggles for sovereignty over their own bodies. In most cases, abortion continues to be penalised in Bolivia, sometimes even in cases allowed by the law, such as rape and risk to the life of the mother (Bolivia 2020). In this legal context,

women are reduced to mere objects of state public policies, with no control over their own reproduction, bound by consistent surveillance of their uteruses. Decriminalising abortion would restore women's right to decide: it would imply the decolonisation of women's bodies and revise the notion of compulsory motherhood. Abortion is frequently on *Mujeres Creando's* agenda, and they have made a point of transforming abortion from a situation of violence and oppression into the possibility for creation and dialogue. A good example of this practice took place at the São Paulo Biennial in Brazil, which I will discuss in more detail in the following chapter. Despite their efforts, according to the group, the government of the time remained conservative regarding the right to abortion. While the government holds debates on women's rights, these focus on the idealised figure of motherhood and the heteronormative family, thus putting subtle ideological pressure on women to reproduce in "approved" ways.

In 2003, there was another social explosion in Bolivia. This was the *El Alto Gas War*<sup>81</sup> against the arbitrary sale of gas supplies to the United States through Chile and Peru. The country was gripped by social upheaval as strikes and road-blocks were mounted in protest against the government's management of the country's natural gas reserves. The protests, largely headed by indigenous and labour groups who demanded the full nationalisation of Bolivia's hydrocarbon resources, were violently repressed by the military and police, and sixty people died in the confrontations. In reaction to the events,

---

<sup>81</sup> The social confrontations resulting from the Bolivian gas conflict derived from the then government's exploitative economic policies. The conflict came to a head with the resignation of President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, with country-wide strikes and violent suppression by the Bolivian armed forces. On May 1<sup>st</sup> 2006, President Evo Morales signed a decree nationalizing all gas reserves.

*Mujeres Creando* penned a response condemning the government as a racist oligarchy allied to transnational corporations in war against a defenceless population. While unequivocally supportive of the call to nationalise Bolivian hydrocarbons (Creando 2005:125), the group criticised the methods of the insurgency, which often led to violence: a strategy *Mujeres Creando* deems derivative of patriarchal stereotypes of male heroism. The exclusion of women's voices is in no way seen as casual, but as part of the vertical and profoundly chauvinistic structure of the movements in question. The one-dimensionality of a separate political identity appears to imply that political issues are themselves one-dimensional, rather than integral parts of an indivisible social fabric, a perspective that would necessarily demand deeper structural change. The group's counter-proposal was to organise a hunger strike adopted by diverse women. As a way to underscore the unusual and subversive alliances from which the group has always worked, and which are untenable to any patriarch, the hunger strike was held, in echo of *Mujeres Creando's* self-description, by "an alliance of Indians, whores and lesbians against any and all forms of racism and authoritarianism" (Creando 2005:125). The purpose of the strike was to make visible the massive participation of women in the national revolt, and to draw attention to the need for popular movements to diversify and enrich their means of exerting pressure at such a dramatic moment. For *Mujeres Creando*, a hunger strike represents the ultimate instrument of non-violent protest (Creando 2005:126), from which to declare their position.

### Conclusion

In this introduction to *Mujeres Creando*, I have outlined the origins of the group, along with describing some of their main members. I have shown how their guiding principles

of depatriarchalisation and decolonisation have led to intersectional political practices involving diverse sectors of society enabled by the concomitant elaboration of complex political subjectivities. In their daily adherence to the feminist principle of “the personal is political”, the group has found a way to ensure their longevity and to promote genuine solidarity and commitment from its members in both a Butlerian and Kleinian vein. In the next chapter, I will discuss the role of art activism in the group’s political militancy.

## Chapter 4

### *MUJERES CREANDO – ART ACTIVISM*

#### Background to global art activism

The anti-capitalist emancipatory struggles of today are struggles incorporating entire subjective and symbolic economies. As I discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, neoliberal subjectivity is one of the cognitive necessities of capitalism: the individual's desires are adjusted to coincide with neoliberal economic aims. Capitalism, as all-pervasive, "uproots, deterritorialises, and recodes the coded traditions and conditions of social and subjective production and reproduction of the past in relation to capital itself" (Pfeifer n.d.:264). A consideration of the extent of the ideological dominance and symbolic authority exerted by a hegemonic discourse that has settled on all surfaces of the globe highlights the importance of the production of images and representations, and of the entanglement of art and politics. The representations generated by the mass media lay out a cartography of the social world, according to which neoliberal subjectivity orients itself.

In this chapter I will consider the role of art as a form of radical and meaningful discourse, through which to liberate desire, build solidarities and create possibilities for alternative societies. I will discuss how changes on the micropolitical level of the psychological and affective dimension of subjectivity, which can be brought about through art activism, are indispensable for sustainable macropolitical democratic change. I contend that without a transformation in subjectivity, macropolitical attempts at democratic change are destined to fall short as the subject remains trapped within the discursive circuit of hegemonic logic.

The role played by hegemonic representations in perpetuating the capitalist subject calls for decolonising the mind and affect. In this respect, creativity becomes a possible subversion and escape from discursive hegemony. Nowadays, the subject is overstimulated by images, propaganda, publicity and symbols. Suely Rolnik<sup>82</sup> postulates that images have the effect of thrusting the subject into a state of low anthropophagy, whereby they consume uncritically, as subjectivities cut off from the sensitive body, numb to “the ocean of variable flows that comprise today the subjective existence of all inhabitants on Earth” (1998:17). The idea of the formation of a more complete subject with a different relation to the other, other than subject-object, is approached from a different angle by Rolnik. Drawing on the tribal Brazilian tradition of anthropophagism, she develops an allegory whereby the subject chooses the other and “ingests” the other as a way to close the divide between the subject and object. As Rolnik explains in “Anthropophagic Subjectivity” (1998), the inspiration for this idea came from a custom of the Tupi Indians (a South American Guarani tribe): “it consisted in eating their enemies — but not just any enemy, only brave warriors. A certain relationship with alterity thus ritualised itself: a choosing of their others in terms of the vital power that their proximity would intensify” (Rolnik 1998:2). The key point here is that the Tupi Indians exercised considered choice in what they chose to consume and assimilate — here both in literal and figurative terms —from the other. In contrast, the tendency since colonisation has been to consume and assimilate, at first European, but more recently North American culture. From a decolonial perspective, which Rolnik shares, both these cultures are complicit with modern capitalist coloniality. This means that, when adopted from an

---

<sup>82</sup> Suely Rolnik (born 1948 in São Paulo) is a writer, psychoanalyst, curator, art and culture critic and university professor.

unexamined perspective, these cultures invariably perpetuate exclusionary worldviews that, in turn, produce truncated subjectivities that have been formatted to respond to the demands of capitalism and have repressed their ability to respond to the other. On the other hand, when brought to a state of high anthropophagy, the subject is able to break free from hegemonic modes of subjectivation in service to the market, making room, once again, for the freedom to create meaning for itself.

Art activism, as my discussion will demonstrate, comprises a way to interrupt the constant flow of information, to reinterpret codes, and construct alternative perceptions and perspectives on what happens in the world. As a counter to the capture of the subject's modes of perception, sensibility and unconscious representations, art provides a means through which to subvert capitalist semiotics. The question remains, however, whether art can resist capitalist appropriation. When subsumed to the capitalist machine, art is vulnerable to standardisation and may be reduced to an alienated enunciation. Here, the occupation of public space as opposed to restricting art to privileged enclaves allows for the transformative power of art activism. While the transformative process is not premised on the negation of art institutions, it depends on the power of art/work to proliferate, creating new sensations through which new futures, in excess of what is already in existence, may be conceptualised. The affective surplus produced by art can be channelled into emancipatory initiatives that can grow into networks of solidarity.

In order to contextualise my case study of the art activism of *Mujeres Creando*, I will first review a few examples of art activism around the world as a strategy of mobilising affect in relation to political and social change.



In 2015, an artists' collective in Mexico turned a low-income neighbourhood into a giant colourful mural (Macromural de Palmitas 2015:n.p.). The intention was to bring the working-class neighbourhood of *Las Palmitas* together and transform its rough image. Altogether, 209 houses were painted in bright colours in a community effort where everyone participated in one way or another. Viewed from a distance, the houses coalesce to form an abstract rainbow design. The goal of the project was to promote community integration and change the negative character of the neighbourhood, a goal that appears to have been accomplished. In a video on this initiative, a former gang member testifies to the surprising impact of the project and narrates how he changed his life after returning to the practice of graffiti art and muralism. Where formerly people stayed in after dark and had little interaction, towards the final stages of the project, it became commonplace to find people talking to each other and children playing outdoors. Residents remarked on the changed character of the neighbourhood, where the inhabitants displayed more community spirit and a willingness to take neighbourhood security into their own hands. The success of the project has convinced government officials to extend the initiative to other neighbourhoods.



Figure 1. The finished mural on the walls of the hillside Las Palmitas in Pachuca, Mexico. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/art-project-turns-mexican-barrio-into-a-giant-mural-10434783.html> (Accessed 2 February 2021).

The impact of the project highlights the transformative potential of art on the level of subjectivity formation, as well as reinforcing the interconnectedness of micro and macro-aspects of solidarity building. The change in the structural macro-aspects of the community gave impetus to the re-creation of the public domain as a shared space for reconnection and building community ties. By transforming the appearance of the neighbourhood, the project effectively altered the representations of the locale previously held by the residents. The direct involvement of each individual in the project had a profound affective impact, in which a psychological identification with the transformation

of the neighbourhood implied the simultaneous transformation of the individual: there ceased to be an affective separation between the neighbourhood and the individual. Therefore, the residents were now prepared to defend the integrity of their neighbourhood as a reflection of themselves. The care the residents are now willing to take of their neighbourhood and each other translates into a genderless local economy of solidarity and care. There is the additional influence of beauty and the impact of partaking in its creation as psychologically transformative forces.

In another example of an art intervention that has re-appropriated the public sphere and concurrently re-created the public domain as a site for political and social intervention, art is used to keep individual and collective memory alive. In Bogotá, Colombia, artist Doris Salcedo creates pieces that are “poetic memorials to victims of violence, corruption and displacement, created to give residents tools for mourning” (Artist Doris Salcedo on Bogotá 2016:n.p.). Bogotá’s political history has been accompanied by attempts to erase individual and collective memory in public spaces. In 1985, guerrillas stormed the Ministry of Justice and many people were killed. The Ministry was later razed and another building erected in its stead. Salcedo sees this as an attempt to erase public memory and to impose oblivion on the populace. In an act to counter this erasure, one morning, at exactly 11h45, the time when the guerrillas had attacked the palace, Salcedo hung a number of chairs on the exterior façade of the building as representatives of the people who had lost their lives. As she was doing so, numerous passers-by came to share their memory of what they had been doing at the time of the attack. The installation thus served as a means for a communal sharing of memory, for a retrieval and revivification of that memory. In a similar vein, when Salcedo learnt that a congressman from Valle, who had

been kidnapped for 5 years, had been murdered by guerrillas, she decided to light 24,000 candles in the main square of Bogotá. She and another twenty collaborators began this impossible task one early morning. Gradually, people came to help in a quiet, organised manner, and it became a collective act of mourning. Creating a poetics of mourning is something the artist perceives as vitally important. Neoliberal subjectivities are typically performed in a perpetual present. The eradication of memory serves to allow the perpetuation of past injustices and purposively induces blindness towards the racist and sexist foundations of neoliberal identity. It also inhibits acts of solidarity by erasing the memory of a collective history. Salcedo (2014) interprets the replacement of the original Ministry of Justice in Bogotá as a deliberate attempt to erase memory, an act aligned with her perception of the city as a physical manifestation of the economic and social forces at work.



Figure 2. Doris Salcedo's "Noviembre 6 y 7" recalls the 1985 siege at the Palace of Justice in Bogotá. Credit. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/15/arts/design/doris-salcedo-whose-art-honors-lives-lost-gets-a-retrospective-in-chicago.html> (Accessed 2 February 2021).

Globalisation has conferred greater visibility on art activism the world over, thus the international renown of some protest artists, such as Ai Weiwei.<sup>83</sup> Weiwei enjoys widespread fame for his political protest art, which is deeply critical of China's communist

---

<sup>83</sup> Ai Weiwei (Beijing, 28 August 1957) is a Chinese artist and social activist. He is a symbol of resistance to oppression and a defender of civil rights and freedom of expression.

party. Some of his most popular works include covering the floor of London's Tate Modern with ten tons of handmade porcelain sunflower seeds (2010). The sunflower seeds, produced under Weiwei's direction by 1,600 craftsmen in the city of Jingdezhen, historically famed for its porcelain, are meant to represent the people of China. The uniformity of the seeds is intended to parallel the homogeneity imposed on the Chinese population by the communist party, for whom individuality and freedom of expression are destabilising forces. While it is difficult to measure the exact transformative influence of Weiwei's work, an indication of its disruptive potential is the extent to which he has been prosecuted by the Chinese authorities.<sup>84</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup> In November 2010, Wei Wei was placed under house arrest after calling for a protest on 7 November in Shanghai, when he intended to denounce the demolition of his studio by the Chinese authorities who alleged its illegality. Ai Wei Wei denied any illegality, noting that he had the approval of the Shanghai authorities and that the government's actions were a retaliation for his support of dissent in the country. Shortly thereafter, the Chinese government ordered the demolition of his studio. On April 3rd, 2011, Ai Wei Wei was arrested by Chinese authorities as he embarked for Hong Kong. A few hours after his arrest, his studio in Beijing was raided by more than 40 police officers. Dozens of items were confiscated. He spent three months detained in a secret location. Wei Wei's S.A.C.R.E.D. 2012 piece is based on his experience in detention. Please put this information into the main body of your text.



