



Care and Ecofeminism

Consolidating Progress and Building
Egalitarian Futures in Latin America

Cecilia Güemes and Francisco Cos Montiel (eds.)



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Prologue

Pilar Cancela

Secretary of State for International Cooperation

Spain is undergoing a profound and comprehensive reform of development cooperation that is responding to the challenges of the 2030 Agenda, and going beyond it. One of the main milestones of this reform is the new Law on Cooperation for Sustainable Development and Global Solidarity, which makes important progress on its strategic vision, instruments, resources and governance.

The law aims to promote transformative cooperation with a feminist perspective, while also promoting environmental sustainability by combating all manifestations and causes of inequalities. Spain thereby responds to the commitments established at the multilateral level and is aligned, in particular, with the universalist vision of development assumed by the United Nations and the European Union. This moves on from a vertical or donor-recipient logic to a more horizontal and dialogical one.

This book presents six research papers by Ibero-American authors that aim to conceptualize what a feminist approach to development and cooperation means today, particularly in the field of the care economy and society, ecological transition and ecofeminism. The papers include reflections and policy proposals for achieving the objectives outlined in the new Law on Cooperation.

We can identify three key objectives in this law that are associated with this book:

1. Spanish foreign cooperation and activity today explicitly define themselves as feminist and aspire to mainstream this approach in their activities. This is reflected in several key commitments and proposals.

They emphasize *the protection of women, adolescents and girls against gender-based violence*. In addition to physical and sexual violence, the protection of women involves recognizing and devising solutions to two other types of violence: economic and environmental.

The first is not limited to glass ceilings in the labour and professional sphere. It is aimed at the broader objective of women's empowerment and economic-financial autonomy. When women do not have decent jobs that guarantee their well-being, it is much more difficult to deal with other types of violence. The focus on economic justice and equal opportunities is key.

The second is climate change, which particularly affects women in Latin America and other regions of the developing world. A revised understanding the intersectionality of gender-based violence historically suffered by women as a result of this phenomenon is a strong point of this proposal.

The Cooperation Law is also committed to the objective of free and equal access to basic social services. Public welfare goods and services that could be considered as basic include the right to education benefits, and also to health care. Within the latter, development cooperation is especially important, not only financially, but also in terms of knowledge and strategies, to guarantee the SDG 5.6 goal of ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive rights including from a human rights perspective.

Spain has a long way to go in this area, and, like other societies and countries, faces the challenge of responding to new extreme right-wing political forces that challenge established rights and

seek to reverse the rules and institutions that guarantee access to them. These are lessons that can be useful to share with countries that have not achieved legal recognition of these rights (such as the right to abortion), as well as with those that currently are also facing the emergence of these conservative and anti-rights forces.

A third commitment established by the Cooperation Law addresses the external dimension of the objectives of the effective participation of women in economic, political and social decision-making areas, which Spain has also adopted in its domestic policy arena.

With a parity government, important legislative initiatives and a long history of gender equality policies, Spain is in a good position to share these experiences and is open to learning from the knowledge, innovations and experiences of its cooperation partners.

When we talk about effective participation, we are talking not only about the presence of women in positions of responsibility and decision-making (descriptive representation), but also about gender issues on the government agenda (substantive representation). This requires action to empower women and promote their agency through capacity building, access to resources, and the strengthening of women's organizations.

For such issues, leadership programmes, spaces for research and reflection, and the cultivation of Ibero-American networks such as those promoted by the Carolina Foundation—through meetings and visitor programs, training scholarships, specific publications and events on central issues of the gender agenda (such as those addressed in this book: care and ecofeminism)—contribute to their achievement.

2. Sustainability. One of the objectives of Spanish cooperation is to promote ecological transition, care for biodiversity and decarbonization, in order to address a climate emergency while recognizing the need to highlight the differentiated gender impact.

The main themes of this book are precisely those of environmentalism and feminism, two movements (or historical actors) that demand the recognition of the relationship between human beings and nature and care.

In other words, the social and lived interdependencies we face must be assumed collectively, and not in relation to historical roles that generate inequality.

It is impossible to think about development and the future without taking into account the impact of human action on nature. It is a matter of not only combating the climate emergency but also devising new ways of relating to nature, with new models of production and consumption that are more respectful of the biosphere and sustainable over time.

The issue of care is a crucial reference for development cooperation when talking about a feminist approach and sustainability. All people throughout their lives require care; we are interdependent beings. How this care is provided, who provides it, how the State and the community should interact in its provision, are some of the questions that, without exhausting this issue, should be part of the agenda of global cooperation and development policies.

3. Support for the economic, social and cultural development of indigenous and Afro-descendant women through the fight against all forms of exclusion and the defense and promotion of their rights.

In this sphere, development cooperation can do more by listening to these groups and contributing to bringing their knowledge, experiences and demands into the public debate in several ways: by helping governments pay attention to the demands of these groups, through diplomacy and mediation, multilateral action, and/or bilateral cooperation between governments that takes into account their demands, wisdom and experience.

No less important is the promotion of listening and the interaction between these movements. This is achieved by supporting

encounters and coordination between different countries and regions, sharing experiences, disseminating knowledge, promoting innovation, and joining forces with actions aimed at creating ties, building agendas and promoting inclusive alliances.

Also contributing to these objectives is the study of local agendas that concern these groups, giving voice and visibility to their positions and demands in different forums and, with wider audiences, serving as advocates, in particular for indigenous and Afro-descendant women activists who are persecuted, harassed, threatened and murdered when they defend their rights at a local level, or when they go to international forums to demand their protection.

All these issues are addressed in this volume, the result of a collaboration between the Carolina Foundation and the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), presented here as a concrete expression of the new feminist and transformative development cooperation that Spain wishes to promote.

Moreover, this is nothing more than a reflection of a society, the Spanish society, which is deeply supportive and proactive with respect to human rights. And when we speak of human rights, part of its essence is the demand and struggle for equality between women and men, and against all manifestations of gender-based violence. Therefore, *our cooperation is feminist*.

Preface

José Antonio Sanahuja

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for Social Development (UNRISD)

For years now, and to the frustration and bewilderment of the large majority of people, we have watched with astonishment as rights that we had worked so hard to conquer, and which we considered inalienable, are rapidly being called into question, limited or eliminated. To give some recent and media-related examples, consider the persecution of women in Afghanistan or Iran who are seeking basic rights such as education or autonomy; the constant violations of LGTBIQ+ rights in Poland and Hungary (two countries in the European Union); not to mention the scandalous figures of male violence and femicides in Latin America, which is the region focused on in this publication.

These setbacks in human rights are undoubtedly surprising because we tend to take it for granted, not without a certain naivety, that they are here to stay and that history does not go backwards. After all, we believe that human progress may be difficult to implement but that, once enshrined in law and adequately supported by public policies, it will remain on “autopilot”, inviolate. Reality, however, stubbornly continues to challenge us and to remind us that rights, like democracy, must be constantly vindicated and defended.

The title of this publication refers to not one but to two different actions, to the need for a redoubled effort. It is not enough to consolidate progress if, at the same time, we are not capable of mobilizing all the energy and imagination available to try to build more egalitarian and just futures. We cannot just be satisfied with the progress achieved and feel content and secure. We need to collaborate with the people and social forces that struggle to affirm their demands in other parts of the world and, being aware of the incomplete nature of rights, to broaden them according to the new realities and sensibilities that arise. The political project of justice is at stake in this double tension.

The Carolina Foundation and the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) are strongly committed to building a different and hopeful future, one that is more inclusive and egalitarian and, of course, feminist. In this sense, we are fully convinced that social sustainability, which obviously includes feminist policies, is only possible if it is aligned with environmental sustainability. Redefining a new model for the future of humanity as an economic, social and political project also requires rethinking how to measure impact in relation to the planet's resources and the digital transition. We have embarked on this task (this book is a good example) and, if we achieve it, we will be contributing to the broader project of a more hopeful future for humanity.

Introduction

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In Latin America, inequality and its corrosive effects have marked the academic and political debate in recent years. Quantitative studies have provided figures and statistical evidence of negative trajectories. Qualitative analyses, on the other hand, have been fundamental to understanding the features and experiences of relative deprivation and exclusion in different latitudes. Last but not least, multilateral institutions have been crucial in reaching a consensus on an agenda with 17 objectives to combat various inequalities and placing it on the agendas of the United Nations member states.

Combating inequalities involves devising effective public policies and political strategies, but also questioning the foundations of the modern idea of equality, focusing on its oversights and blind spots and, from there, developing a narrative that presents equality as a commitment to a desirable future. Anne Phillips (2021) reminds us how the idea of equality has been thought of retroactively around the evolution of the idea of citizenship, which was supposed to be progressive and to incorporate civil, political and then social, economic and cultural rights over the centuries. This highly suggestive and emancipatory reflection had two problems: a) it took each

stage as relatively safe and b) it was based more on the experience of white working class men than women, thus proving incapable of capturing the experiences of women and racialized minorities. Equality was never intended to apply to everyone, nor should it have been taken for granted when it acquired legal or political status.

