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## Book Review: Feminist International. How to Change Everything

Mina Baginova\*

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GAGO, V.: *Feminist International. How to Change Everything*. London – New York: Verso, 2020. 240 p. ISBN 978-1788739689. Translated by Liz Mason-Deese.

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The beginnings of social mobilizations are often narrated through a story that catalysed them. The feminist protests which escalated across Argentina around 2016 mark as the beginning of a social movement Ni Una Menos (Not One More), with the first large-scale mobilization against soaring number of feminicides in the country, following the horrific murder of a 16-year-old Lucia Pérez in the city Mar del Plata. After the first mass protest in November 2016, the mobilizations extended from the whole of Argentina across Latin America, southern Europe, and the US.

With first protests focusing on feminicides and patriarchal violence against women Ni Una Menos quickly endorsed manifold ongoing struggles. These included struggles and demands of domestic workers, sex workers, women working in public soup kitchens for the poor, labour and union mobilizations, and violence against queer people. Campaigns for a free and legal abortion have been ongoing in Argentina since the democratic transition from a bloody dictatorship in 1983. Diverse struggles of Ni Una Menos quickly joined with activists from a pro-abortion camp, a free and legal abortion becoming one of the most profound aim of the movement. In 2017 these mobilizations transcended into the International Women's Strike on March 8. Under the slogan 'if we stop, we stop the world', the strike participants refused to perform any kind of labour duties – paid or unpaid. The International Women's Strike exceeded more than 50 countries globally, with women and LGBTQI+ people

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gathering in assemblies and protests against gender-based violence, the criminalization of abortion, as well as labour exploitation.

In her book activist and theoretician **Veronica Gago** develops on the story of Ni Una Menos and the feminist strikes from 2017 until 2020. Being one of the co-founders and one of the main public faces of Ni Una Menos, she maps the roots of these mobilizations to the previous struggles in Argentina, such as Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres (National Women's Gathering), Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, and Frente de Liberación Homosexual (Homosexual Liberation Front). By doing so, she offers an analysis of the contemporary feminist movement in Argentina as a historical and dynamic process, and not merely a description of a political body with its political objectives.

Empirically, the main idea of Gago's book lies in locating the collective potential of desire and problematizing collective power of getting involved in social movement's processes, activism, and thinking about "changing everything", even if that "everything" is not clearly defined. The book's original title in Spanish, *La Potencia Feminista*, refers to the definition of power in Spanish – *potencia* – which implies a dynamic, affective understanding of power as a collective capacity to change. For Gago, the power of the *potencia* of action are the two essential practices of subaltern knowledge and feminist epistemology. With this affirmatory understanding of power, Gago's research delves into the modes of organization, spatiality, and tactics of the feminist strike, while revealing and challenging forms of interconnected violence, exploitation, and extraction.

From this main premise, Gago deploys other related arguments. Crucially, she enhances the traditional meaning of strike as a praxis of labour unions, and builds on a concept of feminist strike which allows to mobilize historically invisible working groups, namely women and feminized bodies, as well as the precariousness of their working and living conditions. Within this context, the feminist strike blurs the boundaries between public and domestic, work and home, street and private space. Moreover, it expands the understanding of relationships between bodies and territories, and between one body to another. In other words, Gago argues that the strike emerges as a new form of practical cartography of feminist politics, which remaps the spatialities and temporalities of power and production, transcending borders and exceeding the limits of the possible. This way, Gago firmly emphasizes the resistances, struggles, and inventions in which feminist desire allows to shape new worlds.

The argument of the body as a territory is very pertinent throughout the

book, and it needs to be understood as a knowledge product of grassroots feminist epistemologies born in Latin America against the extractivism of indigenous lands. This argument is perhaps more difficult to grasp for a reader who is not familiar with Latin America and the forms by which coloniality shaped resistance tactics of social movements across the region. The body as a territory is, in this context, a territory of a battlefield. Here, however, Gago does not refer to the body as the confinement of an individuality, but as an enlarged matter, a surface of affects, trajectories, resources, and memories. The idea of a body-territory contains the power to transform structures, and holds the desire for resistance and autonomy.

Gago's work has an important theoretical density. From a clear reference to Spinoza and his concept of potency, departing from the work of Marxist feminists like Silvia Federici and Angela Davis, Nancy Fraser and Rita Segato; building on Rosa Luxemburg, Wendy Brown, Dora Barrancos and Karl Marx, Gago employs this theoretical range towards a critique of the current accumulation mode and a neoliberal ideology which functions on exploitation of the poor and the vulnerable, such as migrant women having to move from poor country side to work in megacities of Latin America. Here, she explicitly connects relationships between sexual violence, monetary violence, violence of labour exploitation, racism, and neoliberalism. At the same time, she explicitly emphasizes and maps spaces of resistance and resistance mobilizational practices. For Gago, this critique does not end with reducing women, the queer, or migrants to the status of victims, on the contrary, such critique allows for subjects to become political bodies with their own agency.

For me as a reader who has been interested and active in new feminist mobilizations in Central and Eastern Europe, Gago's emphasis on international aspect of new feminist mobilizing as a fundamental praxis of feminist mobilizations today, is particularly pertinent. With the case studies of feminist international strikes from 2017 until 2020, she draws on cooperation of feminist collectives across the world, including the role of Polish feminists in co-creating the international feminist strikes. In October 2016, the first Black Protests, today known as All Poland Women's Strike, were organized across Poland as a reaction to the law proposal on banning abortion in the country. Within one week, hundreds of thousands of women mobilized in the largest protests since the 1990s to protest the proposed law. Meanwhile, Polish activists with personal connections in Argentina reached out to the feminist collectives in Argentina and shared with them their situation, and an idea of the first international feminist

strike. Organically and with speed, other connections were made with collectives from South Korea, Russia, Italy, Spain, or the US. In the words of Polish writer and activist Klementyna Suchanow, what appeared at the beginning as a futuristic sketch soon turned out to be a historical necessity. In the same vein, Gago argues that the international feminist strikes are not Argentinian (or, conversely, Polish) invention – this process was done together, simultaneously, within each unique locality and out of their specific struggles.

According to Gago, voicing the collective demands of feminist movement in Argentina and elsewhere, the radical potentials of feminist *potencia* is the key to resist global mechanisms of oppression and the rise of anti-gender global movements, with a hope to build the foundations of a more just world. In this regard, Gago's *Feminist International* is a powerful and inspiring project with a potential of amplifying solidarity for women and LGBTQI community across the world. Moreover, it comes with a fresh perspective on forms of feminist mobilizing and claiming collective demands. Finally, a book written for everyone, not only academics, Gago's call has a potential to encourage the voices to amplify the new feminist movements globally.

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