Figure 3. *Sunflower Seeds* by Ai Wei Wei, 2010, Tate <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/ai-sunflower-seeds-t13408> (Accessed 12 February 2021).

More recently in 2020, in the wake of continued nationwide protests against police brutality in the United States, activists have campaigned for the removal of monuments glorifying white supremacist history. In Richmond, Virginia, residents have called for the removal of the statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee as the statue is emblematic of the South's history of enslavement and the violence inflicted on black lives. The projection of images of black people who were fatal victims of violence, such as George Floyd, who was killed by a Minneapolis police officer on May 2020 following his arrest, is

an example of art activism decrying injustice and invoking the need for social and political change. The projection of George Floyd's image radically transforms the statue of Robert E. Lee and can be seen to subvert the imposition of white supremacist history on social consciousness.



Figure 4. Richmond's Robert E. Lee statue is transformed by protests following the killing of George Floyd (John McDonnell/The Washington Post via Getty Images) <https://theconversation.com/dead-white-men-get-their-say-in-court-as-virginia-tries-to-remove-robert-e-lee-statues-140813> (Accessed 14 February 2021).

The Covid-19 pandemic has made many art activists move online. For example, the #ClimateStrike movement, initiated by Greta Thunberg, has transitioned online through the use of social media. The movement is now known as #ClimateStrikeOnline, and is



propelled by artistic posters on Twitter and creative TikTok videos aimed at expanding the movement's appeal. As in the pre-social media era, digital art activism combines the affective potential of art with activist strategies to effect meaningful social and political change.

The above examples comprise only a few instances of the universality of art activism as a catalyst for collective struggle that raises critical social and political questions, while also celebrating the human capacity for unity. The case studies presented indicate that art offers a real possibility for re-awakening the revolutionary impulse and for planting seeds of change. A major challenge for emancipatory initiatives is destabilising hegemonic representations that prioritise the so-called autonomous individual at the expense of social relations of solidarity and care, which are essential to building equitable and just futures.

What kind of politics and solidarities are made possible through art activism? I will address this question next in my analysis of the art activism of *Mujeres Creando*. I will explore some of the ways in which the group's art activism serves as a point of rupture with hegemonic discourses so as to produce new liberatory languages. I will begin by discussing the role of discourse in subjectivity formation. Then I will look at the possibilities for micropolitical resistance offered by the decolonial theory of aesthetics and consider the implications of the aesthetic as a field of political contestation. This will be followed by an in-depth discussion of selected examples of the group's art activism.

## Decolonial discourse as subversive of capitalism

As I have previously argued, discourse both causes and is involved in material and social realities, as well as in subjectivity formation. This is in keeping with my understanding of the necessary co-extensivity of macro and micropolitics for social transformation. All systems of power require an epistemological basis. This order of knowledge becomes the reality in which the individual constitutes her- or himself. Hegemonic discourse, posing as a series of neutral and objective principles, is an institutionalised form of knowledge production rooted in patriarchy, power, and privilege, which determines how human beings navigate and experience the world. Deconstructing the presumed ahistoricity and neutrality of capitalist cosmology has been a priority for decolonial theory in order to expose how hegemonic worldviews are part of the imperial western project of knowledge dissemination that has been developed over the past 500 years. While western knowledge was regional in its original configuration, imperialism gave a global character to these local concepts. Through the exercise of power, the perspectives of patriarchy and privilege become synonymous with the human condition and humanity, to the exclusion of alternative perspectives, narratives and identities.

In order to break with this history of exclusion, alternative emancipatory knowledge production is necessary. Change can only come about when we have developed the tools to decode and dismantle the fabric of perception through which we are made to apprehend existence. Being able to define who we are and the kind of society we wish to live in are crucial guiding markers for any move towards social transformation. Cognitive capture — the ability to shape and influence how people think — is a key aspect of capitalism, which, as an all-encompassing system, shapes not only the financial and

political dimensions of social life, but also an entire subjective and symbolic economy, which directly impacts on subjectivity formation as a primary locus for political contestation and the reproduction of the capitalist system.

A significant aspect of political struggle thus involves symbolic economies. Hegemonic discourses construct “horizons of intelligibility” that “delineate what is possible, what can be said and done, what positions may legitimately be taken, what actions may be engaged in” (Norval 1996:4). Often what counts as an “available,” “intelligible,” or “compelling” subject position is shaped by the power relations that structure a given political terrain. With a wider range of discourses available, the subject has access to a greater variety of frameworks to help them interpret their lived experience. This directly impacts on subjectivity formation as historically “imaginary horizons, far from being merely superstructural phenomena, served to delimit the sphere of the thinkable, setting the boundaries within which all social practices, including capitalist production, had to find their place” (Smith 2003:65). The circulation of emancipatory discourses opens up the possibility for alternative identifications through the creation of alternative symbolisms.

Emancipatory movements<sup>85</sup> play an important role: they offer “critical frameworks that allow the exploited to interpret their experience, and thereby provide them with forms of social consciousness based on common terms of identification and ... the means for

---

<sup>85</sup> A social movement is a sustained association of persons in support of a social goal, usually galvanized by organizational and motivational mechanisms as opposed to a discourse which, following the work of Michel Foucault, is a system of thought, knowledge, or communication that constructs our experience of the world.

collective action” (Smith 2003:62). The creation and availability of alternative discourses is imperative to emancipatory politics as

[...] the experience of subordination does not guarantee that the subordinated social agent will develop a radical perspective vis-à-vis her subjection. The subordinated agent only becomes radicalised when she finds a compelling political discourse that gives an effective account for her condition, provides her with the critical tools that she needs to join with others in constructing an alternative world, and shows her how the entire subordinating structure might be overthrown through collective struggle. (Smith 2003:8)

The art activism of *Mujeres Creando*, as I will demonstrate later in this chapter, constitutes an intervention into the basic functioning of the subject’s perceptive, sensitive, affective and cognitive behaviour through the creation of an alternative discourse, which, under capitalism, is all but drowned out by the near-universality of hegemonic representations.

### The role of the image

Images function as an important filter for capitalist discourse; as representations they “produce their own effects; it is not a matter of representing a pre-existent reality” (Smith 2003: 165). The in-built critical promise of the image can be harnessed as a tool for interruption and disassembly with the potential to leave disorganising marks on dominant discourses, making room for the construction of different narratives. In this sense, images can be considered powerful technologies that administer conditions of intelligibility and regulate imaginaries, and thereby condition identities, truth effects, subjectivities, desire

and affect. Considered in this light, the art activism of *Mujeres Creando* emerges as an emancipatory practice with the potential to deconstruct the dominant grids of intelligibility and make room for the creation of new liberating vocabularies.

Enabling a breach in the hegemonic gaze opens a space for other ways of thinking, for discourse and human beings to slip out from under the mantle of capitalist dogma. In *The Three Ecologies* (2000), Félix Guattari, discussing what is needed to break away from the current world system, makes reference to the global media sphere supporting capitalism. He probes how the social representations and semiotics generated by neoliberal media function as ideological engines sustaining capitalist hegemony. The aesthetic field, operating primarily through the image, has thus become a pivotal arena for capital accumulation, where, as David Harvey observes, “a commodified and pre-packaged form of aesthetics” is promoted “at the expense of concerns for ethics, social justice, fairness, and the local and international issues of exploitation of both nature and human nature” (Harvey 2001:126). For emancipatory movements, the role of the image under capitalism and the ways in which the mesh of representations suffocates divergent interpretations of social realities is a critical area for intervention. Therefore, while the sphere of aesthetics may represent a locus of oppression, it is also a principal site from which to mount an offensive against the seeming boundlessness of neoliberal control. *Mujeres Creando* intervene in the aesthetic sphere to contradict the subjectivities and social relations fashioned by the logic of the market. For them, the aesthetic domain provides an opportunity for the creation of spaces that, in time, are intended to allow individuals to live independently from capitalism, according to alternative ideological and social realities.

## Art activism

As a means through which to carve out autonomous anti-capitalist enclaves, art activism is constantly faced with the possibility of its re-appropriation and domestication by hegemonic discourse. For the capitalist project, in its current cognitive variant, affective labour is a valuable commodity: “Affects and feelings, linguistic abilities, modes of cooperation, forms of know-how and of explicit knowledge, expressions of desire: all these are appropriated and turned into sources of surplus value”<sup>86</sup> (Shaviro 2013:n.p.). This amounts to a universal condition of subsumption, where not only labour but also all facets of social and personal existence are subsumed to capital. Under this form of capitalism, subjectivity itself is directly subsumed to processes of generating profit, transformed by a pervasive economic logic into value to be gainfully invested. Under these conditions, subversive or transgressive acts do not challenge the prevailing system: instead, they expand the scope of capitalist investment. Critical acts of transgression or radicalism become a motor for capitalist expansion, creating new territories for capitalism to appropriate and extract surplus value. As a result, critical capacities atrophy, replaced by conformist consciousness, which the steady consumption of commodified culture is apt to produce. However, although capitalism is a system seemingly without gaps, there are fissures, in which relatively autonomous art evolves according to its own criteria. Relative autonomy, therefore, is the condition that, paradoxically, both feeds capitalism and allows for resistance. If individual or cellular micro-resistances find ways to organise

---

<sup>86</sup> In Marxist theory, surplus value refers to the difference between the value of work done or of commodities produced by the labourer and the subsistence wages paid by the employer. The surplus produced over and above what is necessary for survival translates into profit in capitalism.

and develop networks of solidarity, by connecting their struggles through strategic alliances, instances of critical autonomy could potentially coalesce into a global and politically coherent network of subversive aesthetic strategies.

### The capitalist domination of the culture industry

The connection between the capitalist culture industry and subjectivity formation has far-reaching social and political implications. In *Critique of Creativity* (2011), Raunig and Ray explore the consequences of capitalist homogenising forces. Their thesis is that the hegemonic culture industry induces conformity in subjects by generating politically acquiescent role models for people to emulate. The mobilisation of a culture industry that fosters conformity means that ostensible forms of discipline and punishment are no longer necessary, as these forces are internalised and merge with the deeper structure of subjectivity. Taken to its logical extreme, the tendency to conform results in terror of the liquidation of individuals: “genocide is the absolute integration” (Raunig & Ray 2011:177). Given the catastrophic outcome of capitalist systemic logic, the disruptions provoked by the art activism of groups such as *Mujeres Creando*, which force a re-introduction of cause and legacy into the public imaginary, represent vital acts of radical struggle against the pressures of conformity to a market logic.

### Decolonising discourse

The patriarchal and racist foundations of the hegemonic order divide the world’s population into a deeply unequal hierarchy between disposable and necessary peoples, dictating the way all social groups relate to the other. Decolonising perception so as to

enable the formation of alternative social relationships with the other is a meaningful strategy for change, and is the driving principle of decolonial aesthetics. The idea of decolonial aesthetics derives from an awareness of the modern/colonial project — established in the sixteenth century with the materialisation of the Atlantic commercial circuit and the colonisation of the “New World” — as controlling, not only the economic and political spheres, but also knowledge production, including perception. From the time of the Enlightenment, art has been an influential medium, through which the senses of European subjects were shaped. As Europe was then emerging as a global economic and political centre, European aesthetics were exported all over the world and prevailed over non-European institutions and knowledge. Decolonial theory opposes decolonial aesthetics to colonial aesthetics, which promotes “the hidden process of erasure, devaluation, and disavowing of certain human beings, ways of thinking, ways of living, and of doing in the world” (Gaztambide-Fernández 2014:198). The identifications encouraged by colonial aesthetics are dependent on the practice of exclusion, leading to what has been termed the colonial wound:<sup>87</sup> the experience of living as a racialised subject. However, as both racial and patriarchal, the colonial wound is not restricted to the destitute or subordinate, but, rather, cuts across social classes. Patriarchy and racism are “two pillars of eurocentric knowing, sensing, and believing. These pillars sustain a structure of knowledge – Christian theology, secular philosophy (including aesthetics) and secular sciences” (Gaztambide-Fernández 2014:206).

---

<sup>87</sup> The term “colonial wound” is used by Walter D. Mignolo and Rolando Vasquez in their 2019 article “Decolonial AestheSis: Colonial Wounds/Decolonial Healings”.



Healing the colonial wound implies delinking from the European matrix of aesthetic experience, which imposed itself as universal. Delinking requires a dis-identification from the colonial gaze and the realisation that one's mind, body and senses have been modelled by the colonial matrix of power. In the delinking process, there is necessarily an understanding of how modern aestheTics<sup>88</sup> have played a key role in configuring a canon, a normativity that enabled the disdain and the rejection of other forms of aesthetic practices, or, more precisely, other forms of aestheSis, of sensing and perceiving (Mignolo & Vasquez 2013:5).