For these reasons, Phillips believes it is more appropriate to claim equality unconditionally, without associating it with shared traits, with some human property that we supposedly share (dignity, rationality, capacity for empathy, etc.) in order to, in this way, prevent the exclusion of those who lack the presumed attribute. Without offering prescriptive visions, but also understanding difference and the importance of active policies to address it, from this point of view equality is approached as a claim that leads us to identify injustices and inequalities that can be undone (Phillips, 2021).

It is at this point where the struggle of feminism, together with other social movements, proves to be fundamental in Latin America. As Jane Mansbridge (1993) has suggested, democracy needs the community, and faith-based struggles have much to contribute in this regard. Common life cannot be based only on rules and rational interests, just as the acceptance of rules cannot depend on the fear of punishment. Rather, life together is based on emotional connections, on bonds of mutual responsibility, on common vulnerabilities, and on understanding and sympathy for community members and their destinies.

If the demand for equality must be unconditional, democracy as a form of government that involves the exercise of politics requires the capacity for understanding (*empathy*), cultivating understanding and developing social confidence. However, these interdependencies and mutual obligations cannot be made without denouncing certain historical oppressions and power inequalities, nor by eluding and treating differences within a universe of impartiality that does not recognize them. Women's struggles offer valuable inputs for the deepening of democracy. In the first place, because it is they, in comparison with other groups also struggling for recognition and

power, who have learned to identify the more subtle and obvious ways in which power is unequally distributed and exercised in both the public and private spheres. Furthermore, because they have traditionally taken on care roles related to vulnerable people, on which feelings of community and responsibility for the fate of others are built. Finally, because whether they identify themselves as feminists or not, they have built networks of cooperation to face their daily battles (be it health, credit, peace or natural resources) and, from there, they have been able to create ways to contest power and undertake a revolution to change everything (Mansbridge, 1993; Fraser, 1996). Of course, this is not intended to offer a vision that presents women without differences or women's movements without tensions, but it does make clear the enormous progress that has been made in the region in terms of gender equality in comparison with other regions of the global South.

In recent decades, the denunciations against femicides and physical and sexual violence in Ibero-America have conquered the streets, newspapers and the digital public sphere, reaching the agendas of governments and giving rise to punitive and, to a lesser extent, preventive, palliative and restorative public policies. The energy of social movements created affective communities that continue to fight today for a more just social world, that reflect on their actions, and that demand institutional and normative change (where, for example, sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls are recognized) while at the same time campaigning for profound cultural transformation from which to deconstruct the cultural mandate of masculinity, particularly its most toxic forms, and building models of more egalitarian relationships. Today, Latin America is full of promising symbols in many of its governments that distinguish it from a certain stagnation of democracies in Europe: Francia Márquez, the first Afro-descendant vice-president in Colombia; parity cabinets in several progressive governments such as Chile; or the reelection of President Lula da Silva in Brazil, to name just a few.

Such changes and transformations constitute a pressing task in Latin America, but also in Europe if attention is paid to the forces being mobilized and the threats emanating from the new radical right, as well as from timid progressivism and reactionary leftists who, subtly or explicitly, seek to re-traditionalize social relations and reinforce gender roles and relations. In the face of this, there are pendulum swings that worry us and that we believe merit reflection: 1) building bridges and weaving alliances between existing but diverse and increasingly distant feminisms, 2) finding points of convergence around issues such as care, which call for State public action and responsibility and, at the same time, require recognizing and strengthening the co-responsibility of society as a whole in the preservation of human life, 3) learning to think from and revalue situated experiences from a respectful point of view, while remaining strategic and aspiring to approaches of global justice, 4) finding spaces for women to share their pain and to experience catharsis and healing without falling into victimhood that paralyzes their agency, 5) winning rights, changing legal rules, training officials and allocating resources to make policies a reality, 6) transforming patterns of behaviour and ingrained social gender roles, not only female but also male, that engender co-responsibility and a shared care for life and the living (Cos Montiel, 2022) and 7) addressing women's lack of economic power as a spearhead to achieving not only financial but also personal autonomy and social respectability (Güemes, 2022).

Today, in the developed West, calling oneself a feminist is relatively easy; so much so that even leaders of anti-rights parties do it. The expanded use of the label has caused it to lose value, to be instrumentalized and co-opted by the market as just another commodity. Meanwhile, in Latin America there are people who, from popular struggles, work on a daily basis for the recognition of diverse identities, equal access and use of natural resources and common goods, and the redistribution of wealth without abandoning themselves to the nominative and labels (Svampa, 2022; Güemes, 2021; Wences, 2023).

Aware of all these issues, in 2021 the Carolina Foundation and the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) decided to launch a polyphonic and choral project that would focus on reflecting, in a situated and critical way, on some of the most pressing challenges of the Latin American region in relation to gender justice. After the COVID-19 pandemic, two central questions triggered our research: how to promote women's economic autonomy in a context of social and climate crisis, and how to recognize and redistribute the care work historically taken on by women?

For this launch, we convened academics, social activists and specialists from international agencies and civil society organizations, of different ages, with diverse personal backgrounds and political experiences, and from different countries, to reflect together on two axes: care and women's economic autonomy in terms of sustainability. We wanted to highlight the violence suffered by those who do not enjoy economic autonomy, while at the same time focus attention on care as an axis that reinforces inequalities, and makes visible the race-related experiences of pain and relative deprivation that women go through.

This debate is directly linked to concerns that both institutions consider key to the future: a “triple transition”—social, ecological and digital—that aims for greater equality, and the creation of the foundations for a new eco-social contract to ensure more just societies. Several of the issues and authors that are part of this project participated in two related Latin American events that took place during 2022. The 9th Latin American and Caribbean Conference on Social Sciences, held in June in Mexico City, and the 15th Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in November in Buenos Aires. In the first of these, feminisms were highlighted as transformative struggles that are sweeping our region in pursuit of greater democracy, equality, and social justice, while environmental issues were positioned among the most pressing concerns of the present and future of Latin America. In the second

event, the topic of care connected conversations between different sectors that put differences on hold to dream of profound social change and broadening the historical agenda of feminisms.

The papers presented below are part of this ongoing debate in Ibero-America and explore the following issues: how the demands for gender equality raised by feminisms fit with climate justice, what models of support for employability and care are capable of increasing women's autonomy, the complexities linked to the professionalization and recognition of care and the equitable distribution of domestic tasks, how the costs of care responsibilities and social obligations can be financed and distributed, how do we get men to go into the private sphere (while ensuring that women continue to participate and join the public sphere), how to promote women's leadership without losing sight of the bonds of sisterhood or falling prey to uncritical assimilation, how to address intersectionality, and how to detect and resist threats from anti-rights movements.

The first of the papers presented is by Alicia H. Puleo and analyzes the relationship between feminism and environmentalism. The analysis focuses on three issues: the way in which nature and women are undervalued in Enlightenment thinking, the discomfort of feminism with respect to environmentalism, and the potential opportunities for dialogue and coordination between both movements. According to the author, enlightenment culture and the academy were structured by hierarchizing certain types of knowledge and giving priority to certain issues, roles and subjects. While nature, emotions, the body, the particular, the domestic and, with it, the sustenance of life, received an inferior status, with the tasks related to care and subsistence assigned to women being devalued, the development and generation of knowledge oriented to the productive sphere—a responsibility attributed to men—were revered and received all the attention and value. In this regard, both feminism and environmentalism have denounced these hierarchies and advocated for a re-valuing of silenced issues,

for their introduction into the research agenda, public debate and government; in short, for abandoning binary visions and instead developing an integrated view of the human experience.

Despite coinciding on the above issues, there are reservations in feminism with respect to the essentialist proposals of certain ecologies, among which is the discomfort with the role of mother attributed to all women, which would be a clear step backward in terms of women's freedom and autonomy. As the author suggests, "the model to which we should aspire is not that of a return to a rudimentary past, a return that would most likely be unfavorable to women, but a future of moderation, of *sophrosyne*, that virtue praised by Greek philosophy that warned of the dangers of the abyss of *hubris*, of excessiveness. [...]. The ecological transition must offer an opportunity for the recognition of women's knowledge and for the promotion of their participation in the decision making process of green work, projects and policies."

It is possible to vindicate the knowledge of indigenous women and at the same time fight against patriarchy, as evidenced by the eco-territorial struggles that Latin American women are waging against extractivist industries. Beyond the names given to the phenomena (which do not always coincide with the self-perception of those who act), in practice a space of variable geometry is being configured around certain themes such as water, territory, bodies and food sovereignty, which aspire to a just eco-social transition (Svampa, 2021).

The second of the papers is by Lilián Celiberti, who aims to enable the creation of a space, delimited by care, where feminism and environmentalism can converse. Emphasizing the eco-dependence of the material bases that sustain life, this chapter explores the potential of care to strengthen community networks and collective action capable of confronting the privatization of social issues, the patriarchal allocation of care to women and rethinking strategies to strengthen local communities.

While public policies locate interventions, services and policies in separate sectors and areas ("environment", "gender", "culture"),

resistance struggles in Latin America integrate the socio-environmental dimension into care, imagining new ways of producing, consuming and inhabiting. In the face of precariousness, they are creating material and/or symbolic ways of coping with dispossession and deprivation, and social practices are taking root that strengthen communities and value the work of sustaining human life.

Taking note of this leads to questioning current governance and calling for public interventions that contribute to a paradigm of collective care.

The new ecosocial contract must recognize that human beings are part of a global ecosystem and remedy historical injustices through just transitions. If the original social contract concealed a sexual contract to which women did not give their approval, the new contract must go hand in hand with a fair contract in which the activities of production and reproduction are shared equally by women and men and the different genders, and in which sexual orientations and gender expressions enjoy the same respect and the same rights (UNRISD, 2022).

As Celiberti clearly suggests, de-familiarizing, de-feminizing, de-heteronormalizing and de-maternizing care must be an objective of new welfare states, not only to redress historical injustices, but also to generate state and collective responsibility for care and to commit to a more just future.

Moving forward in the analysis and the effects of the insertion of care in public and government agendas, the third paper written by Ailynn Torres focuses on unresolved problems, on political approaches in tension and on areas that have not yet been explored. Reminding us that by work we should not only understand those tasks that are salaried—and that, consequently, providing unpaid care, insofar as it involves time, effort and resources, is also work—, the text has the virtue of systematizing issues in dispute. For example: should care be monetized? If unpaid caregivers do not acquire worker status, they will continue to be excluded from many of the rights associated with employment (social security, pensions, leave,

etc.). However, there is also the risk that policies may reproduce gender roles and further normalize women's domestic destiny, while reinforcing the intersectionalities that women as caregivers experience.

Along these lines, the chapter lists proposals currently being considered to respond to these problems, such as the "feminist wage", the "care income" or the "universal basic income", and underlines how the mere formal recognition of rights does not necessarily generate institutional transformation. There are several countries that have regulated care (through constitutional articles, laws, or decrees), but this has not necessarily led to far-reaching changes. Moreover, at times, the recognition of care can be a mechanism for fossilizing social action and reinforcing gender roles that fail to recognize sexual diversity, for example, or hinder access to public services for the LGBTIQ+ population, and issues related to children as carers.

The question of regulatory non-compliance is not unique to Latin America, but in this region it is a long-standing problem that seriously affects democracies and hinders efforts to combat inequality, insecurity and social vulnerability. Therefore, if we want to create rights, it is not enough to express them legally, it is also necessary to synchronize the regulatory regimes such as law, and sociocultural and moral norms, and to undertake action for social change that does not remain superficial or limited to a legislative order, which is not the main one (Güemes y Wences, 2019).

Returning to the convergence between feminism and ecology in Latin America, and in close harmony with intersectional approaches, the fourth chapter is written by Fabio Vélez and is based on the Brazilian context. It begins by recalling that ecofeminism encompasses both the authors who choose to label themselves as such, as well as the production emanating from grassroots movements of women uncomfortable with that label. In Brazil, especially in rural communities, religion and the Church have served as a medium and space in which women have been able to begin to discuss and organize themselves around beliefs, traditions and cus-

toms, raising concerns, debates, struggles and action that could be considered as ecofeminist.

Within ecofeminisms, he differentiates between “essentialists” (who presuppose a biological, innate connection between women and nature) and “constructivists” (who deny any special connection between women and nature and tend to position themselves critically in the debate based on sexual difference), which brings both clarity to their work and elements for an approach to a reality little known in the global North. His chapter summarizes the critical positions that can be glimpsed in Brazil today, detailing the dangers of quick or superficial readings of its reality, and makes the work of feminist thinkers and activists visible.

One of the virtues of this work is that it contributes to the “cosmo-audition” of practices and struggles, and allows us to understand and recognize visions, feelings and ways of thinking that go beyond Western epistemological prejudices. Only through respectful listening can feminisms build an intercultural and symmetrical dialogue to confront patriarchy (Wences, 2023).

The fifth chapter, written by Marta C. Ferreyra, dwells on an uncomfortable tension that permeates feminisms and proposes replacing the concept of sorority with that of *affidamento* (“trust”) in order to strengthen the political influence of feminisms. The subordination experienced by women in their day-to-day lives has led to questioning of hierarchies in social relations which, if left unchecked, may risk obscuring other conflicts, differences and identities. Under the logic of being identical, a lot of energy is often invested in order to keep the group united. The illusion of equality and the basis of love and sisterhood leads to a uniform and homogeneous treatment of women that produces new subordinations and the denial of otherness.

With this in mind, the author advocates recovering the notion of *affidamento* and enhancing the existence of relationships based on the need for others, which recognize the differences and asymmetries between women, and consequently proposes recog-

dition through coalition, rather than identity. Both individual and collective strength, in her view, can and should be centered on the desire to achieve goals, rather than on the feeling of assuming that we are all equal.

The concerns raised above are in line with those presented in a masterful way by Jane Mansbridge (1993): How to strengthen community ties while developing institutions that protect individuals against community oppression? Women have been socialized to listen, provide support and avoid conflict, and while feminisms combat universalisms that ignore differences, they have difficulty organizing power and creating images that allow them to have political influence.

The sixth and last chapter is by Joy H. González-Güeto and, in it, she proposes discussing the lack of recognition or subordination of the racial question in gender policies and in some feminist discourses and practices, repositioning the racial question to explain inequalities and reformulate current approaches. Based on the understanding of racialization as an experience of gendered suffering, she highlights the language of people who are not politically or academically organized, for whom racialization has emotional and sensory nuances with emphasis on their bodily and situated experience.

Critical of programmes, policies and strategies with an “intersectional” perspective aimed at black, indigenous and poor women—which, in her opinion, from a neoliberal perspective lead them into debt and continue to subject them to dependent relationships of fragility and hopelessness—the author distinguishes two equally insufficient responses. On one hand, there are the psychology-led programmes, which are geared towards strategies of symbolic, aesthetic and “empowerment” affirmation; on the other hand, there are the historical reparation programmes, not designed as gender policies, which rarely address the specificity of the racism that affects women.

The suffering generated by the processes of racialization calls for the recognition of the structures that sustain and reproduce this pain, as well as for more comprehensive political and govern-

mental interventions based on listening to the demands of peasant, popular, black, indigenous, migrant and traveller feminist organizations, and in the search for reparation and the generation of more just futures.

We conclude this introduction by inviting careful reading of the texts, calling for reflection as a critical contribution to transformation and to the passion and action that, we believe, should never be lacking in intellectual debate. Aspiring to social justice in scenarios where inequalities do not have a single root, but multiple roots (gender, class, ethnicity, age, geography, etc.), implies making tensions visible and managing them, creating a willingness to reach agreements, designing coordinated and sequenced actions to implement public policies and political strategies. For all this we need a utopia to serve as a horizon and to not let ourselves be captured by discouragement or by all the issues that society constantly seems to prioritize and that bring us closer to dystopias.

Eleanor Faur (2022) provocatively asked the following question: “How can we continue to talk about care after a pandemic, with our homes being torn apart by inflation and inequality, and our territories affected by environmental violence? It is always a challenge to raise issues related to gender equality in contexts such as Latin America, with so many urgent problems, but at the same time—just as the Amazonia is—the Latin America region, with its social and political innovations, is a conceptual and political lung for other regions of the world. It is precisely the issues raised in this book that are capable of revolutionizing a state and bringing about social change, not only in Latin America but also in the rest of the world.

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1. Ecofeminism, deep feminist awareness of the socio-environmental crisis

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1. Introduction

Ecofeminism, that current of feminism that can be defined as deep feminist awareness of the socio-environmental crisis, is today more necessary than ever. We find ourselves at a time of particular international tension and increasingly frequent “natural” disasters that render the words of the German ecofeminist Petra Kelly particularly significant: “The ultimate result of unbridled and terminal patriarchy will be ecological catastrophe or nuclear holocaust (...) We need to transform the model itself” (Kelly, 1997: 28). On one hand, the threat of nuclear war that loomed during the Cold War years and faded away in 1989 is once again present on the world stage; on the other, the report made public in 2021 by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns of the serious effects of anthropogenic climate change that will soon take place and of the urgent need to reduce emissions to halt the rise in temperatures generated by the current unsustainable production and consumption model.¹ This sinister panorama contrasts with the

¹ A summary of their findings can be found at the following link: https://www.national-geographic.com.es/naturaleza/claves-informe-ipcc-sobre-emergencia-climatica_17210

good news we have regarding the international advance of feminist awareness despite occasional setbacks in the legal framework of some countries. Thus, Dina Garzón, coordinator of the International Ecofeminist Network, accurately describes the *pathos* that overwhelms those who have developed an ecofeminist conscience:

As feminists, we are aware of the historical moment in which we live. We see with excitement how young women have massively embraced feminism, turning it into a global and planetary movement in which women of all ethnicities and conditions rebel against sexual harassment and aggression without geographic exception. As environmentalists, on the other hand, we live in desperate times (Garzón, 2020: 95-96).