In deconstructing the conceptual binary of the mind/body dualism inherent in patriarchal logic, which equates the mind with male rationality that aims for transcendence and the body with female immanence and biological solipsism, decolonial theory aims to decolonise sensory experiences so that the body can recover its ability to respond across the nature/culture divide. Decolonial aesthesis therefore refers to rehabilitating the innate human capacity for simultaneous intellectual and emotional perception/feeling. In other words, insofar as decolonial aesthesis encompasses the conjoined processes of sensing, thinking and doing, it implies a deconstruction of the European eighteenth-century dualism of knowing and rationality versus sensing and emotions. As, within European Modernity, rationality is equated with the male and emotions with the female, decolonial

---

<sup>88</sup> Mignolo and Vasquez (2013) make the distinction between "aestheTics" as an invention of European enlightenment that has colonised all kind of sensing and is aimed at regulating taste, while "aestheSis" stands as a decolonial option within artistic, philosophical, ethical and political debate (Mignolo & Vasquez 2013:15).

aesthesis is not only a decolonising but also an inherently depatriarchalising practice; to quote *Mujeres Creando*, there is no decolonisation without depatriarchalisation.<sup>89</sup>

The deconstruction of the mind/body dualism derives its urgency from the political and ethical implications irrevocably connected to a capitalist-colonialist world-view. Reconceptualising the mind/body dualism entails an acknowledgement of “the embodiment of the brain and the embrainment of the body” (Braidotti 2017:33). This co-implication revives the notion of the relationality of the body, its potential to affect and be affected, and its irremediable connection to the materiality of the world. As Karen Barad claims, “We are not outside observers of the world. Nor are we simply located at particular places *in* the world; rather, we are part *of* the world in its ongoing intra-activity” (Barad 2003:828). This theoretical move displaces the anthropocentrism underlying the mind/body dualism, situating the body in a state of interconnectedness and interdependency with other-than-human worlds, opening up possibilities for alliances and flows previously arrested under coloniality. “Thinking across bodies” (Alaimo 2010:2) in this way betrays the circuits of power traversing body-environments and how these correspond to social inequalities and environmental ruin. Revealing this mutual entanglement therefore exposes the political nature of the epistemological and ontological categories of mind/body, insofar as these either support or challenge the status quo. Rethinking the seminal mind/body dualism thus bears the potential to reshape the world.

---

<sup>89</sup> *No se puede descolonizar sin despatriarcalizar. Teoría y propuesta de la despatriarcalización, Bolivia, Mujeres Creando*, 2013. – “It is not possible to decolonise without depatriarchalising” was the title of a paper developed by *Mujeres Creando* in 2013. See: [http://www.idaes.edu.ar/pdf\\_papeles/NO%20SE%20PUEDE%20DESCOLONIZAR%20SIN%20DESPATRIARCALIZAR.pdf](http://www.idaes.edu.ar/pdf_papeles/NO%20SE%20PUEDE%20DESCOLONIZAR%20SIN%20DESPATRIARCALIZAR.pdf) (Accessed 13 July 2020).

## The colonial wound

Healing from the colonial wound requires a subversion of dominant imaginative cartographies through the creation of new processes of thinking, doing, sensing and existing, in which the distinction between theory and practice has no purchase. The practice of decolonial aesthetics submits art as one possible emancipatory route, a way in which subjects are exposed to “the mysterious power of regeneration of the vital force, wherever it is” (Rolnik 2011:n.p.). The practice of art as part of the decolonial project means creating in order to decolonise sensibilities: it involves transforming colonial aesthetics into decolonial aesthesis. In the former case, market values predominate; art signals investment; and creating beautiful objects is the primary focus. Success in the established art world is tied to financial gain, whereas the primary aim of decolonial artists is to contribute to the formation of decolonial subjects. Through a variety of artistic expressions, such as installations, theatre, musical performances, sculpture, literature, poetry and other visual arts, decolonial aesthesis simultaneously delivers a radical critique of colonial aesthetics and executes a re-appraisal of that which the colonial order has invisibilised or debased, allowing for “the possibility of re-existence through the everyday aesthetic practices and the senses” (Mignolo & Vasquez 2013:5).

The re-incorporation of the senses into everyday experience is intended to induce a shift in perception, from knowing the world as form — an empirical exercise — to knowing the world as force, which calls on sensation. This mode involves reactivating the body as a field of energies that is receptive to the forces of the surrounding world. In this reawakened relationship, body-subjectivity is invigorated by the pulse of an endless series of fresh and varied experiences of the world’s otherness. The body is a territory to

be reclaimed, and a site for the redemption of emotion, autonomy and freedom as embodied experiences. The body has always been central to feminist theory, as historically women have experienced first-hand the complex intersections of power and the body through racial and gender oppressions.

In the art activism of *Mujeres Creando*, the body emerges as a locus from which to pose questions about how subjectivity is constructed and the ways in which the radical immanence of power is expressed through the body. The recovery of the body and the senses implies a criticism of rational thought and of modern subjectivity, as art and creativity become central elements in decolonising perception. In this way, decolonial art functions as a tool for empowerment, as a driving vehicle in the individual's development of new ideas and attitudes, and a means through which to secure their autonomy and dignity.

### The art activism of *Mujeres Creando*

#### *The São Paulo Biennale, 2014*

*Mujeres Creando's* art activism foregrounds the embodied and sexually differentiated structure of the subject through the phenomenon and theme of abortion. At the 31<sup>st</sup> Art Biennale in São Paulo, Brazil in 2014, *Mujeres Creando* created an installation entitled "*Espaço para Abortar*" (A Space for Aborting). The installation served as a space for women to share their "forbidden stories". The decriminalisation of abortion is a priority for *Mujeres Creando*, not only as it pertains to individual rights and public health, but also to their objective of decolonising the female body. By creating conditions for women to talk about their bodies, *Mujeres Creando* provide a point of unity and confluence for multiple voices from across Latin America. The dialogue in an atmosphere of supportive union

effects a transmutation of violence and oppression into solidarity for a dissident feminism, in which the non-victimising testimonies of abortion amount to the creation of a cartography of resistance.

On 6 November 2014, the first weekend of the São Paulo Biennale, dozens of women gathered at the pavilion to begin the procession through Ibirapuera Park, carrying a sculpture of an oversized uterus, made mostly of wire and other light materials. At a certain point, the women were invited to set the sculpture down on the grass and listen to the testimonies of those who wished to share their stories. Those who chose to share their experiences were asked to enter the uterus where, with their consent, their stories were recorded. The telling of each story was accompanied by demonstrations of affection and solidarity among all the women present, thereby transforming the giant uterus into a collective space for women's enunciation of a shared desire for ethical and political transformation. On completion of the procession, the sculpture was returned to the Biennale pavilion where it remained until the end of the event.



Figure 5. Women carrying the uterus sculpture through the streets of São Paulo for the Biennale (image available at <http://www.bienal.org.br/texto/1115>) (Accessed 11 March 2021).

*Mujeres Creando*'s final installation at the Biennale consisted of a red circle on the floor that read: a space for aborting. On the red circle, the oversized uterus sculpture was set down, having the shape of a vulva at the top inscribed with the words "neither closed mouth nor open uterus". In addition to the central uterus, another 6 sculptures of uteri were added, forming a circle in which two television screens were placed. Upon entering the uterus, the public could put on headphones and listen to the reports of Brazilian women who participated in the procession. On the screens, images of public demonstrations by *Mujeres Creando* showed how, months before the event in São Paulo, they had taken a similar walk (Costa de Souza 2017: 7).



Figure 6. *Mujeres Creando*'s final installation at the São Paulo Biennale, (<https://www.artnexus.com/en/magazines/article-magazine-artnexus/5d641d3490cc21cf7c0a4164/95/bienal-de-sao-paulo-pensar-la-realidad-por-medio-de-la-experiencia-estetica>) (Accessed 21 March 2021).

*Mujeres Creando*'s installation at the São Paulo Biennale is a typical example of dissident feminism with the aim, as a social movement, of encouraging dialogue between subjects who traditionally avoid talking to each other, especially about prohibited subjects such as abortion, because of political, class and racial differences. Through these unlikely alliances, the possibility arises for the emergence of complex political subjectivities through which ever more inclusive networks of solidarity are forged. One of *Mujeres Creando*'s signature graffitis, "*Mi cuerpo, mi territorio*" (My body, my territory) is emblematic of the group's focus on asserting the sovereignty of female bodies. It is on the body that language leaves its mark and that submission is reproduced. In varied,

creative ways, the group engages with the theme of violence against women's bodies; art becomes the medium through which to resist and subvert established authority. The group's initiatives take diverse forms, through subversive iconographies, performance, protest. Their art activism often also takes on a playful, feminist pedagogical aspect.

### *The blasphemous murals*

An example of the group's use of subversive iconography, intended to depatriarchalise and decolonise perceptions, is their series of blasphemous murals. As an instance of their art activism, I will discuss how the group makes use of alternative forms of expression in order to thwart the capitalist manipulation of subjectivity and bring about new, revolutionary configurations of the unconscious. One of the group's recent works was a series of blasphemous murals. The first was exhibited in La Paz, the second in Quito and the third in Santiago de Chile. Thus far, they are known as the holy trinity of blasphemous altars for being displayed in three different locations. As Galindo explains, the murals are in direct, transgressive and critical opposition to the colonial altars situated around the continent, whose purpose is primarily didactic and repressive. Through a specific symbolic register, these colonial altars were intended to "educate" the locals about their political and geographic position in relation to European colonial powers. They were also meant to instil fear or awe in relation to the church, whose complicity with colonial powers was evident. Fear was meant to discourage attempts at questioning or revolt. The murals by *Mujeres Creando* are painted on the external walls of symbolically important institutions, such as churches, some of which have been turned into important national museums since their deconsecration. Their position on the exterior of the institutions is



intentional, deconstructing the idea of museums as inviolable interior spaces, cut off from society.

The group's intention is to continue creating and exhibiting blasphemous altars throughout Latin America. The primary impulse behind the murals, as explained by the members of *Mujeres Creando* (Milagroso altar blasfemo, la censura ... n.d.:n.p.), was the desire to appropriate the symbolism of the colonial altars. This symbolism, intended as a tool for learning, assimilating and accepting narratives of submission, is reinterpreted from a feminist perspective as an opportunity to learn about freedom and self-determination instead. In Bolivia, where *Mujeres Creando* are known as *las locas oficiales* (the official crazy women), the group suffers a steady stream of sexism, misogyny, racism and even direct violence from a number of social sectors, including the art world. The group classifies the latter arena as a world controlled by a white, racist, classist, homophobic, middle-class oligarchy that holds their work in contempt (Flores 2017). Given this panorama, it is not surprising that the blasphemous mural created by *Mujeres Creando* in La Paz was destroyed by a religious gathering after only twenty-four hours. Neither legal officials nor the institutions that had extended the invitation for the group to make use of the external wall of the National Art Museum intervened to prevent the destruction. According to *Mujeres Creando*, the organisations that had extended the invitation, incapable of disguising their complicity with the establishment, were happy with the destruction of the mural because the religious fanaticism displayed in its eradication helped to consolidate their actual repudiation of the piece and, logically, their repudiation of *Mujeres Creando* (Milagroso altar blasfemo, la censura ... n.d.:n.p.).

After these events, the creation of the blasphemous altars has taken on a secondary purpose as an empirical demonstration of the ineffectiveness of censorship. As we now know, *Mujeres Creando* has gone on to create two more blasphemous altars in Quito, Ecuador, and Santiago de Chile, Chile. The group takes this unfolding of events as evidence that they have a living, eloquent, powerful and indispensable piece on their hands (Milagroso altar blasfemo, la censura ...) through which to carry out symbolic challenges to the status quo as part of their work of feminist depatriarchalisation.

While each mural is different from the others, all appropriate and reinterpret the symbols of church and state in order to critically interpellate the continent's colonial legacy. The murals are made up of images, such as a Christ-figure burdened by a cross of penises, a coat of arms mounted on a defeated nude male figure whose penis is chained to a weight labelled "the weight of sexism". The prostrate male is flanked by aphorisms: "Neither the earth nor women are territories for conquest", and "nothing is more similar to a sexist of the right than a sexist of the left". Other images include the Holy Virgin, who is neither man nor woman, the Virgin of Ovaries who watches over abortions, *La Dolorosa* (the Painful) who weeps for women who have been assassinated, as well as the nude masturbating figures of church and military officials, such as Pinochet. The onanism of the latter officials can be read as indicative of the calamitous autism of self-aggrandising politics; it is also a clear denouncement of the alliance between Opus Dei and the erstwhile Chilean dictatorship.



Figure 7. One of the blasphemous altars in Chile (<https://artishockrevista.com/2017/09/28/mujeres-creando-entrevista/>) (Accessed 12 May 2020).

In the Santiago mural, the Chilean and Bolivian coats of arms are placed in parallel and suffer a simultaneous deconstruction or decomposition of their narratives. The founding words on the Chilean coat of arms have been substituted by “Chile is not in Europe”, alluding to what *Mujeres Creando* perceive as the imaginative and discursive geopolitical misplacement of Chile resulting from its ambitions in relation to Europe and North America. In a mirror placed at the centre of the coat of arms is the key phrase: “The most subversive object in Chile is the mirror”, alluding to Chileans who are beguiled by western physical ideals. On either side of the mirror, there are two central characters. Piñera appears as the archetype of the successful white businessman who also wants to play at being president, and on the other is O’Higgins, the country’s founding father. Piñera is depicted as urinating into the mouth of a kneeling O’Higgins. Both are supported at their

feet by two indigenous individuals who, in Chile's original coat of arms, were eliminated and replaced by animals, in a clearly racist process of constituting the state.