Environmentalism asks itself why, in the decades of activism it has already been engaged in, it has not been able to adequately transmit the data available to it. Why has the population remained unresponsive to their messages? Environmentalists are debating whether it is necessary to present the situation in all its gravity or to limit themselves to proposing sustainable ways of living. If they opt for the first strategy, they are accused of being catastrophists and there is a risk that the fear generated will block any positive reaction. If they choose the latter, they conceal part of the truth and convey the idea that there is no hurry to change course. This situation between Scylla and Charybdis produces disenchantment and pessimism. However, there are also notes of hope. Major environmental organizations such as Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, Ecologists in Action, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Spanish Ornithological Society (SEO/BirdLife) published in 2019, around March 8, a press release in which they confirmed they shared ecofeminist principles. Indigenous and peasant women in defense of the Earth, and the new youth movements that have taken up the fight against the ecological crisis are clear that it is a question of survival (Garzón, 2020). Abandoning oneself to pessimism leads to inability to act and conformism. Not everyone can tolerate this.

The enormous interest shown in ecofeminism today reveals the need for approaches that enrich the existing ones and respond to the profound socio-environmental problems through philosophical paradigms and practical initiatives that reflect the experience and feelings of women.

2. Ecofeminism that takes up the feminist legacy

For a long time, feminism has viewed ecofeminism with suspicion. Feminists' reservations about this trend have various origins. First, there is a notable lack of ecological information and training, with a consequent lack of awareness about the environmental crisis among the population. Feminists, as part of the general population, have been no exception in this regard and have generally failed to give due importance to this problem. Second, however, we must point out that the fears that underpinned their rejection were also justified by the possible and even already detectable divergence of some ecofeminist theorists. Exaltation of the sanctity of life has led some of them to positions that are in conflict with feminist struggles for the right to separate sexual desire and pleasure from reproduction. Both contraception and the voluntary interruption of a pregnancy have been questioned by some ecofeminists, generating great unease within feminism. The tendency towards essentialism has also caused alarm. The identification of women with motherhood brings us back to a pre-Beauvoirian patriarchal state that is not desirable, neither from the feminist point of view of women's autonomy nor from the ecological point of view of the need to reduce birth rates. In the face of these trends, it is worth recalling that Françoise d'Eaubonne—the French feminist who forged the term *ecoféminisme* in the 1970s—argued that feminism and environmentalism had a point in common, and this was to be found in the demographic question: the feminist goal of gaining the right to decide whether or not to become a mother coincided with the

concern of environmentalists at the time about the unsustainability of the exponential growth of the human population. From my point of view, which is that of an ecofeminism of equality, I maintain that the incorporation of a new ecological vision must not imply a step backwards in terms of women's freedom and autonomy, and that the position on this point must be clear.

Neither does being an ecofeminist require a return to pre-technological societies as has often been assumed. The image of ecofeminism as a primitivism advocating a return to harsh living conditions that do not appeal to anyone has been another obstacle to its acceptance. The problem is its invocation and use for purposes that have nothing to do with scientific objectivity and truth. Today it is becoming evident that, if we do not undertake a rational, measured, moderate and organized population decrease, the unsustainability of the current development model will necessarily bring about abrupt and painful transformations, that is to say, an involuntary and chaotic decrease. The model to which we should aspire is not that of a return to a rudimentary past, a return that would most likely be unfavorable to women, but a future of moderation, of *sophrosyne*, that virtue praised by Greek philosophy that warned of the dangers of the abyss of *hybris*, of immoderation. It is not a matter of promoting technophobia; neither is it a matter of falling into the technolatriy of those who believe that all ecological problems will be solved by technological advances. New technologies cannot obviate the need for a paradigm shift.

We live in the heritage of Modernity. The rights that women enjoy today in modern societies have been conquests of feminism that originated in Modernity as a result of the reflection on the relations between the sexes based on principles and values such as the equality of all human beings and criticism of prejudice (Amorós, 1997; Valcárcel, 2019). But Modernity is two-faced. On one hand, it has recognized rights and granted freedoms; on the other hand, through an instrumental reason guided by the will of patriarchal domination, it has brought us to the current situation

of ecological crisis and risk of nuclear war. While a review of its heritage is necessary, this should not lead us to its total rejection. On the contrary, we will have to know how to distinguish between what is desirable to conserve—and here feminism has a lot to say—and what we will have to transform, an aspect in which the importance of environmentalism is inescapable.

3. Ecofeminism for the health of women and the Earth

One of the issues that focused the attention of early ecofeminists was women's health. There is a clear and simple motive that explains one of the reasons for the emergence of feminist interest in ecological thinking. In the 1970s, the effects of environmental pollution on the female body were becoming known. The American biologist Rachel Carson raised the alarm by denouncing the link between the increase in breast cancer and the dichloro diphenyl trichloroethane (DDT) massively used in industrial agriculture in the 1960s. Later, numerous medical studies have shown that environmental pollution with xenoestrogens affects women in particular. Xenoestrogens are substances so called because they are external but chemically similar to estrogen. They are found in organochlorine pesticides, dioxins produced by incinerators, furniture and wall paints, numerous cleaning and perfumery products, plastic wrap, synthetic resins and other household items. They are responsible for the increased risk of suffering from asthma, Parkinson's disease, lymphomas, fibroids and gynecological cancers (Valls-Llobet, 2018). Everyone can be affected by these chemicals, but because toxic substances bind better in fat cells, the female body's higher percentage of fat and its hormonal instability make it particularly receptive to contamination. This explains the higher percentage of women affected by multiple chemical hypersensitivity syndrome (MCHS), a disabling condition that is routinely diagnosed as an allergy. Chlorinated kerosenes and

brominated flame retardants have also been detected in breast milk, which is worrisome considering that young children are more vulnerable because their immune systems are not yet sufficiently developed.

This data should set off all the alarm bells and encourage decisive action in favour of production alternatives that do not pollute and create jobs, such as Agro-ecology (Siliprandi and Zuloaga, 2014). The precautionary principle is a key concept for humanity to meet its needs without reducing quality of life or compromising the future of generations to come. Consumer voracity and unrestrained greed for profit do not contribute at all to quality of life. As moral and political philosophy warns, and social psychology or a simple observation of the reality around us shows, unbridled consumption does not bring happiness.

4. Ecofeminism as international sorority and dialogue of cultures

Participants of the large international movement Via Campesina—which defends the independence of small farmers from large corporations and promotes agriculture that respects nature and human health—state in their Nyéléni Declaration:

We, women from more than 86 countries, from many indigenous peoples, from Africa, America, Europe, Asia, Oceania and from different sectors and social movements (...) will find the energy to carry forward the right to food sovereignty, bearer of the hope of building another world, drawing this energy from our solidarity. We will carry this message to women all over the world.

If feminism wants to maintain its aspiration for international sisterhood, it must take into account that there can be no social justice without ecojustice. In the face of forced displacement, deforestation, market-oriented monocultures, patents on life, the

massive use of agrottoxins, the mega-mining of the extractivist model and other environmental attacks, peasants and indigenous women from the global South have developed courageous forms of activism on the front line of the struggle, putting their lives at risk as the the tragic case of Berta Cáceres, a Lenca leader assassinated in Honduras in 2016, demonstrates. It is about recovering “the territory body earth” (Cabnal, 2010: 23) in the face of neocolonialism and the “patriarchal entanglement” (Paredes, 2012) of colonized and colonizers.

The current ecological crisis forces us to rethink our worldview and ask ourselves about the value assigned to human and non-human nature and life-sustaining activities. The ecofeminist perspective is essential at a time when the unsustainable development model affects our health, dispossesses native peoples of their lands, destroys biodiversity, depletes non-renewable resources, pollutes even the farthest corners of the planet and leads us to an unprecedented economic-ecological crisis. Therefore, ecofeminism must be enriched through intercultural learning. Interculturalism invites us to learn from others. Thus, for example, respect for the Earth and its own cycles of the original peoples of Abya Yala is immeasurably wiser than hegemonic market-centered misdevelopment. Intercultural learning does not imply an indiscriminate relativistic multiculturalism for which every cultural trait is respected and cannot be criticized. For women, as for stigmatized minorities, such cultural relativism is highly problematic, as it prevents the critique of oppressive traditions (Puleo, 2011). The praxis of indigenous women in defense of the Earth unites the ecocentric ethics of their original world views with demands for equality and autonomy (Tapia González, 2018). Reclaiming the knowledge of indigenous women is not at odds with recognition of the enlightened thinking that made possible the emergence of feminism more than three centuries ago. Every culture has something to give and much to receive.

5. Ecofeminism as a post-gender, universalized and non-anthropocentric ethic of care

The sexual division of labor has encouraged differentiated attitudes and virtues in men and women. Some may be more favorable—more adaptive in an evolutionary sense—to this century in which we live. Care implies feelings and practices coming from the historical experience of women; feelings and practices devalued in the face of others considered virile and superior, such as conquest, competition and domination.

We urgently need to overcome the idea of dominion over nature and replace it with the notion of caring for nature. Moral anthropocentrism consists of denying any value to nature beyond being a source of resources for human beings. Establishment of an ontological abyss whereby only that which is defined as human deserves respect and consideration has allowed the unlimited exploitation of anything seen as closer to nature than to culture. The reduction to a mere body is the ideological substratum and the legitimizing argument for exploitation, devaluation and violence. Aristotle himself, who was a sexist but not misogynist thinker, justified the order of the polis by arguing in *Politics* that women, slaves and animals “do things with their bodies,” so that the free man, characterized by the ability to reason, can use them by attaching a purpose to them.

As we have seen in the previous section dedicated to health, the concept of “nature” concerns both the external (ecosystems) and the internal, our bodies, which, on the other hand, are not alien to culture. Women’s bodies have been and are the object of specific forms of violence and exploitation. In what I have called both “patriarchies of coercion” (societies in which women must obey strict customary rules) and “patriarchies of consent” (current societies in which equality before the law has been achieved) (Puleo, 2019), women have undergone processes of reification that turn them into bodies for pleasure or for reproduction. If in patriarchies

of coercion we find such harsh forms of violence against the natural body as, for example, ritual sexual amputations, in patriarchies of consent the damage may be self-inflicted under aesthetic or other arbitrary and androcentric imperatives. New technologies have increased objectification through the consumption of increasingly violent pornography. It has also facilitated the creation of an international market for trafficking, prostitution (De Miguel, 2015) and surrogacy (Guerra, 2018). For the latter, hormonal stimulation and aggressive fertilization methods used with cattle are now applied to poor women in what I have considered a form of “reproductive extractivism” (Puleo, 2017).

This fact is related to the inferior status given to nature. Thought and praxis have been articulated in hierarchical dualisms: culture/nature, spirit/matter, mind/body, reason/emotion, universal/particular, public/domestic.., polarizing the human lived experience. These pairs of opposites are also gendered, the upper one is conceived as masculine and the lower one as feminine. Consequently, all tasks related to subsistence and the maintenance of life (starting with domestic tasks) have been unfairly devalued. Ecofeminism, as a hermeneutic of suspicion, has seen an androcentric trait in the hierarchization of these dualisms that had to be combated. However, we must not confuse the correct assessment of their value with a mystification that perpetuates stereotyped roles and confines women to the domestic sphere. In this regard, I often say: beware of care! Some current ecofeminist discourses focus too much on praising the feminine virtues of care, diluting the critique of patriarchal attitudes and privilege with respect to women’s reified bodies. If the tasks that were historically assigned to women have favoured the development of a more empathetic attitude, the praxis of caring for the vulnerable must now be universalized, that is, taught to men as well, and extended to ecosystems and non-human animals, the object of infinite abuse and cruelty (Puleo, 2011, 2019). Empirical data shows that women constitute a large part of the grassroots of the global environmental movement and form the overwhelming

majority in animal advocacy groups, and important links can be observed between their animal welfare commitment and their environmental awareness (Balza y Garrido, 2016). We need a critical ecofeminist analysis of the patriarchal elements of the ecological crisis to understand our current situation and find strategies to leave it. Often assuming the burden of the double day, we have integrated ourselves into the sphere of culture, in the marketplace, in politics, in those spaces from which we had been unjustly excluded. Our fair integration must also imply important transformations. Leaving behind the will of patriarchal domination, we must move towards a future of post-androanthropocentric equality that does not consider women and what is considered feminine as inferior, or make non-human nature a simple instrument to subjugate and exploit.

6. To conclude with a few proposals

There will be no solution to the crisis of the environment and civilization as long as we do not contribute to transforming the horizon of expectations about what a good life is. Preferring justice, friendship, equality, care for living beings and the enjoyment of nature to the endless accumulation of useless objects offered by the market is a fundamental ethical basis for political decisions in the broad Frankfurtian sense of the term *politics* (and also in the narrow sense, since those in power will hardly jeopardize their popularity by betting on ecological measures if they are not demanded by a conscientious electorate). This appeal to value change is not an ethic that ignores the strength of the economic interests at stake, but a recognition of the feedback loop between ethics and politics. The ecofeminist future implies, among other things, a responsible commitment to applying a precautionary principle and to the search for the common good in the face of the unbridled race for economic gain characteristic of globalized neoliberalism. All this must be done without prejudice to women. A sustainable world cannot be built on

sacrificing their just demands, returning to discriminatory forms of social organization or questioning their ability to decide whether or not to become mothers. On the contrary, the ecological transition must offer an opportunity for the recognition of their knowledge and for the promotion of their participation in the decision making process of green work, projects and policies. The empowerment and economic autonomy that comes with the full entry of women into the public sphere must be accompanied by the co-responsibility of men in the tasks of attentive care and the development of their capacities for empathy, compassion and responsibility in the face of a vulnerable world.

As for the environmental threats to the health of women and the population as a whole, there are several possible measures that can be taken: provide more information on the benefits of organic food, promote through laws a greater control and a drastic reduction in the use of pesticides, promote agro-ecological practices, grant aid to the production of organic cooperatives with a significant presence of women both for production and for the maintenance of marketing and consumption networks, promote research in environmental medicine, warn about the danger of insecticides and cleaning products used daily by women in household chores... These are just some of the policy actions that must be taken. While we wait for them, there remains individual and collective action to protect ourselves and the ecosystems. Taking care of nature also means taking care of our bodies, which is part of the web of life. There can be no human health in a devastated and poisoned environment. Destroying our common home is suicidal.

Ecofeminism has to provide clear ideas and values at a time when the increasing destruction of nature and the commodification of human and non-human living beings are reaching a point of no return; and it should seek to establish with other emancipatory theories and movements, whenever possible, “mutual aid pacts” that do not entail either merging or postponing, devaluing or forgetting the just demands of women (Puleo, 2015).

By gathering the aspects of the epistemologies of the global South that question the unsustainable economic and civilizational model in force, an intercultural dialogue of encounters and contrasts that does not fall into a relativistic conformism detrimental to women, is extremely enriching and opens up new horizons. To overcome the androanthropocentric bias of patriarchal culture and globalization that ignore human need for care, prevent a minimum of interspecies justice, lead us to ecological catastrophe and threaten to drag us into a devastating nuclear war, we need to promote critical and constructive thinking that takes into account the experience and feelings of women around the world who care for nature internally and externally from very different fields, convictions and ways of life; we will promote a culture of peace through education, literature, science and art, environmental and animal activism, agroecology, traditional gardens of women farmers in impoverished countries, indigenous defense of territory, food sovereignty, alternative energies, recycling and other sustainable practices of daily life. In sum, we will have to promote an ecofeminist culture of peace.

7. Conclusions

- Ecofeminism is thought and praxis that redefines reality, questioning patriarchal, androanthropocentric and neoliberal domination. As a regulatory horizon, it charts the course towards a future of justice and peace with nature and, therefore, can establish “mutual aid pacts” with other emancipatory theories and movements as long as they do not imply fusion, since this is usually followed by the postponement, devaluation or forgetting of women’s demands for justice.
- If ecofeminism wants to overcome the well-known (and often justified) feminist reticence towards its approaches, one of the first steps it must take is the recognition of the difficult feminist

conquest of the right of women to decide whether or not they want to be mothers. Both the defense of women's freedom, autonomy and life and the unsustainability of unlimited population growth require adequate information and health care.

- In the face of patriarchal hierarchy of values inherited from a long history of the sexual division of labor, ecofeminism must defend the revaluation of empathy, compassion and caring practices with respect to humans, nonhuman animals and ecosystems. In order for the revaluation of the virtues of care not to become a return to old sexist stereotypes for women, these virtues must be universalized, taught to and required of men from childhood.
- Environmental medicine has shown that women are particularly vulnerable to pollution. Laws and institutions must combat the extractivism that poisons and devastates territories, control and drastically reduce the use of pesticides, and decisively support agroecological practices and ecological cooperatives with a strong presence of women, both for production and for the maintenance of marketing and consumption networks. It is necessary to understand that, today, international feminist sisterhood implies ecojustice.
- Without falling into ethicism, it can be affirmed that, given the feedback between ethics and politics, the economic-political decisions that allow for a future worth living will be more feasible if a transformation in what is understood as a good life is promoted, critically analyzing the patriarchal will to power and the consumerist ideal, learning in intercultural dialogue with the epistemologies of the global South and giving their fair value to friendship, equality, care for living beings and love of nature.

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2. Territories of life-sustaining care

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“In fact, to continue with the problem requires learning to be truly present, not as an axis that vanishes between horrible or Edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvation futures, but as mortal bugs intertwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings”.

(Donna Haraway, 2019)

1. Introduction

The pandemic ruthlessly demonstrated the inequalities between regions, social sectors, and between men and women. The weaknesses of public health systems also became evident, as well as the structural inequality in access to decent housing, which exacerbated the suffering of those living in overcrowded and precarious housing. Among other consequences, the impact will be visible in the increase in extreme poverty levels, which will return to those of a decade ago, according to the Population Division of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, CEPAL by its Spanish acronym)¹. The precarious situation

¹ By 2021, the number of people living in extreme poverty reached 86 million (13.8% of Latin America’s population) and people living in poverty reached 201 million (32.1% of Latin America’s population), figures much higher than those of 2019 (70 million people and 187 million people, respectively) (ECLAC, 2022a).

of women in the labour market, mainly in commercial and services sectors, was aggravated by the paralysis of activities due to the pandemic, in addition to the fact that the closing of schools and an increase in teleworking generated high levels of stress and an overload of care tasks (CELADE, 2022).