Figure 8. Blasphemous mural in Bolivia (<http://www.ramona.org.ar/node/64047>) (Accessed 11 April 2020).

As examples of the group's art activism, the murals faithfully represent the politics and modus operandi of *Mujeres Creando* as an anarchy-feminist group. The murals are produced by three *Mujeres Creando* members, underscoring the value accorded to collective work by the group, which repudiates the elevation of "individual genius" and the marginalising practices that prevail in the art world, in clear ideological alignment with their feminist commitment to horizontal praxis. For decades, women and other marginalised communities have protested against the disproportionate status afforded to the work of white men in cultural institutions such as museums and galleries (*Armen Avnessian and ... 2018:n.p.*).

In Quito, *Mujeres Creando*'s blasphemous altar was subject once again to censorship, this time of a more bureaucratic nature. The mural was part of an exhibition entitled "Intimacy is political". While most of the pieces in the exhibition are reported to have adopted a critical position in relation to forms of gender-based violence, such as femicide, violence, sexual assault and discrimination, the work of *Mujeres Creando* was considered the most controversial (El milagroso altar y debate ... n.d.:n.p.), provoking different reactions from society. From the religious sector, the General Secretariat of the Ecuadorian Episcopal Conference issued a communication expressing its discomfort with the mural, while academics and some cultural actors showed interest in debating the mural and avoiding its censorship by the Municipality of Quito, which has authority over the Metropolitan Cultural Centre curating the exhibition. Despite these efforts, the Municipality of Quito censored the mural after only three days. The censorship was lifted four weeks later, but admission was restricted to guided visits. Amid the furore was a call for the resignation of the museum director (El milagroso altar y debate ... n.d.: n.p.).

The murals, like the other works of art activism by *Mujeres Creando*, commonly excite opposition. More importantly for their feminist agenda, their work foments debate. This is evident in the copious response from both sides of the debate to the mural in the Quito press. In La Paz, in an initiative to circumvent censorship and promote continued discussion, *Mujeres Creando* held a street event where, at night, without the permission of the National Art Museum, images of the three blasphemous murals were projected onto its walls. Pictures of the event on the *Mujeres Creando* website<sup>90</sup> show a large

---

<sup>90</sup> See <https://www.mujirescreando.org/> (Accessed 3 January 2021).

turnout. As street performances, these pieces undermine the hyperrealism of the imagosphere — “a continuous layer of images that places itself as a filter between the world and our eyes, which become blind to the tense pulsation of reality” (Rolnik 2007) — to produce palpable and material instances of epistemological insurgency: they are interventions that prove uncomfortable for the status quo.

### *Intervention at a book fair in La Paz, 2015*

Another of the group’s interventions, in commitment to their chosen mandate to depatriarchalise and decolonise, took place at a book fair. The choice of location is significant, since books are a primary source of knowledge production and dissemination. The intervention was filmed and is available on their website. The video begins with an image of the book fair onto which is superimposed the heading “Women correcting the Bible”. This is followed by an image of a poster *Mujeres Creando* created for the event. It features three faceless women, each representing a different age and background, as indicated by their dress, although all are drawn topless. Their nakedness is devoid of eroticism: rather, it underscores their equal standing as women. Their facelessness is oddly reflexive, causing the viewer’s gaze to ricochet back onto herself or himself. The poster announces a “Disturbing Unofficial Intervention”, along with the dates and times of the occurrence. The video rolls on and another phrase is superimposed onto the image: “at a book fair filled with unimaginative expensive books filled with misogynistic religion”. The group then appears, making its way into the pavilion in the style of a religious procession. In front is Maria Galindo, dressed in a flowing black robe over a brightly patterned dress. She wears a white death-mask on which is written: “it is more valuable to doubt than to believe”. Her appearance is evocative of pagan religious iconography in

its riotous colour and rebellious commingling of seriousness and irreverence, reminiscent of the Mexican festivities of the Day of the Dead.<sup>91</sup> Galindo holds a transfigured cross aloft. The bottom has been replaced by the legs of a mannequin; in the centre is a cut-out of a Caucasian Jesus, onto which a sentence in bright lettering has been overlaid: “Attention! Women correcting the Bible!”

The members of the group then settle in the middle of one of the passages. Three members sit on the ground on coverlets. They set to work in companionable diligence. Two of the members remain on their feet. One reads extracts from the Bible alluding to the inferior or unclean status of women. The other is dressed as a nun, with the words on her headpiece: “*ser iluminada*”, which can be interpreted in the imperative as “be illuminated!” or taxonomically as “illuminated being”. “Illuminated” here is also open to two possible interpretations: either an individual inspired by a supernatural power and therefore in possession of absolute truths, or as having experienced enlightenment. As her colleague reads from the Bible, the “nun” slowly chews up pages from the Bible. There are long shots of the nun literally ruminating on the pages, methodically moving her lips to pull the papers into her mouth. The shots are disturbing and viewing the process of ingestion is uncomfortable. Although the “nun” appears, in that moment at least, to undertake the consumption of the pages voluntarily, her body language betrays an

---

<sup>91</sup> Originating in Mexico, the Day of the Dead is a holiday traditionally celebrated on November 1 and 2, and is associated with the western Christian observance of All Hallow’s Eve and All Souls’ Day. It is generally a joyful celebration when family and friends gather to pay their respects to those who have died. Traditions include the use of *calaveras* (skulls) and marigolds.

abrogation of desire, possibly in allusion to the malaise induced by the incorporation of misogynistic stereotypes.

At the same time, Galindo and two others sit cross-legged on the floor and continue with their labours. The scene is evocative of women's circles, which typically embody horizontal relations of productivity and solidarity. Each of the seated members is occupied with transfiguring the Bible. Galindo tears out pages and then, using red wool, sews others together. Sometimes the thread is used to frame certain passages. Another member is creating an alternative Bible, and the third member inscribes text in bold lettering across a number of pages. The process of transformation is craft-based and mildly hypnotic in anticipation of the finished product. The materials are colourful and aesthetically stimulating. The orator continues to read from the scriptures, at this juncture citing verses on menstruation and how it renders women unclean. All the while, people mill around and look on curiously. Eventually, the "nun" removes her robes, standing before those around her in a white satin slip. She plaits her long black hair, which is adorned with colourful accessories. Her removal of the nun's garb is experienced as an act of release, of breaking free. At this point, the women have completed their task of transforming the Bible. One of the Bibles has its cover revamped by colour and text. The cover, in shades of white, pink and sky blue, says: "Women speak out today; I am not a reproductive machine; I think and decide for myself". The second Bible has been "edited" by the red woollen thread and, on certain pages, the following text is rendered in bold lettering across the original content:

**Death: every day women die raped by their boyfriends or husbands**



Fear: Women have been raised to be fearful and thus submit easily

Object: Today we have been turned into disposable objects

Children: our daughters are raised for submission

Meanwhile, the now ex-nun begins to sing an original composition entitled "*La inaudita virgen pecadora*" (the unheard-of sinful virgin) a capella. This is a song about the historical representation of women as born from Adam's rib, secondary and in service to men. The video ends with scenes of the members of the group speaking to passers-by and showing the transformed Bibles to those who demonstrate interest. On screen is the sentence "It is more valuable to doubt than to believe".

The radicalism of *Mujeres Creando's* art activism can be measured by the degree to which religion is regarded as inviolable territory, which is an indication of how deeply immersed it is in the public imaginary, and of the cardinal formative role it plays for many people. Interpreted politically, the piece is not aimed at religious practice *per se*, but at Catholicism in particular as a primary religion that has functioned as a dominant form of social organisation. By now, it is an established historical fact that the Catholic Church has been complicit in government affairs in many countries, a reality that persists in some states. Therefore, the target of the art activism here, I believe, is the conundrum that a major belief system underlying the larger moral fabric of many societies should be inherently sexist and remain undisputed. Their protest is aimed at the moral and intellectual incoherence of defending or allowing to go unquestioned a fundamental organising social structure that condones women's servitude.

The church has been a regular target of *Mujeres Creando*'s art activism, which is intended to expose how Christian religious discourse on the Latin American subcontinent has served as an instrument for the colonization of women's bodies and for the constitution of obedient subjectivities. As Lugones has pointed out (2014:938), the "civilising" mission of Christianity, at first forcibly imposed, and later institutionalised through educational and other normative processes, colonised people's notions of themselves, as well as of intersubjective relationships, relationships with the spiritual world and the earth, with identity, social organisation, ecological and cosmological views, and their perception of reality itself. The art activism of *Mujeres Creando* is frequently aimed at undermining religious doctrine that prescribes categorical feminine identities based on the surveillance of bodies and sexualities. The group's activism is carried out with a mix of humour and parody. In July 2015, for example, the group impersonated pregnant nuns, protesting at the gates of the Cathedral of La Paz against the visit of Pope Francis at the time.



Figure 9. *Mujeres Creando* protest outside a church (<http://g1.globo.com/mundo/noticia/2015/07/feministas-protestam-contra-visita-do-papa-bolivia.html>). (Photo AFP PHOTO/ Jorge Bernal) (Accessed 12 April 2020).

Visible in the picture are the statements: “Francis, your visit is not a reinforcement of faith but a handy blessing of power”. Also: “My homosexuality doesn’t require your approval, it is the homosexuality of the church that needs acknowledging”.

During the performance-protest the phrase: “Your church crucifies women every day, feminism revives them” was repeatedly chanted as the police violently forced the performers to retreat. In March 2017, the group held a protest defending the right to abortion in front of the Metropolitan Cathedral of La Paz. On that occasion, they stood at the doors of the building located in Plaza Murillo, some dressed as nuns, denouncing the attitude and hypocrisy of the church regarding abortion, recalling the existence of clandestine abortions within convents.

The art activism of the group is intended to promote dialogue and participation, often by blurring the boundary between performers and audience, breaking the fourth wall, producing reflections and knowledge based on bodily experiences. As socially involved art, *Mujeres Creando*’s interventions question the separation of the individual from the collective. They engage with the question of what is sayable and visible through dissent, challenging established hierarchies of meaning, clamouring for self-representation, constructing alternative forms of speech and visibility in order to alter social consciousness and create new, self-determining and revolutionary subjectivities. *Mujeres Creando*’s art, which uses the body as a medium, is inseparable from physical experience. For the group, embodied experience, the subverted and subverting body is the source of creative expression. Here, the body is centred, not only in an ironic reference to the centuries-long association of the body with women but also, as

performance art is more corporeal than other art forms, the body literally becomes the medium of the art work.

The group's commitment to socially involved art, in which the separation of performer and spectator is dissolved to transform the political conscience of the onlooker, explains why the art of *Mujeres Creando* is not generally to be found in the international art circuit. While on occasion the group may decide, for strategic reasons, to accept an invitation to participate in institutional events by exhibiting in art galleries and museums — for example, in the Brazilian Biennale — they usually decline invitations from the art establishment. In the imagosphere, social critique tends to be neutralised and recuperated by capitalist discourses. Instead, *Mujeres Creando* bring their art into the street. This move not only subverts established categories of privileged and underprivileged groups in society by flouting the socially mandated standard of art as the exclusive privilege of cultural elites; it also imbues the group's art activism with strength from the situational embeddedness and unique temporality of each operation. In the aestheticised enclaves of the art establishment, removed from the realities that art is often supposed to express, the artist is less likely to commit to working and living in solidarity. In the case of *Mujeres Creando*, abstracting their art from particular lived conditions by submitting it to exhibition and replication would result in transforming the pieces into domesticated political exhibitions, effectively cancelling their radical potential. Conversely, the streets are the interstices from which to effect a rupture and to wreak symbolic violence on the master discourse.

## Graffiti

Graffiti was very popular in Latin America during the years of military dictatorship and has become one of the primary means used by *Mujeres Creando* to communicate with the city.