Cities in Latin America and the Caribbean are highly segregated, fragmented and territorially unequal, and in these situations sanitation and access to water become a privilege. “Stay at home” was the slogan used by most countries to confront the pandemic, appealing to a “home” that—when it exists—is often a prison for many women and children who live with a violent man without means of escape. As in all crisis situations, in this collective pain solidarity practices summoned people to organize solidarity and care networks, such as soup kitchens, picnic areas, food baskets or community health networks. These actions, which multiplied in the cities and territories of the region, made it possible to confront the impact of the pandemic and made visible the networks that are woven daily among people to sustain life and social reproduction.

By focusing on everyday life, its networks and exchanges, we can identify both the solidarity efforts of individuals and the weakness and fragmentation of community networks . Therefore, a feminist perspective aims to explore the potential of care to strengthen community networks and collective action to confront privatization of the social sphere, patriarchal allocation of care to women and the absence of recognition of the eco-dependence of the material bases that sustain life. The climate, civilization and care crises call for a rethinking of strategies capable of dealing with their impact and strengthening communities.

2. Interdependence and eco-dependence

If we think about the land and its webs of human and non-human life, we must necessarily involve the material bases that sustain

life. How is the fabric of life in each neighborhood or territory made visible? How is territorial political action reoriented towards production and consumption practices based on reciprocity? For Gabriela Merlinsky, we are facing an ecopolitical crossroads that imposes a change in the system of production and reproduction, and “this requires strengthening territories, defending politically active communities, maintaining forms of economy based on reciprocity and rebuilding democracy from the grassroots. It is a project that links ways of life and common goods” (Merlinsky, 2017)².

Feminist theory arises from the political practice of women as protagonists, traversed by multiple inequalities, a subaltern status and exclusions, and is permanently challenged by the subjects with whom it dialogues and from whom it is nourished, which is why the paths that open up are often contradictory to each other. Feminist histories range from the demands from modernity to the critical perspective on the epistemic violence of coloniality, from gender to gender and dissident identities, from anthropocentrism to ecofeminism, thus constituting a diverse theoretical and political body that revises and questions itself, generating ever broader pluralities of questioning subjectivities, both of practices and of the theoretical categories themselves. Dialogue between feminism and ecology is part of this process. The daily political practices of feminisms and, in particular, in the struggles of resistance to extractivism in Latin America, have been broadening the concept of “sustainability of life” to incorporate the socio-environmental dimension of care, imagining new ways of producing, consuming and inhabiting.

These perspectives are based on the recognition of interdependence between people and eco-dependence with nature, as pointed out by Yayo Herrero. The eco-dependence of human society on nature is becoming evident, particularly in view of the ecological limits we are currently facing: climate change, the

² Available at: www.clacso.org.megafon.

rate of biodiversity extinction, nitrogen and phosphorus cycles, stratospheric ozone depletion, ocean acidification, freshwater use, changes in land use, atmospheric and chemical pollution (plastics, heavy metals, hormone disrupters, radioactive waste, etc.) (Herrero, 2017).

We need to imagine the transition to a new paradigm that reverses the dominant values and opens paths of hope towards a dignified life for all people, while preserving nature. The changes are so far-reaching that they require the adoption of a systemic approach in which the economic, political and cultural spheres interconnect in a new social configuration, strengthening the processes already underway in thousands of micro initiatives. The path does not seem simple, as it requires changes ranging from the design of cities and urban planning, to comprehensive approaches and intersections of policies with an intercultural perspective. It also implies opening up the question of how much we need to live and what we are willing to give up as a tool to advance the development of a new ecological economy.

Policy proposals and social experiences should promote collective self-managed experiences to strengthen the social fabric based on cultures of cooperation and care. The construction of these scenarios plays a crucial role in preventing authoritarian and elitist proposals from appropriating supposedly environmentalist discourses and integrating legitimate and necessary claims for change into their discourses, giving rise to the so-called “eco-fascisms” and the proliferation of false green alternatives. The gravity and urgency of the moment requires us to reflect on the looming threats in order to understand what dynamics coexist in the condition of interdependence and eco-dependencies, and what are their current challenges. This approach allows us to recover and enhance the ways of being in the world, of relating to each other and to nature. Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar calls the community framework “a heterogeneous multiplicity of life worlds that populate and create the world under diverse patterns of respect,

collaboration, dignity and reciprocity, not exempt from tension, and systematically harassed by capital” (Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2017: 33). These weavings of sociability grow in the forms of action developed in the face of precariousness, constructing material and/or symbolic forms of confronting dispossession and deprivation.

For Yayo Herrero, three types of hegemony need to be disputed: economic, political and cultural. To dispute economic hegemony, we need to consider that the material sphere of the economy (natural resources of the earth’s crust) is in the process of exhaustion and will continue to be so. It is essential, therefore, for a change in the forms of consumption, a socialization of basic resources managed under the logic of the commons and not of commodities, and a redistribution of wealth. With respect to the dispute about political hegemony, we need to focus on the reality of the Earth and our bodies, disregarding what Almudena Hernando defines as the fantasy of individuality (Hernando, 2012): dispensing with nature, one’s own body and the care of others, to create an ecological feminist imagination that allows us to build a life that deserves to be lived, starting from the bodies we inhabit and the earth we walk on. The cultural dispute “forces us to promote a culture of sufficiency and material self-restraint” (Herrero, 2017: 121).

From these perspectives, democracy today is challenged by capitalist voracity over territories, the physical limits to the reproduction of nature, the pollution of rivers and seas, and the growing loss of collective spaces for working together. The sustainability of life as a concept has precisely the potential to articulate environmental and ecological knowledge with feminist views of the autonomy of bodies and territories in order to think of alternatives. Debating the need to move forward in a new ecological and feminist economy allows us to reduce the materialization of production and produce what is necessary to live with the least amount of energy, water and pollution possible. The common good as a political principle challenges us to reinvent the collective.

3. Care to sustain the fabric of life. Community care

What place does the maintenance of the life occupy? And the environment in which it develops? What are its conditions of viability? How is it organized, distributed and socially valued? And, above all, how can we imagine it under other criteria of environmental, personal and social justice for individuals and collectives? These questions guide Vega, Martínez-Buján and Paredes' search in *Cuidado, comunidad y común: experiencias cooperativas en el sostenimiento de la vida (Care, community and the common good: cooperative experiences in supporting life)* (2018), which gathers cooperative experiences of community care.

Analyzing the community hub allows us to think about the potential it has to build arrangements that are not driven by social and spatial privatization in the nuclear family, by the exclusive and individual work assigned to women, by the use of the poorest women or by the economic resources of each individual. Taking on the capacity to care is a way of valuing collective and embodied life that displaces profit and capitalist atomization, creating communities for which care is not a minor issue, but something that intertwines with life in common. This is undoubtedly a democratic challenge that does not necessarily have to be considered against or outside the commitments of States to meet the needs of all and guarantee the rights of all. Thinking about the community level in this field opens up a series of questions that displace the central role played by the family, money and the residual "use" of the public sphere (Vega, Martínez-Buján & Paredes, 2018: 17).

The feminist debate that has constructed the "right to care" as a slogan, even in all its plurality of perspectives, shares as a central premise moving care away from the focus on the family in order to emphasize that caring is a social, communal and collective responsibility. The depatriarchalization of care involves assuming it as a central axis in the support of human life and all its aspects. Exploring this link is one of the urgent tasks, not only to highlight the use of women's free labour in social reproduction, but also to revalue

care as an ethical and ecological paradigm. The aim is to bring care and the reproduction of life to broad sectors of communities and society, to incorporate these dimensions in social organizations, trade unions, cooperatives and communities, while at the same time promoting and designing a new dimension of State social protection as public policy. But social practices must expand beyond the State to make possible relational fields guided by ethical principles for the construction of the “common good”. In this sense, cities and their neighborhoods, beset by the commodification of spaces and the individuation of ways of life, can become fertile ground for these transformations, generating networks of exchanges and services.

At the 15th Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, ECLAC, together with UN Women, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the International Labor Organization (ILO), presented the research conducted by the consultant Cecilia Fraga (2022). The work characterizes community care by considering the purpose that animates it and divides it into five major groups:

- The first is linked to the satisfaction of needs associated with physical survival and direct care, where canteens, day care centers and direct support of different types stand out.
- The second refers to the link with productive processes within the framework of the social and solidarity economy, but also to the link with the market economy.
- The third refers to care practices in communities that seek to solve structural problems, such as gender-based violence and the sexual division of labour. These practices are based on co-responsibility and care networks among women.
- The fourth refers to support networks for self-care: information, assistance, accompaniment and emotional support; networks of support and containment for caregivers, with emphasis on mental health, and support networks for information and self-knowledge linked to ancestral medicine.

- The fifth refers to the care of tangible and intangible common goods such as water, land, environment, but also historical memory and customs (Fraga, 2022: 30).

This characterization is relevant and useful for the definition of territorial policies, since when we speak of care we are referring to very different and broad meanings, and run the risk of emptying a polysemic category of its content.

To a greater or lesser degree it is possible to find thousands of heterogeneous initiatives in Latin America: some emerge as an extension of extended families while others are intertwined with the State, but from a self-management perspective (Vega, Martínez-Buján & Paredes, 2018: 24). Many initiatives arise in critical situations, such as that generated by the pandemic. Soup kitchens, popular dining halls or picnic areas are an example of initiatives whose self-management is central to their sustainability. A significant percentage of these initiatives are the result of the voluntary action of women, although they are not exclusively women's initiatives.

This field of community action does not necessarily subvert the patriarchal relations that are reproduced in society and families, but as a space for collective participation it constitutes an experience of political action for women. For communities to exist, we need to share social experiences that generate ties for the reproduction of life; therefore, enhancing the heterogeneity of collective initiatives is a necessary condition to generate forms of re-existence.

4. Cities that care

The dilemmas that have opened up present new arenas of conflict arising from the increase in everyday violence (gangs and mobs, settling of scores), the increase in femicides and the pedagogy of cruelty, as Rita Segato (2018) calls it, in structural contexts of symbolic

and material violence. What can we do to live in less violent cities and coexist in spaces in our diversity? What public policies should be developed to contribute to the livability of cities? What social practices contribute to strengthening a paradigm of collective care?

Feminist urbanism proposes new ways of inhabiting spaces: “Transforming the city, its relationships, its spaces, its uses and its priorities implies developing a view and a practice that are absolutely different from those of hegemonic, androcentric, patriarchal and mercantile urbanism” (Collective Point 6 2019: 154).

For feminists, thinking about the city in its complex dynamics implies putting the underlying logic that drives the reproduction of inequalities and private appropriations of space on the same level as the new subjectivities of gendered bodies that dispute appropriations of public space, in order to open the expression of other bodies that pluralize ways of feeling and desiring to build other ways of constructing ties and affections.

Perspectives on territory and urbanism, as well as contributions from feminist economics, have made the care crisis visible, placing the right to care and community strategies to address the needs arising from this right on the public agenda. “Cities that care”, “caring cities”, “care policies” are some of the initiatives that, from different theoretical perspectives, try to respond to the deterioration of daily life, social fragmentation, economic, climatic or any other kind of displacement. Each of these initiatives contributes to placing the reproduction of life at the center, as well as the intersections between the economy, urban planning and citizen participation; they also define significant axes for thinking about policies from the perspective of people, their needs and challenges. We need to rescue and strengthen the community processes that are generated to respond to urgent needs not addressed by the State, but they are also examples of a culture of more cooperative social relations.

However, moving from care between people to ensure survival to a culture of care that includes the Earth and nature is a complex

challenge that requires discursive and political action that makes eco-dependence visible and places environmental problems as a sphere of collective action.

Feminist urbanism offers a view and action on Earth the and on planning that makes it possible to establish a clear link between sustainability and care, as well as between public space and communal spaces. Public space is managed by the State, and is always in dispute with the market and the processes of commodification and gentrification. Thus, Harvey links the defense of public space as a condition of the affirmation of the common good: “the struggle to appropriate public spaces and public goods in the city for a common goal is still ongoing; but in order to achieve it, it is often vital to protect the flow of public goods that underlie the qualities of the common good” (Harvey, 2017: 116).

Cities that care aim to break the public-private dichotomy, revaluing spaces through urban variables capable of generating sociability and encounters, autonomy and social participation, and where the social co-responsibility for care is supported by physical urban spaces that foster it. Spanish architect Izaskun Chinchilla states that cities are a hostile environment for activities that are not linked to production: “trying to get some sleep, using a toilet, drinking clean water without paying, breathing unpolluted air, having fun without consuming or walking without getting wet on a rainy day are great feats in today’s city” (Chinchilla, 2020: 61). Chinchilla proposes seven ideas for the transformation of the city, combining urban design ideas with diverse audiences. The need to move from fenced parks to what he calls the ‘pixel’ (living wall) garden, from the polluted city to the forest city, or the fight against hostile architecture and urban areas make up of separate pieces. It is essential, says Chinchilla, “not to usurp citizens’ sovereignty over their own actions. The task of technicians is to illustrate alternative ways of life and make the evaluation of their advantages transparent” (Chinchilla, 2020: 177).

The document prepared by ECLAC, presented as the basis for the debates at the 15th Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean in Buenos Aires, states that:

For example, urban planning and mobility criteria that take into account the effects of the organization of public space on care are crucial components in moving towards the care society. In particular, it is essential to incorporate mobility and transportation accessibility criteria that allow the entire population, according to their abilities, to move around and participate in the different social, cultural and economic spheres, both at the urban level and in rural areas (ECLAC, 2022b: 170).

Many municipalities have begun to try out concrete ways of promoting new approaches to territorial policy-making, and exchange networks have been created to strengthen the care paradigm. In Montevideo, the municipal development plan formulated in Municipality B for the period 2020–2025 focuses on seven axes: i) attention to social emergency, ii) right to the city, iii) living heritage and culture, iv) green neighbourhoods, v) building neighbourhoods, vi) winning back the street, and vii) municipal proximity, and places the care plan on the axis of the right to the city.

The agendas of local governments—as strategic enclaves for developing proximity policies and promoting citizen participation—are increasingly open to including plans and actions that consider care as a strategic focus. Public institutions, such as municipalities/local councils, have a central role in the construction of a city that cares for everyone. In this sense, when we speak of care in the city, we think of infrastructure for daily life, which materializes in walkability and accessibility (ramps, sidewalks, inclusive signs and signals), safety (street lighting), atmosphere, less pollution, green spaces, access and proximity to health services, education, support for small local businesses, urban equipment that recognizes the needs for rest (pedestrian shelters), leisure and recreation,

among others. The Care Plan of Municipality B assumes the double challenge of making visible and recognizing the “ecology of care and knowledge” (Najmanovich, 2019) present in the territory: those networks, practices and knowledge of individual, family, community and state care, some of which dialogue, overlap and complement each other, as well as may also come into tension (Care Plan of Municipality B, 2021)³.

The care promoted and developed from local policies facilitates the deployment of dialogue on the common good, contributing to the development of experiences of collective cooperation, de-familiarizing and de-patriarchalizing the reproduction of life, and assuming the challenge of connecting care between people and nature. Feminist proposals for the city develop a set of variables that interact with each other and combine physical variables—such as public and relational space, urban equipment and services, mobility and housing—with two cross-cutting dimensions such as participation and security. The interconnection of these dimensions reorients urban planning and design to place people and their diversities at the center.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, it is worth suggesting some areas for further study.

- Articulating a care perspective in the fabric of life is a challenge for public policies that, in general, organize interventions, services and policies in separate sectors: “environment”, “gender”, “culture”, etc. Being able to generate cross-cutting and interconnected or ‘joined up’ local agendas is a crucial challenge for public policy-making and implies the development of new institutional capacities based on training for working in interdisciplinary and intercultural way.

³ Available at: <https://municipiob.montevideo.gub.uy/plan-de-cuidados-del-b>.

- The climate, civilization and care crises require rethinking strategies to strengthen communities from an integrated perspective that connects environmental sustainability and multispecies initiatives with care among people. Diverse social participation is a central axis of any community proposal, but in order to achieve a complex and articulated view, it also requires spaces for debate and training where diverse theoretical perspectives converge, such as those developed in feminisms, ecologies, queer approaches, popular education or anti-racist views, among other critical pedagogies.
- We need to assume an approach oriented towards strengthening community networks and collective action capable of confronting the privatization of social issues, the patriarchal allocation of care to women, and the absence of recognition of the eco-dependence of the material bases that sustain life. The aim of de-familiarizing and de-maternizing care is to make the sexual division of labor more visible and to generate state and collective responsibility for all care tasks.
- A feminist policy on care must start from some basic principles such as de-maternalization, de-feminization or de-heteronormalization of care by appealing to the cultural changes necessary for a redistribution of care.
- Promoting participatory and innovative urban design experiences capable of strengthening multifunctional meeting spaces for all ages, diversities and dissidences. Urban designs can contribute to making life in cities more livable, as proposed by feminist urbanism.
- Stimulating practices of reflection in urban environments, social and solidarity economies, agroecological consumption, collective consumption circuits, community gardens, barter fairs. Promoting initiatives that generate other forms of production and consumption is a path of experimentation that is crucial for the development of cultures of resistance. In the neighborhoods there are already very diverse practices on a

small scale that, when hierarchized, can constitute interesting alternative experiences.

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3. Incomplete Decalogue of debates on care. More than consensus in Latin America

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, Latin America and the Caribbean have produced an important body of theory and analysis on the processes of social reproduction. Central questions have included: how are individual and collective lives and social systems reproduced; what processes, at what cost and through which actors does it all take place? Feminisms have played a key role in these debates in general, and in a specific one related to them: care.

The analysis and politicization of care has made it possible to make advances in the knowledge of who cares, under what conditions they do so, with what individual and collective consequences, and to what extent it is necessary to modify the order of things related to the provision and receipt of care. The national and regional studies carried out have been important in this regard, despite their limitations¹.