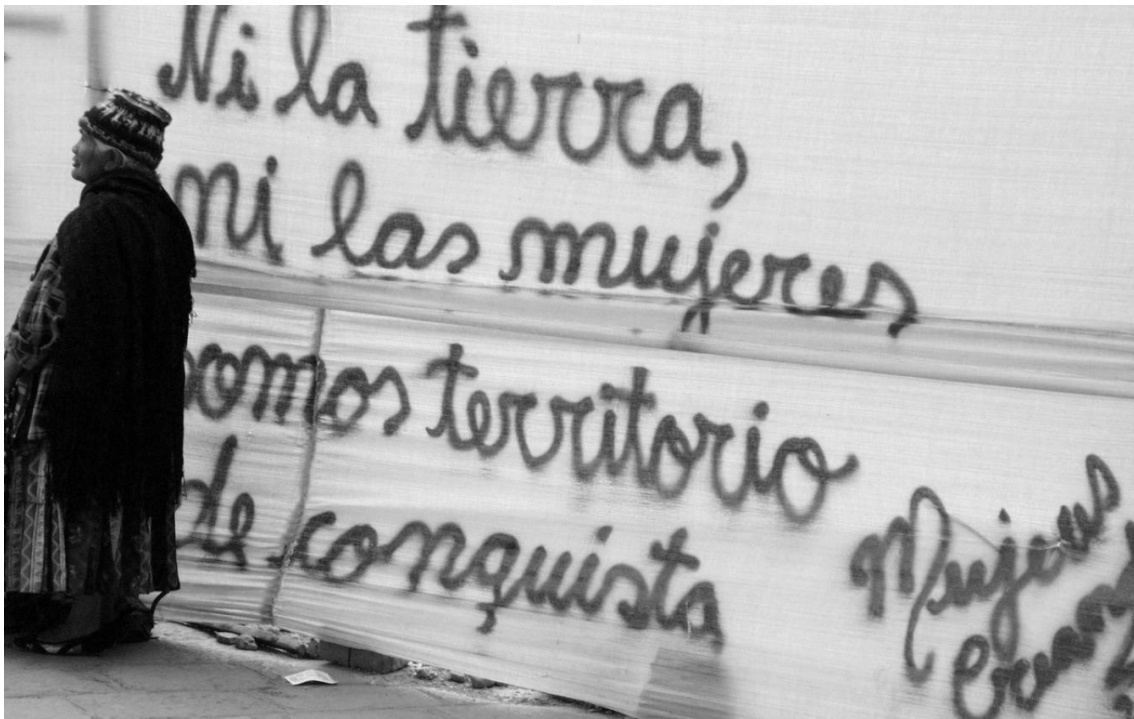
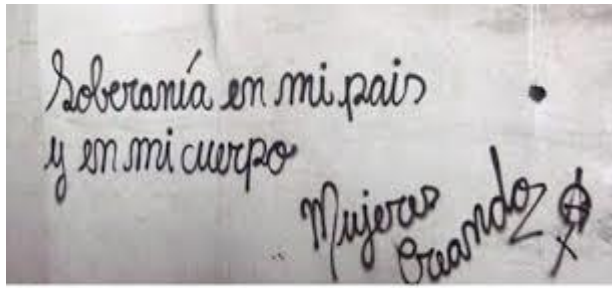


Figure 10. An example of *Mujeres Creando*'s graffiti. The tag translates as "Neither the land, nor women are territories for conquest" <https://www.risd.edu/news/stories/decoloniality-seminar-expands-social-equity-initiative> (Accessed 22 January 2020).



"Sovereignty in My Country and in My Body" - Mujeres Creando

Figure 11. This tag proclaims "Sovereignty in my country and in my body" <https://towardfreedom.org/story/archives/women/sovereignty-in-my-country-and-in-my-body-the-fight-for-women-s-reproductive-rights-in-latin-america/> (Accessed 22 January 2020).



Figure 12. A *Mujeres Creando* graffiti proclaiming that happiness is their revenge <https://twitter.com/search?q=%23MujeresCreando> (Accessed 27 January 2020).

For *Mujeres Creando*, the street is the place to subvert hegemonic symbolism and develop an alternative language of revolution, which is simultaneously accessible and compelling. Through their alternative approach to democracy-building and the creation of a different language and terminology, *Mujeres Creando* make room for affect. The group is well-known for their graffiti, which consists of politicised messages that question and subvert the dominant means of communication and the prevailing androcentric discourse. Their graffiti is also a way to install in the social imaginary the idea of questioning and

transgressing a system that, through municipal decrees of order and ornamentation, construes the city as their kingdom, beyond intervention from anyone else.

Adopting the street as a political space, however, implies more than graffiti. In a political stance where knowledge is directly produced from social practice, *Mujeres Creando* takes the street as their public stage on which utopias slowly open up. Their appropriation of the street is a deliberate action to recover the public realm, which the patriarchal system had vetoed for women. Appropriating public space is an important strategy for getting society to understand what the group wants to change and how this is to be done. This is an ongoing challenge and progress is piecemeal. The graffiti is intended for everyday people in their daily lives. It denounces racism, along with state, family, sexual and institutional violence. The language breaks with the rhetoric of the left, allowing for greater creativity and the gradual honing of the group's own forms of expression. By engaging directly with the public and inhabiting the streets, the group has developed an alternative language, which escapes the overt rationalism of the left and the prejudice of the right, with the aim of building an alternative populism that is committed to equality.

Creativity and the use of alternative forms of communication, as strategies to interpolate the tangled forces that produce and reinforce power, distinguish the group's approach to challenging existing forms of political interaction. Their communication is founded on creativity and pacificism, but as their actions are perceived by those in power as transgressive of behavioural norms, repression is nearly always in attendance during their street interventions (Mujeres Creando 2005:43). *Mujeres Creando* have continued to face these obstacles while insisting on their emancipatory project, a part of which entails

overcoming the semantic confusion wherein words such as “movement” and “autonomy” are trapped. To recover the true meaning of these words, *Mujeres Creando* appeal to political practices in which a new language and a new aesthetics is developed (*Mujeres Creando* 2005:59), and where autonomy is promoted as a relation of non-dependency, of independence and sovereignty in their decisions and their way of expressing them.

### Art activism in the public sphere

The art interventions of *Mujeres Creando* are meant to re-appropriate the public sphere and concurrently to re-create it as a site for political and social intervention. Art is also used to keep individual and collective memory alive. The group’s art activism often serves as a means for the communal sharing of memory, its retrieval and revivification. Creating a poetics of memory is an important counterweight to the production of neoliberal subjectivities that are typically performed in a perpetual present. The eradication of memory serves to allow the perpetuation of past injustices and purposively induces blindness towards the racist and sexist foundations of neoliberal identity. It also inhibits solidarity by erasing the memory of a collective history.

Memory is fundamental to identity and to the sense of who people are, both individually and collectively. It is through memory that value systems endure. Without these, subjectivity is suspended in a perpetual present, bereft of guiding references. Under neoliberalism, the transfiguration of the public space into a seamless ahistorical flatland sustains the hegemonic political project. This notion is developed by Marc Augé in *Non-Places* (2008), where he explains that, under neoliberal capitalism, increasingly, public spaces are turned into a series of non-places. Contrasting this term with its opposite —



anthropological place — helps us to understand Augé's term. Anthropological place is inscribed with references to social bonds and a collective history, while non-places, whose proliferation is coincident with globalisation, are areas designed exclusively for the purposes of "circulation, consumption and communication" (Augé 2008:viii). The dichotomy is a useful instrument for measuring "the degree of sociality and symbolisation of a given space" (Augé 2008:viii). Communication in non-places is reduced to instructions. This is suited to the design of non-places in service to specific consumerist ends, such as transport, transit, commerce or leisure, as exemplified by airports or shopping malls. Relations between individuals in non-places is mediated by an "overlaying of temporal language by spatial language, the primacy of code, which prescribes behaviour, over the symbolic which constructs relations" (Augé 2008:xviii). In non-places, the individual's relation to otherness is neutralised, as both the architecture and the language of the space of non-places function to produce solitary users in purely contractual relations with their environments, causing Augé to observe that "the space of non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude and similitude" (2008:83). Extrapolating from the above, the anthropological as well as social and political consequences of the spread and current extension of non-places are significant for emancipatory projects of solidarity building. Non-places produce atomised and largely disaffected subjectivities, whose capacity for awareness is profoundly altered through the manipulation of space and language.

The proliferation of non-places implies the end of the public sphere and its effective neutralisation as a domain of social and political exchange. In the past, much work has

been done by feminists<sup>92</sup> to overturn the traditional gendered divide between the private and public spheres, in attempts to open up the public sphere to those who, routinely, have been excluded from it. Feminists have worked to open up the public domain as a discursive space in which to question sociocultural, economic, political and legal institutions, challenging the longstanding patriarchal public/private dualism. Art is able to catalyse an alternative relationship between people and the environment, mobilising affect and precepts that break with the blanket semiotisation of capitalism, to rescue sensation and the new forms of life to which it can give rise. Through their street performances and use of graffiti, *Mujeres Creando* disturb the anodyne order of the public domain with their riotous presence, forcing open interstices through which to glimpse the beginnings of a public commons.

### Conclusion

The art activism of *Mujeres Creando* is an exercise in collectively aiming to implement new ways of generating knowledge through relationships. This implies a strict commitment to situated perspectives, where ethical accountability for one's own implication with the structures one is opposing is ever-present. One such implication of *Mujeres Creando's* art activism involves challenging the viewer to think beyond established patterns of thought. Their graffiti is a good example of this as they attempt to reclaim the street as a public place of sociability and political struggles, rather than just a place of passage, thus their nickname "*agitadoras callejeras*" (street agitators). Their

---

<sup>92</sup> The public/private distinction has been contested by feminists such as Carole Pateman (1983) and Catharine MacKinnon (1989), among others.

graffiti functions as a critique of the role of women in patriarchal society, and as a potential pedagogical tool it signals an alternative to the disciplinary purity of institutionalised instruction. Their other art activism, consisting of installations, murals and performance pieces, among other media, can be read as a quest for transformative processes leading to a reconstructed social imaginary and ultimately to a new depatriarchal and decolonial metaphysics. Forging a new metaphysics, however, is not restricted to the present: it is, rather, a continuous unfolding of the potential of the here and now in which, on a daily basis, the conditions for political and ethical agency are generated through creativity and interconnection with others. It requires a commitment to rethinking the world so as to reshape it, and a robust vision of social and political transformation that enables an affirmative hold on the present. The capacity of art to challenge the status quo through defamiliarising a normative vision of the subject and the translation of an internal shift into public discourse is a complex and uncertain process. This unpredictability notwithstanding, the art activism of groups such as *Mujeres Creando* is indispensable as a way to mobilise resources and visions for sustainable future alternatives.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

#### *MUJERES CREANDO: FEMINISM AS A PROJECT FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION*

##### Conducting qualitative discourse analysis

Conducting qualitative discourse analysis on a group who vigorously eschew any interaction with academia posed a particular set of challenges. Field research, as a qualitative method of data collection, would have provided me with the opportunity to observe and interact with the members of *Mujeres Creando* in their natural environment. From a personal point of view, the opportunity to engage in participant observation would have allowed me not only to observe the group in its everyday activities but also to be deeply involved in the research process in ways that could have led to in-depth discussions with the group members. These conversations would most likely have yielded detailed data, and would possibly have uncovered facts that may not have been obvious at first, to either myself as the researcher or to the participants. The opportunity to conduct qualitative interviews, either on a one-to-one basis and/or with focus groups would have made it possible to collect ancillary data, as having the researcher working *in loco* always opens up new lines of thinking. Fieldwork with *Mujeres Creando* would have allowed me to experience Barad's notion of connection and entanglement as fundamental states of being. Coming from different cultural backgrounds and political geographies, my having conducted fieldwork with *Mujeres Creando* would have furthered my practical understanding of difference as integral to the world's entangled becoming, and of the application of Barad's concept of intra-action on my research. As a result of not doing fieldwork, I had to apply notions of connection on a strictly theoretical plane. I reflected in

solitude if and how the material forces that would act upon me in their “intra-active liveliness” (Juelskjaer 2012), while conducting field work in a foreign social context would have disrupted the iterative materialisation of my person in productive ways.

As a result of the above, my research has been conducted primarily online, along with consulting published works and video. There are advantages to doing online research. Firstly, it allows me to can access data and work at my own pace. In addition, online research has allowed me to reconcile my need for employment with my interest in conducting research. It is also cost-effective, as there is no need to incur travel expenses. Nevertheless, while it is impossible to say how my research might have turned out if I had done fieldwork, this present body of work represents my best efforts given the restrictions on personal contact imposed by the group.

### Feminist emancipatory groups around the world

There are numerous feminist emancipatory groups worldwide. The fight for gender equality has expanded due to digital tools, making it easier for feminist activism to spread across borders. The following brief list of events, legislative gains, and feminist groups in recent years is provided for the purposes of comparison and contextualisation. One example of how social media expedites organising and planning was the 2017 Women’s March — the largest coordinated global women’s protest in history (Foreignpolicy.com 2021), which took place across the globe just ten weeks after the 2016 election of Donald

Trump. Less than a month later, the #MeToo movement<sup>93</sup> had gone viral in over 190 countries. In Argentina, during the pandemic, women protesting against gender-based violence pushed for legal abortion. The Argentinian abortion bill, which legalises abortion on demand in the first fourteen weeks of gestation, was passed in a groundbreaking move by the National Congress in December 2020. Among the more visible feminist activist groups are Guerrilla Girls, Pussy Riot, and Femen in the global North.

The Guerrilla Girls' activism consists of posters, stickers, billboards, videos and protest actions. Active since 1985, these feminist activist artists are known for wearing gorilla masks in public, a strategy intended to keep their identity private and force a focus on the issues rather than on the members of the group. The group fights against discrimination and corruption. Most recently, Guerrilla Girls have undertaken a new street campaign to denounce discrimination in museums.

---

<sup>93</sup> The #MeToo movement gained momentum after Harvey Weinstein's history of sexual assault and harassment were revealed as survivors went public with their personal experiences in 2017. The movement has become a platform for denouncing sexual assault and harassment as epidemic phenomena around the world.



Figure 1. A Guerrilla Girls poster denouncing discrimination in museums <https://delitodeopiniao.blogs.sapo.pt/1324099.html> (Accessed 20 May 2021).

Pussy Riot, a Russian feminist protest punk rock and performance art group based in Moscow, was founded in 2011. The group gained notoriety when they staged an unauthorised performance in Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour on 21 February 2012. Eventually halted by church security, the performance, aimed against the support lent by Orthodox church leaders to Vladimir Putin during his election campaign, was condemned as sacrilegious by the Orthodox clergy, and later led to the arrest of three of the group members. The Pussy Riot members were accused of hooliganism motivated by religious hatred, and each was sentenced to two years' imprisonment. Yekaterina

Samutsevich was later released following an appeal, and her sentence suspended. The sentences of the other two members remain unchanged.



Figure 2. Pussy Riot performance in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour <https://www.rferl.org/a/pussy-riot-maria-alyokhina/31349639.html> (Accessed 20 May 2021).

Femen is “an international women’s movement of brave topless female activists painted with the slogans and crowned with flowers” (Femen 2021). The group’s topless protests generate significant media coverage. Female nudity, according to the group’s ethos, is “a naked nerve of the historic woman-system conflict, its most visual and appropriate illustration. Activist’s [sic] naked body is the undisguised hatred toward the patriarchal order and new aesthetics of women’s revolution” (Femen 2021). Claiming to adhere to an ideology of sextremism, atheism and feminism, Femen’s goal, as stated on their website, is complete victory over patriarchy.





Figure 3. Femen staging a street protest <https://revistaglamour.globo.com/Na-Real/noticia/2014/03/documentario-revela-o-grupo-feminista-femen-e-comandado-por-um-homem.html> (Accessed 22 May 2021).

These examples of feminist art activism demonstrate a move towards other forms of organising and political resistance to despotic regimes, often through occupying public space. This experimentation with embedded and embodied forms of resistance — embedded in the social fabric as a politics of location, and embodied as the activists’ bodies are directly implicated in their acts of consciousness-raising — enacts the becoming of alternative political subjects. The same kind of embodied and embedded political praxis is visible in *Mujeres Creando*. I have discussed the numerous ways in which *Mujeres Creando* battle to occupy and reclaim the streets of La Paz as a genuinely public domain. Like the other feminist groups I have mentioned, *Mujeres Creando* is committed to the counter-production of autonomously defined political subjectivities, centred in affect and relational structures. A third aspect these groups have in common

is the embrace of political resistance as joyful affirmation, giving rise to their common use of humour and irony. This, which constitutes an alternative notion of political praxis, might hold the key to the longevity of such groups. As Maria Galindo of *Mujeres Creando* has stated, “*ser felices es nuestra venganza*” (being happy is our revenge) (Cadenaser.com 2019). Building social horizons of hope is a lifelong project, and without joyful affirmation any such project is unlikely to endure.

### Socially transformative feminism

Since 1992, *Mujeres Creando* has been practising its particular blend of intersectional feminist resistance in response to entangled oppressions of all kinds. I have analysed examples of their work in previous chapters. However, it is important also to investigate the group’s effectiveness and which conditions have changed as a result of their actions. A recent video of a conference held by *Mujeres Creando*<sup>94</sup> on violence against women provides a good indication of how far the group have come and in which direction they are headed. During the talk Galindo refers to what she considers the two main achievements of the women of Bolivia to date regarding violence against women in her country. The fact that she refers to Bolivian women rather than to *Mujeres Creando* underscores the intersectional and embedded identity of the group, which does not see itself as separate from others but as an ethical alliance that is deeply implicated in Bolivian society. Galindo points to the fact that, due to women’s activism, it is no longer possible to deny the reality of violence against women in Bolivia. This statement denotes an

---

<sup>94</sup> See: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8\\_BlvI5xSc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8_BlvI5xSc) - *Justicia patriarcal vs justicia feminista | María Galindo - Integrante de Mujeres Creando 2/10/2021.*

important shift in social consciousness. Where previously, women who suffered violence were subjected to disempowering and frequently humiliating sexist assumptions and actions by the authorities if they chose to report, according to Galindo, thanks to the persistence of Bolivian women activists, this situation has begun to improve. Related to this shift in consciousness is the concomitant and equally important refusal of Bolivian women to endure more violence. This new standpoint has led to the second important achievement Galindo mentions. Bolivian women, in their newfound conviction about bringing the perpetrators of gender-based violence to justice, have inundated the justice services in the country and caused them to collapse. Galindo interprets this mass pressure on the Bolivian justice system as proof of the increasing consciousness of autonomy, of dignity, of the desire for freedom, happiness and peace among Bolivian women, which has arisen from the grassroots. The actions of these women, in Galindo's understanding, has induced a conceptual crisis in the patriarchal justice system, which thousands of women have accused of freeing rapists, suppressing evidence and delaying cases. Galindo claims the patriarchal justice system has not addressed the cultural, political and social bases that generate and reproduce violence, and that it does appear disposed to doing so. Galindo's proposal in reply to the profound justice crisis is the creation of a parallel feminist justice system, one which sees the return of public tribunals. "Call me crazy", Galindo says as she dares the audience to imagine a future the collective power of Bolivian women could fashion. Galindo's proposal illustrates the spirit of *Mujeres Creando* as a feminist activist group for whom feminism is a project of social transformation.

## Concluding remarks

My thesis has attempted to answer the following research question: What would feminist activism look like if it addressed both macro and micropolitical factors in a way that led to the formation of anti-capitalist subjectivities and sustainable environments? Posed against the background of globalised neoliberal capitalism, my research question is based on the premise that, for emancipatory movements, capitalism, operating on both the macro and micropolitical levels of existence, is the major impediment to the establishment of egalitarian socio-political contexts. On the macropolitical level capitalism results in an unequal distribution of wealth, which generally correlates with the racist and sexist parameters on which the project of modernity is organised. On the micropolitical level, capitalist values fashion stunted subjectivities. Subjectivity formation under capitalism results in individuals who not only follow patterns of consumption, but whose relationship to others and the world is truncated. For anti-capitalist activists working on the micropolitical level,<sup>95</sup> the aim is to heal the wounds inflicted by the hegemonic system and create conditions for the emergence of alternative subjectivities. I wanted to explore feminist resistance to these challenges in a real-life context, so a case study was appropriate.

*Mujeres Creando*, active since 1992, constitutes an interesting case study because of how the group has developed, and continues to develop, a praxis to address the macro and micropolitical challenges habitually facing anti-capitalist movements. It has been especially engaging to study how the group has articulated the inseparability and mutually

---

<sup>95</sup> Examples include the feminist activists mentioned above.

constitutive character of micro and macropolitical factors in their daily work, and to witness how the mutual implication of macro and micropolitical concerns plays a fundamental role in determining the longevity of their emancipatory initiative.

A key point in the group's resistance to the pressures of capitalist social and political realities entails having carved out a space away from the reach of hegemonic control, a nodal point from which to begin to think about how to advance social transformation. For *Mujeres Creando*, their distinctive identity finds material expression in the completion of their house/headquarters, in which they live and organise politically, from where they inhabit their state of rebellion and work together with communities to change the colonial and patriarchal structures of Bolivian society.

The *Mujeres Creando* project is a living experiment based on the second-wave feminist principle that “the personal is political”, which is, in itself the perfect synthesis of macro and micropolitical aspects of existence. *Mujeres Creando*'s commitment to the “the personal is political” principle combines emancipatory theory and praxis as inseparable fronts of resistance. The idea of a feminist commons,<sup>96</sup> in which this principle is epitomised, allows for the re-organisation of collective life: not only is a space created where women may escape hegemonic modes of manipulation and control, but it is precisely through this daily organisation of life that subjectivity is reformulated in democratic ways. The commons represents an attempt by people to reclaim control over their lives and to create forms of existence that are organised in accordance with impulses other than those dictated by market logic. In reaction to ecological devastation and social

---

<sup>96</sup> A feminist commons is understood here in the terms laid out by Silvia Federici, as discussed in chapters 1 and 2.

injustice, mass land expropriation by capitalism, the precarisation of jobs and the cancellation of social services, the commons is a way to address macropolitical concerns that directly jeopardise the ability of many people to sustain themselves on a daily basis. The commons serves multiple purposes: it is a way to re-create mutual aid and bonds of solidarity that cut across divisions of race, gender and age, but also to develop new forms of cooperation and, as a space of resistance, it is also the locus of knowledge production. The commons is thus a terrain of new social and political possibility.

The *Mujeres Creando* house, aptly named *La Virgen de los Deseos* (The Virgin of Desires), as Maria Galindo explains (*13 horas de ...* 2019), is such a commons. It is a place where women are changing the structure of the family, assumptions about maternity, happiness and their bodies, and the basis of the economy. Through the exercise of creativity, the women of *Mujeres Creando* are re-inventing their means of subsistence, rethinking their dreams and aspirations, and creating a new social position capable of undercutting accepted meaning. In reinventing themselves, these women are reinventing their worlds.

The feminist commons created by the women of *Mujeres Creando* is the base from which the group engages with society. The situated activism of *Mujeres Creando* means the espousal of a deeply relational ontology and politics, in which the members of the group reject the idea of the individual as a separate entity living an independent, self-contained existence. In a way that is reminiscent of the theory of agential realism — a relational account of ontology where there are no pre-existent discrete atomic entities with determinate boundaries but, rather, subjects that emerge intra-actively through “a

multitude of entangled performances of the world's worlding itself" (Barad 2011: 133) — the politics of *Mujeres Creando*, both within and outside their house, is aimed at transforming subjectivities through continuous entangled inter-relating. This new materialist aspect to the political activism of *Mujeres Creando* allows for the emergence of unlikely political alliances and more complex political subjects, as I discussed in previous chapters, which results in a broader, more inclusive political praxis.

The relational character of the politics of *Mujeres Creando* entails the emancipation of the affective capacities of the individual and the formulation of an ethics of engagement with the other. In classical political theory, politics is considered as free of affect, which traditionally is seen as a feminine attribute. However, the experience of *Mujeres Creando* demonstrates that affect, which historically has been relegated to the feminine, is, paradoxically, the basis for the constitution of contemporary democratic subjectivity. The reintroduction of affect into mechanisms of power is achieved through the dissolution of the private/public binary where, through the daily struggle to reclaim control over the forms of social reproduction, new subjectivities and social relations are forged. The introduction of affect into politics directly impacts on the micropolitical processes of subjectivity formation. At the same time, the disintegration of the private/public dualism exposes how material conditions and interior states are twin conditions, and how the production of subjectivity demands that the dual facets of sociality — material reality and the interior plane of desire and thought — are not hierarchically structured, but rather, mutually reinforcing.

The introduction of affect into political praxis therefore contributes to the dissolution of the subject/object divide, cutting across other foundational dichotomies of the Euro-Western tradition, such as nature/culture, animate/inanimate, and mind/body. The political and ethical importance of deconstructing and reconceptualising these dualisms lies in the epistemological support they lend to power relations and their potential, once rethought, for challenging and changing the status quo. For the political activism of *Mujeres Creando*, the body is an important threshold. As Karen Barad claims: “We’ are not outside observers of the world. Nor are we simply located at particular places *in* the world; rather, we are part *of* the world in its ongoing intra-activity” (2003:828, original emphasis). The potential of the body to affect and be affected, as irreversibly connected to the materiality of the world, opens the way for thinking differently about alliances and relationality.

For *Mujeres Creando*, their recognition of the complex intersection between bodies and power is visible in their politics and in their art activism. Their art is based on the body and on the knowledge emanating from physical experience, thereby challenging epistemological and ontological paradigms that separate the mind from the body, reason from affect, and the individual from the collective. The art activism of *Mujeres Creando* goes beyond traditional forms of activism to embrace “the economy of desire and the politics of the image” (Rolnik 2007:5). In so doing, their experimental art practices work to mobilise an alternative perception of the other through awakening the affective potential of the spectating body. The intention is to dissolve the barriers between the performer and the spectator and precipitate a reconnection of the subject with its context. Caught between an apprehension of the world based on the hierarchies of patriarchal thought



and a newly awakened sensibility, the creative tension generated in the spectator gives rise to the possibility of transformation in perception, identity, and position in the world.

The art activism of *Mujeres Creando* is aimed at intervening in capitalist micropolitics and the production of anti-hegemonic subjectivities. In this sense, their art activism can be considered as a didactic as well as an empathetic strategy, which not only instigates a deeply insurrectionist form of knowing, but also functions to produce alternative social relations. Their art activism provides a space for denunciation and protest while also yielding the possibility for imagining alternative self-representations and a future decolonial and de-patriarchal state. In this way, the art activism of *Mujeres Creando* comprises critical interventions that are transversal to both macropolitical and micropolitical social and political concerns.

#### Can *Mujeres Creando*'s experiences be transferred to other emancipatory movements?

The experience of *Mujeres Creando* offers fruitful cartographies for feminist emancipatory movements. While Galindo warns against the facile transposition of *Mujeres Creando*'s political struggle to other contexts (2021), there are a number of aspects of the group's experience that can prove valuable to feminist groups elsewhere and to emancipatory movements in general. This demands a re-conceptualisation of the paths to social transformation. Instead of monolithic change, current events indicate that social transformation is being effected in pockets of resistance around the globe, with an increased tendency for these movements to connect transnationally in support of each other.

*Mujeres Creando*'s art activism and the ways in which the group has harnessed its micro and macropolitical potential provide fertile ground for further study. The role of feminism here is, in my view, crucial. Without the feminist insight that the personal is political, the routes to merging the macro and micropolitical in socially transformative ways remain unclear. Likewise, without the incorporation of the micropolitical into emancipatory practices, the question of subjectivity formation remains unresolved and any attempts at transformation will be frustrated by an unchanged symbolic and affective economy. In this sense, feminism represents an important, if not unique, avenue for achieving authentically democratic subjectivities.

Future research, building on the work I have done in writing this thesis, could offer additional exploration of other feminist art-activist groups, and the role art can play in subverting hegemonic processes of subjectivation in ways that cut across epistemological and ontological matters. The work of *Mujeres Creando* represents an important move in the direction of developing political praxis that takes into account issues of embodiment, accountability, and positionality, so as to imagine and build sustainable social collectivities organised on the notion of the univocity of being, where everyone and everything is cognisant of our irreducible entanglement and shared vulnerability. In this way, the path is laid for renewed political and ethical agency.

## List of Sources

Agerstoun, Mary & Auther, Elissa. 2007. Considering Feminist Activist Art. *NWSA Journal*. 19: vii-xiv.

Absi, P. 2018. The future of an institution from the past: accommodating regulationism in Bolivia, from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century. [O]. Available at : <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01874959/document>. (Accessed on 21 /3/ 2021).

Alaimo, S. 2010. *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*. USA: Indiana University Press.

Alaimo, S. 2010. Material Engagements: Science Studies and the Environmental Humanities. *Ecozon*, Vol 1, N° 1.

Ainsworth, S & Hardy, C. 2004. Critical Discourse Analysis and Identity: Why Bother? *Critical Discourse Studies*. 1.

Alemán, J. 2015. *Hegemonía y poder neoliberal*. Pagina 12. [O] Available at: <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/psicologia/9-271126-2015-04-23.html>. (Accessed on 6/7/2017).

Alemán, J. 2017. *El Acto Instituyente en el Terreno del Otro Neoliberal*. Público. [O] Available at: <https://blogs.publico.es/otrasmiradas/11403/el-acto-instituyente-en-el-terreno-del-otro-neoliberal/>. (Accessed on 4/11/2017).

Armen Avanesian & Enemies #35: *No More Dick Soup*. Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz [O]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G2zejVlrAdI&t=6057s>. (Accessed on 2/11/2018).

Artist Doris Salcedo on Bogotá: 'The forces at work here are brutal' | The artist and their city. 2016. Guardian Culture. [O] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7xF2HyPIQw>. (Accessed on 12/10/2018).

Augé.M. 2008. *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*. London: Verso.

Baderoon, G & Decker, A. 2018. African Feminisms: Cartographies for the Twenty-First Century. *Meridians* (2018) 17 (2): 219–231.

Barad, K. 2003a. *Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter*. [O] Available at: [https://www.uio.no/studier/emner/sv/sai/SOSANT4400/v14/pensumliste/barad\\_posthumanist-performativity.pdf](https://www.uio.no/studier/emner/sv/sai/SOSANT4400/v14/pensumliste/barad_posthumanist-performativity.pdf). (Accessed on 12 February 2019).

Barad, K. 2003b. "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, 3: 801-831.

Barad, K. 2007. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. USA: Duke University Press.

Barad, K. 2011. Nature's Queer Performativity. *Qui Parle* 19, no. 2: 121–58, 133

Barad, K. 2014. Diffracting diffraction: Cutting together-apart. *Parallax* 20(3):168-187

Bolivia. *Constitución Política del Estado*. Promulgada em 7 de fevereiro de 2009. [O] Available at: [https://www.oas.org/dil/esp/constitucion\\_bolivia.pdf](https://www.oas.org/dil/esp/constitucion_bolivia.pdf) (Accessed on 24 March 2020).

Bourdieu, P. 1984. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. USA: Columbia University Press.

Braidotti, R. 2007. 'Feminist epistemology after postmodernism: critiquing science, technology and globalization', *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews*, Vol 32, No 1.

Braidotti, R., & Dolphijn, R. (2014). Deleuze's Philosophy and the Art of Life Or: What does Pussy Riot Know? *Faux Titre Online*, Vol 400.

Braidotti, R. 2017. "Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism." In: *Anthropocene Feminism*, 21-48, edited by Richard Gusin, Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press.

Braidotti, R. 2013. *The Posthuman*. UK: Polity Press.

Beauvoir, Simone. 1989. *The Second Sex*. New York: Vintage Books.

Boserup, E. 2011. *Woman's Role in Economic Development*. New York: Earthscan.

Bott Spillius, E. et al. 2011. *The New Dictionary of Kleinian Thought*. UK: Routledge.

Burr, V. 1995. *An introduction to Social Constructivism*. London: Routledge

Butler, J. 2020. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. New York: Verso.

Butler, J. 2016. *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* New York: Verso.

Butler, J. 2004. *Precarious Life- the powers of mourning and violence*. New York : Verso

Butler, Judith, 1999 [1990]. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge.

Butler,J. 2016. *Why Preserve the Life of the Other?* [O] Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=40YPnzv5JzM>. (Accessed on 23/2 /2018).

Christopher N. Gamble & Joshua S. Hanan (2016) Figures of entanglement: special issue introduction, *Review of Communication*, 16:4, 265-280.

Cornell.D & Marle.K. 2015. *Ubuntu Feminism: Tentative Reflections*. [O] Available at: <http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/vee/v36n2/13.pdf>. (Accessed on 29 November 2017).

Correal,D, Miñoso,Y, & Muñoz,K (eds) .2014. *Tejiendo de Otro Modo: Feminismo, epistemología, y apuestas descoloniales*. Colombia: Editorial Universidad del Cauca.

Costa de Souza, M. 2017. MUJERES CREANDO: UM ESPAÇO PARA ABORTAR NA 31ª BIENAL DE SÃO PAULO. *Seminário Internacional Fazendo Gênero 11 & 13th Women's Worlds Congress (Anais Eletrônicos)*, Florianópolis.

Creando, Mujeres.2005. *La Virgen de los Deseos*. 1ª ed. Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón.

Crenshaw, K., 1991, Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color, *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 43, No. 6, pp. 1241-1299

De Beauvoir, S. 1998. *The Second Sex*. UK: Manchester University Press.

Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. 1988. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Athlone Press, London.

Disch, L. & Hawkesworth, M. (eds). 2018. *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*. New York : Oxford University Press.

Eisenstein, H. [Sa]. *Feminism Seduced: Globalisation and the Uses of Gender*. [O] Available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/08164649.2010.525210?journalCode=cfs20>. (Accessed on 24 May 2016).

*El Milagroso Altar Blasfemo y el Debate Sobre Género en el Ecuador*. [O] Available at <http://www.paralaje.xyz/el-milagroso-altar-blasfemo-y-el-debate-sobre-genero-en-el-ecuador/>. (Accessed on 25/9/2017).

*Descolonização, autonomia, igualdade de gênero e a solução zapatista*. 2016. [O] Available at: <https://www.ufrgs.br/enunciarcotidianos/2016/10/03/descolonizacao-autonomia-igualdade-de-genero-e-a-solucao-zapatista/>. (Accessed on 2/5/2017).

*Entrevista a Mujeres Creando*. 2012. [O] Available at: <https://arainfo.org/mujer-publica- revista-intercontinental-de-discusion-feminista-editada-por-mujeres-creando-de-bolivia/>. (Accessed on 6/6/2018).

*Entrevista a María Galindo: militante lesbiana y feminista boliviana*. 2019a. [O] Available at: <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/209196-a-despatriarcalizar> (Accessed on 22 September 2019).

*Entrevista a María Galindo: "Soy feminista, soy boliviana y estoy loca"*. 2019b. [O] Available at: [https://www.clarin.com/revista-enie/ideas/maria-galindo-feminista-boliviana-locas-0\\_jyEOnY7.html](https://www.clarin.com/revista-enie/ideas/maria-galindo-feminista-boliviana-locas-0_jyEOnY7.html). (Accessed on 14/10/2019).

*Entrevista a María Galindo, psicóloga, escritora y militante feminista. "Demandar justicia en las puertas de la justicia patriarcal es llorar de rodillas"*. 2021. [O] Available at: [https://www.eldiario.es/cantabria/ultimas-noticias/maria-galindo-psicologa-feminista-demandar-justicia-puertas-justicia-patriarcal-llorar-rodillas\\_1\\_8520397.html](https://www.eldiario.es/cantabria/ultimas-noticias/maria-galindo-psicologa-feminista-demandar-justicia-puertas-justicia-patriarcal-llorar-rodillas_1_8520397.html). (Accessed on: 28 November 2021).

*Entrevista a Suely Rolnik*. 2006. [O] Available at: <https://lavaca.org/notas/entrevista-a-suely-rolnik/> (Accessed on 2/6/2019).

Eschle, C & Miguashca, B. 2010. *Making Sense of the Global Justice Movement*. United Kingdom: Ronan and Littlefield Publishers.

Espinosa-Miñoso, Y. 2014. Una crítica descolonial a la epistemología feminista crítica. *Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana Unidad Azcapotzalco – Distrito Federal, México, El Cotidiano*, n. 184, p. 7-12.

Espinosa Miñoso, Gómez Correal & Ochoa Muñoz (eds) ,2014. *Tejiendo de otro modo: Feminismo, epistemología y apuestas descoloniales en Abya Yala*. Cauca: Editorial Universidad del Cauca.

Espinosa -Miñoso, Y. 2016. Of a decolonial feminism is necessary: differentiation, co-constitutive domination of the modern west and the end of identity politics, *Solar* | Año 12, Volumen 12, Número 1, Lima, pp.171.



Espinosa Miñoso, Y. 2017. “De por qué es necesario un feminismo descolonial: diferenciación, dominación co-constitutiva de la modernidad occidental y el fin de la política de identidad” en *Revista Solar. Revista de Filosofía Iberoamericana, Dossier Epistemologías feministas latinoamericanas*, Año 12, Vol. 12, N° 1, pp 141-171

Federici,S. 2012. *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*. New York: PM Press.

Federici,S. 2014. *Caliban and the Witch – Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. USA: Autonomedia.

FEMEN. 2021. [O] Available at: <https://femen.org/about-us/>. (Accessed on 23March 2021)

Flores,M. 2017. *Mujeres Creando: “ El Neoliberalismo ha Tomado la Cuota de las Mujeres como Biológica, no Ideológica”*. [O] Available at: <https://artishockrevista.com/2017/09/28/mujeres-creando-entrevista/>. (Accessed on 5 June 2018).

Foucault,M. 1975. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books.

Foucault,M. 2004. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79*. New York:Palgrave Macmillan

Fraser, N. 2013. *Fortunes of Feminism – From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis*. London: Verso.

Frostig, K. 2011. Arts Activism: Praxis in Social Justice, Critical Discourse, and Radical Modes of Engagement. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*. 28.

Fuchs,C. 2015. *Antiglobalization*. [O] Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/event/antiglobalization>. (Accessed on 28 May 2016).

Galindo, M, & Paredes,J. 1992. *Y si fuéramos una, espejo de la otra?: Por un feminismo no racista*. La Paz: Talleres Ediciones Graficas.

Galindo, M. 2013. *No se puede descolonizar sin despatriarcalizar: Teoría y propuesta de la despatriarcalización*. La Paz: Editora Mujeres Creando.

Galindo,M. 2016. *A Despatriarcar! Feminismo Urgente*. Argentina. Lacavaeditora.

Gamarra,K. 2010. The challenges of depatriarchalisation in the political process in Bolivia. *T'inkazos*, No 28, 33-49

Gaztambide-Fernández, R. 2014. Decolonial options and artistic/aesthetic entanglements: An interview with Walter Mignolo. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*. Vol. 3, No. 1, 2014, pp. 196-212.

Geertz,C. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Geiger, S. 1999. 'Women and Gender in African Studies – The Invention of Women', *African Studies Review*, vol. 42(3).

Gill, R. 2007. *Gender and the Media*. USA: Polity Press.

- Gill,R, & Scharff,C. 2013. *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gomez, D, Bernal-Olarte,A, González, J, Montealegre, D, Manjarrés,M. 2021. *Comisiones de la verdate y género en países del SurGlobal: miradas descoloniales, retrospectivas y prospectivas de la justicia transicional. Aprendizajes para el caso colombiano*. Colombia: Ediciones Uniandes.
- Grewel, I &Kaplan, K. 2002. *An Introduction to Women´s Studies: Gender in a Transnational World*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Grewal, I. 2005. *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms*. USA: Duke University Press Books.
- Grusin,R. (ed) .2017. *Anthropocene Feminism*. London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Guattari, F. 2000. *The Three Ecologies*. London. Athlone Press.
- Hanisch,C. 2006. *The Personal Is Political*. [O] Available at: <https://webhome.cs.uvic.ca/~mserra/AttachedFiles/PersonalPolitical.pdf>. (Accessed on 21 May 2019).
- Haraway, D. 2016. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Haraway,D. 1988. *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*. [O] Available at: <https://philpapers.org/archive/HARSKT.pdf>. (Accessed on: 28 March 2019).

Harvey,D. 2001. *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography*. New York. Routledge.

Hudson,D. & Martin,M. 2010. *Narratives of Neoliberalism: The Role of Everyday Media Practices and the Reproduction of Dominant Ideas*. [O] Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/256017140\\_Narratives\\_of\\_Neoliberalism\\_The\\_Role\\_of\\_Everyday\\_Media\\_Practices\\_and\\_the\\_Reproduction\\_of\\_Dominant\\_Ideas](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/256017140_Narratives_of_Neoliberalism_The_Role_of_Everyday_Media_Practices_and_the_Reproduction_of_Dominant_Ideas). (Accessed on 8 September 2019).

Irigaray,L. 1985. *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Trans. Catherine Porter. New York: Cornell University Press.

Jaggar, A. 2005. “*Saving Amina*”: *Global Justice for Women and Intercultural Dialogue*. [O] Available at: (Accessed on 28 April 2016).

Jorgensen,M & Phillips, L. 2002. *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Juelskjaer, Malou. (2012). Intra-active entanglements: an interview with Karen Barad. *Women, gender and research*. Vol 21. 10-23

Kabeer,N. 2008. *Mainstreaming Gender in Social Protection for the Informal Economy* (New Gender Mainstreaming Series on Development Issues). UK: Commonwealth Secretariat.

Kapur,R. 2005. *Erotic Justice: Law and the New Politics of Postcolonialism*. UK: Routledge.

Kerrigan,W. & Smith.J. 2009. *Interpreting Lacan*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press; Revised edition.

Kabeer, N. 2008. *Paid work, women's empowerment and gender justice: critical pathways of social change*. Pathways of Empowerment working papers (3). Institute of Development Studies, Brighton.

Klein, M. 1997. *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963*. London: Vintage Classics.

Klein, M. 1998. *Love, Guilt and Reparation*. London: Vintage Classics.

Klein, M. 1975. Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946–1963. *The International Psycho-Analytical Library*, 104:1-346

Klein, N. 2007. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. USA: Picador.

King, A. 1998. 'Review of Invention of Women' *World Literature Today*, vol. 72(4).

Lacan, F. 1991. *The Seminar of Jaques Lacan: Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Latour, B. 2017. *Facing Gaia : eight lectures on the new climatic regime*. USA : Polity Press,

Lazaratto, M. 2014. *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).

Lazarrato, M. 2017. *Some "Misunderstandings" on Desire*. [O] Available at: [http://www.ladeleuziana.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Deleuziana6\\_50-60\\_Lazarrato\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.ladeleuziana.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Deleuziana6_50-60_Lazarrato_ENG.pdf). (Accessed on 10 March 2018).

Lilley, S. 2006. *On Neoliberalism: An Interview with David Harvey*. [O] Available at: <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2006/lilley190606.html>. (Accessed on 16 May 2016)

Lugones, M. 2007. 'Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System', *Hypatia*, vol. 22(1):186-209.

Lugones, M. 2008. *The Coloniality of Gender. Worlds & Knowledges Otherwise*. Spring 2008

Lugones, M. 2010. 'Toward a Decolonial Feminism' *Hypatia*, vol. 25(4): 242-259

*Macromural de Palmitas: pintura vs violencia*. 2015. [O] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gfnd6R3PP0s>. (Accessed on 14 October 2018).

Maerhofer, J. 2015. *Beyond Resistance: Arundhati Roy and the Rhetoric of Anti-Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, *Taylor & Francis Online* 29:2, 119-124.

Maldonado-Torres, N. 2007. *On the Coloniality of Being*. [O] Available at: <http://www.decolonialtranslation.com/english/maldonado-on-the-coloniality-of-being.pdf>. (Accessed: 23 February 2015).

Matory, J.L. 2005. *Sex and the empire that is no more: Gender and the politics of metaphor in Oyo Yorùbá Religion*. New York: Berghahn Books.

McKagen, E.L. 2018. The Stories We Tell: Toward a Feminist Narrative in the Anthropocene. *Spectra*, 6(2), pp.74–88. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.21061/spectra.v6i2.a.7>.

Mendonça, B.R. 2018. *Agitadoras Callejeras: Alianças autônomas e as palavras em movimento das Mujeres Creando*. Dissertation (Mestrado em Antropologia Social). UNICAMP. 126p.

Mies, M. & Shiva, V. 1993. *Ecofeminism*. London. Zed Books.

Mies, M. 1999. *Patriarchy and Accumulation of a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*. London: Zed Books.

Mignolo, W. 2010. *Colonialidad, la cara oculta de la modernidad*. [O] Available at: <http://esferapublica.org/nfblog/colonialidad-la-cara-oculta-de-la-modernidad/>. (Accessed on: 2 February 2016).

Mignolo, W. 2011. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. USA. Duke University Press.

Mignolo, W. & Vasquez, R. 2013. *Decolonial Aesthetics: Colonial Wounds, Decolonial Healings*. [O] Available at: [https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope\\_article/decolonial-aesthetics-colonial-wounds-decolonial-healings/](https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/decolonial-aesthetics-colonial-wounds-decolonial-healings/). (Accessed on 18 February 2018).

*Milagroso Altar Blasfemo*. [O] Available at <http://paginasiete.bo/opinion/maria-galindo/2017/7/26/milagroso-altar-blasfemo-145987.html>. (Accessed on 25 September 2017).

Millner, Jacqueline & Moore, Catriona & Cole, Georgina. (2015). Art and Feminism: Twenty-First Century Perspectives. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*. 15. 143-149. 10.1080/14434318.2015.1089816.

Mohanty, C. 1984. Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses. *boundary 2*, Vol. 12, No. 3, On Humanism and the University I: The Discourse of Humanism. (Spring - Autumn, 1984), pp. 333-358.

Mohanty, C. T. (2003). "Under Western Eyes" Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles. *Signs*, 28(2), 499–535.

Morris, Rosalind, ed. 2009. *Can the Subaltern Speak?* New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Mujeres Creando. 2005. *La Virgen de los Deseos*. Buenos Aires. Tinta Límón.

Nikander, P. 2006. Constructionism and discourse analysis. *Handbook of Constructionist Research*.

Norval, A. 1996. *Deconstructing Apartheid Discourse*. London: Verso.

Olajubu, O. 2004. 'Seeing Through a Woman's eye: Yorùbá Religious Tradition and Gender Relations', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol. 20(1).

Oyěwùmí, O. 1997. *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

Parisi, L. 2010. *Feminist Perspectives on Human Rights*. [O] Available at: <https://oxfordre.com/internationalstudies/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.001.0001/acrefore-9780190846626-e-48#acrefore-9780190846626-e-48-div1-0002>. (Accessed on 28 February 2019).



Pfeifer.G.[Sa]. The question of capitalist desire: Deleuze and Guattari with Marx. *Continental Thought and Theory*. 1(4): 254-269

Phillips, A. 2000. *Democracy and the Representation of Difference*. [O] Available at: [http://vbn.aau.dk/files/49900648/GEP\\_Tesktserie\\_No4\\_2000.pdf](http://vbn.aau.dk/files/49900648/GEP_Tesktserie_No4_2000.pdf). (Accessed on 29 November 2017).

*Poverty is Sexist* 2016. [O] Available at: <https://landportal.org/pt/library/resources/povertyissexist2016/poverty-sexist-2016> (Accessed on 19 July 2016).

Puar, J. (2012). Precarity Talk: A Virtual Roundtable with Lauren Berlant, Judith Butler, Bojana Cvejić, Isabell Lorey, Jasbir Puar, and Ana Vujanović. *TDR (1988-)*, 56(4), 163–177.

Rabinow, P. 1991. *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought*. London: Penguin Books.

Revelles Benavente, Beatriz & Ernst, Waltraud & Rogowska-Stangret, Monika. (2020). *Feminist New Materialisms: Activating Ethico-Politics Through Genealogies in Social Sciences*. *Social Sciences*. [O] Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12010/16028> (Accessed on 2 January 2021).

Raunig,G, Ray,G & Wuggenig, U (eds). 2011. *Critique of Creativity*. London. MayFlyBooks.

Rolnik.S. 1998. Anthropophagic subjectivity. *Arte Contemporânea Brasileira: Um e/entre Outro/s*. 1-20.

Rolnik, S, 2007. *The body's contagious memory- Lygia Clarke's return to the museum*. [O] Available at: [http://www.kunsthuisbyb.nl/images/projecten/archief/2012/On\\_residency/Body'sContagiousMemory.pdf](http://www.kunsthuisbyb.nl/images/projecten/archief/2012/On_residency/Body'sContagiousMemory.pdf). (Accessed on: 10/3/2018).

Rolnik, S. 2011. Deleuze, Schizoanalyst. *E-flux journal* .Issue #23.

Rolnik.S. 2017. *The spheres of Insurrection: Suggestions for combatting the pimping of life*. *E-flux journal*. 86: 1-11

Rottenberg, C. 2013. *The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism*. [O] Available at <http://www.bgu.ac.il/~rottenbe/The%20rise%20of%20neoliberal%20feminism.pdf>. (Accessed on 16 February 2015)

Roy, A. 2019. *My Seditious Heart: Collected Nonfiction*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Santos, B. 2009. *Beyond Neoliberal Governance: The World Social Forum as Subaltern Cosmopolitan Politics and Legality* (2009). [O] Available at: <http://www.boaventuradesousasantos.pt/documentos/chapter2.pdf>. (Accessed on 28 April 2016).

Shaviro,S. 2013. *Accelerationist Aesthetics: Necessary Insufficiency in Times of Real Subsumption*. [O]. Available at: <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/46/60070/accelerationist-aesthetics-necessary-inefficiency-in-times-of-real-subsumption/>. (Accessed on 23 September 2017).

Shiva,V & Shiva,K. 2018. *Oneness vs the 1%: Shattering Illusions, Seeding Freedoms*. UK: Chelsea Green Publishing.

Shiva, V. 2016 *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge*. California: North Atlantic Books.

Smith, A. 2003. *Laclau and Mouffe: The Radical Democratic Imaginary*. New York: Taylor and Francis.

Smith, B. 2019. *Women's Studies*. London: Routledge

Spivak, G. 1985. *Can the Subaltern Speak?* [O] Available at: <https://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~sj6/Spivak%20CanTheSubalternSpeak.pdf>. (Accessed on 23 September 2019).

van Dijk, T.A. 1995. *Discourse Analysis as Ideology Analysis* in Christina Schaffner and Anita L. Wenden (eds.). *Language and Peace*. Dartmouth: Aldershot.

VIOLATIONS OF THE RIGHT TO LIFE, RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, RIGHT TO ASSEMBLY & ASSOCIATION, AND OTHERS: ONGOING HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN BOLIVIA. Submission to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions from Harvard Law School's International Human Rights Clinic 2020. Available at: [http://hrp.law.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/IHRC-Submission-on-Bolivia-Aug.-18-2020\\_Public-Edited.pdf](http://hrp.law.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/IHRC-Submission-on-Bolivia-Aug.-18-2020_Public-Edited.pdf). (Accessed on 12 November 2020).

Wolvers et al. [Sa] *Concepts of the Global South*. [O] Available at: [file:///C:/Users/Ant%C3%B3nio/Downloads/voices012015\\_concepts\\_of\\_the\\_global\\_south.pdf](file:///C:/Users/Ant%C3%B3nio/Downloads/voices012015_concepts_of_the_global_south.pdf). (Accessed on 15 November 2017).

*13 horas de rebelión*. [O] Available at: <http://www.mujirescreando.org/index.php/publicaciones/audiovisuales/13-horas-de-rebelion>. (Accessed on 2 June 2019).

31ª Bienal de Arte de São Paulo.2014. La Paz: Página Siete. [O] Available at: <http://www.paginasiete.bo/opinion/2014/7/30/bienal-arte-paulo-28023.html>. (Accessed on 21/04/2018).

## Appendix



### COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

10 April 2021

Dear Ms Andresa Natacha Gomes de Almeida Vicente

NHREC Registration # :  
Rec-240816-052  
CREC Reference # :  
31245412\_CREC\_CHS\_2021

**Decision:**  
Ethics Approval from 10 May 2021  
to 10 May 2026

**Researcher(s):** Name: Ms Andresa Natacha Gomes de Almeida Vicente  
Contact details: [31245412@mylife.unisa.ac.za](mailto:31245412@mylife.unisa.ac.za)  
**Supervisor(s):** Name: Prof Deirdre Cassandra Byrne  
Contact details: [byrnedc@unisa.ac.za](mailto:byrnedc@unisa.ac.za)

**Title:** *Building feminist solidarities: the case study of Mujeres Creando.*

**Degree Purpose:** PhD

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa College of Human Science Ethics Committee. Ethics approval is granted for five year.

The negligible risk application was reviewed by College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee, in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the College Ethics Review Committee.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the



University of South Africa  
Pretorius Street, Mucklenek Ridge, City of Tshwane  
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa  
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150  
[www.unisa.ac.za](http://www.unisa.ac.za)

confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.

5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data require additional ethics clearance.
7. No fieldwork activities may continue after the expiry date (10 May 2026). Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

*Note:*

*The reference number 31245412\_CREC\_CHS\_2021 should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Yours sincerely,

Signature: 

Prof K.B. Khan  
CHS ERC Chairperson  
Email: [khb@unisa.ac.za](mailto:khb@unisa.ac.za)  
Tel: (012) 429 8210

Signature: PP 

Prof K. Masemola  
Executive Dean : CHS  
E-mail: [masemk@unisa.ac.za](mailto:masemk@unisa.ac.za)  
Tel: (012) 429 2298