¹ These include the scarcity or fragmentation of available statistics, the lack of comparable indicators in the evaluations of different countries, the very limited information on the coverage and quality of public policies and care services, and the lack of systematic and longitudinal evaluations.

Today we know that, worldwide and without exception, women spend more time than men in unpaid care work. We also know that, as a result, women spend just over a third of the time that men spend on paid work globally, although, if total work time (paid and unpaid) is calculated, the overall workload of women is greater, and even more so in the so-called “developing countries” (Charmes, 2019). We know, therefore, that the sexual division of care work is a key vector of inequality. And we know that care is inequitably distributed not only between genders but also between the state, the market, communities and families². Every year in Latin America, publications reveal studies that are consistent with what has been said above, demonstrating a great consensus in this regard.

However, there are issues and problem areas that remain open questions subject to dispute, and areas in need of further politicization. This is the subject of the following pages. Rather than synthesizing what we already know, the aim is to bring to the fore coordinates that are not yet tied together, unresolved problem areas, political approaches in tension, and areas in need of further reflection³.

These problems and open issues will show, first, the threads of care policies that need to be addressed and developed. And they will outline a roadmap—still incomplete—on content that should articulate policies and regulations, and link with other strategic debates on the subject.

² The first two transfer their responsibilities to the latter two, who remain overburdened.

³ The issues mentioned below are the result of the collective heritage built in the region on care, the right to care and care work. The identification of part of the issues analyzed has benefited from the Community of Analysis “Challenges and Perspectives of Care as a Right”, developed by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in co-leadership with the Global Care Alliance during 2022.

2. Monetized care?

Work is not just work that is paid for. Providing unpaid care is also work because it involves time, effort and resources. This idea, which has gained consensus, has also raised questions as to whether it is necessary to calculate the monetary value of unpaid work in order to make it visible, and whether the way to recognize this unpaid work is to assign it an income.

Certainly, the consideration of unpaid work as work has prompted its inclusion in national economic accounts and the calculation of the equivalent of its value with respect to the GDP of the countries. This is how it has been given monetary value and this has led to criticism: by giving it this value, is it not reproducing the logic that only makes visible that which has financial translatability?

Related to this is the question of whether one way to ensure autonomy for those who perform unpaid care work is to grant them a salary, and whether this would contribute to deactivating the sexual division of labor. There has been no agreement on this either.

For some feminisms, granting an income for this work would contribute to secluding women in the domestic sphere, leaving the sexual division of labor intact. Rather than that, the aim would be to create value for that work beyond that which is expressed in prices, income or wages. The solution should be, exclusively, the redistribution of care work, the expansion of social services and decent employment, the generation of diverse and eco-independent forms of coexistence.⁴

Other voices, however, have emphasized the need to think about how women can reappropriate the wealth created by their reproductive work and, from there, have discussed the demand for wages, income and, more recently, the need for a specific Care

⁴ For further analysis in this regard, see Davis (2004) for the 1970s, and for more contemporary reflections, see Júlia Martí Comas (2020).

Income⁵ (Barca *et al.*, 2020). This proposal argues that such a solution is a political operation that denaturalizes the “domestic destiny” of women: it is not a demand for income for women, but for household work, and should be understood as a complementary (and not alternative) demand to the demand for services and other resources, such as the demand for equal pay or better working conditions, for example. (Federici, 2021). The emphasis here is on the politicization of income reappropriation channels that do not reproduce welfare policies such as conditional vouchers, paid leave, childbirth benefits or pensions for “non-contributors” (Vega y Torres, 2022).

There has also been talk of a *feminist wage* that recognizes, in the dense weave of the popular economy, the plural tasks and jobs that are disconnected from the wage income but which benefit capital and are the basis of differential exploitation (Gago, 2017). That is, all the territorial, neighborhood, community, care contributions interwoven with assistance, care networks, canteens, self-defense, health promotion etc.

Therefore, the possibility of monetization, rent or salary, continues to constitute a strong debate that needs to be discussed in greater depth in order to gain consistency in the alternatives of political demands.

3. Care work without care workers?

We know that unpaid care work is work, and this is beginning to be recognized in some jurisdictions (Ecuador, Bolivia, Venezuela, etc.), national laws and in political language, although the question of whether they are workers remains a hazy issue. However, if unpaid female caregivers do not acquire worker status, they continue to be excluded from many of the rights that are still associated with employment (social security, pensions, leave, etc.).

⁵ The antecedent is the proposal for a Wage for Domestic Work, promoted by Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Silvia Federici, Judith Ramirez and Selma James.

For example, the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador (2008) recognizes Unpaid Domestic and Care Work (TDCNR, by its Spanish acronym) as a productive activity, and provides for the extension of general social security coverage to those who perform it, although the law does not classify them as workers. In addition, the Organic Law for Labor Justice and Recognition of Work in the Home (2015) establishes that in order to gain access to social security⁶ the person must perform “exclusively household care tasks without receiving any remuneration or economic compensation”, which limits their ability to receive self-employment income to supplement them and prevents them from participating in the labor markets, even partially, and acquiring workers’ rights in this way (Palacios, 2021).

The Political Constitution of Mexico City recognizes the right to care, but also does not speak of caregivers as workers (Villa, Trevilla & Quiroz, 2021). In the Dominican Republic, the national Constitution also recognizes “domestic work” as an economic activity that creates value, but no other legislation specifically recognizes it, and caregivers are not defined as workers, nor are there any policies to that effect (Gómez and Balbuena, 2021). More examples could be provided.

The non-consideration of those who engage in Unpaid Domestic and Care Work as workers continues to be a blind spot in societies such as those in Latin America—and others—where the labour paradigm (rights associated with the condition of employment) is highly regulatory. In the meantime, Unpaid Domestic and Care Work is a barrier to participation in labour markets.

In 2021, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) reported, for example, that around 70% of women in households with children under 15 years of age stated that they do not participate in the labour market due to family responsibilities. Lower-income households, individuals and women

⁶ Social security coverage does not include entitlement to health services, nor does it recognize work-related accidents or unemployment.

are the most affected. Gaps related to labour market insertion are aggravated when variables of gender, territory of residence, and ethnic and “racial” belonging are taken into account: women, people residing in rural and indigenous areas, and afro-descendants are more excluded (Torres, 2021).

In short, the fact that those who perform unpaid care work do not attain the status of workers is a key vector of inequality that limits their access to rights and their autonomy in various ways. This is, in fact, a Gordian knot that reveals a certain disconnect between analytical and political-normative advances.

4. Universal right to care for priority groups?

One of the issues that occupies a central place in the discussion on care today—and that is progressively reaching political and regulatory consensus—is the consideration of care as a right. To do so implies that “each autonomous subject, bearer of rights, can and must request the satisfaction of their care demands, regardless of their situation of vulnerability or dependence” (Pautassi, 2013: 113). That is, the right to care is integral and universal, for all people. One of the arguments in the defense of care as a right is that all people need care in order to live, at all times of life. The translation of the principle of universality into public policy, however, remains a challenge.

Care standards, policies and services continue to be organized, to a large extent, according to “priority groups”, mainly children, the elderly and people with disabilities. The existence of priority groups is argued in several ways: i) for these three conditions or moments of life, care needs increase, and ii) in terms of policy organization, it is necessary to work for specific, more urgent groups in the first instance, although this is not an exclusive path.

In practice, the logic of priority groups co-opts any possibility of institutional realization of universal care policies, which end up

being highly focused, displacing the needs for careful self-care that take place in other circumstances. At the same time, care for these priority groups tends to be disconnected, hence the demand for comprehensive systems that break this tension between universality and specific groups.

5. Universality of care and the intersectionality of dominations

Care work is poorly recognized and redistributed, as mentioned above, and this has more serious consequences for women, who are the main caregivers. But this general fact does not have the same implications for all. Class, “race”, ethnicity, age, place of origin, migratory status, moment in the life cycle and others, configure geometries of precariousness that need to be addressed in a differentiated manner.

For example, although women always do more unpaid care work, the amount of time spent differs according to the time of the life cycle, the presence of children in the household, income or their location. In households that are impoverished, rural, with racialized people, or with lower levels of formal educational instruction—in which there tends to be more presence of minors (ECLAC, 2019)—caregivers are more overburdened because the demands are greater and the possibilities of resolving them through the market are fewer. As a result, they have fewer possibilities for economic autonomy due to the impossibility of participating in labor markets.

On the other hand, single-parent households headed by women, which are on the rise, are more likely to be in poverty. Meanwhile, the number of women with no income of their own continues to be high, reaching almost one third of all women in the Latin America and Caribbean region (ECLAC, 2019).

In addition, caregiving responsibilities are intertwined with other processes, such as early marriages: the responsibilities as-

signed to adolescent girls with respect to household reproduction and motherhood prevent them from continuing their studies and earning their own income. The number of adolescent mothers is also much higher in lower income groups (ECLAC, 2019).

All of this is related to social markers of migratory status, area of residence and “race”/ethnicity. There is a shortage of statistics on racial self-identification for analyzing the specific situation of racialized groups. However, at least for some countries, the particular and more serious inequality that affects indigenous and Afro-descendant women, who receive less income regardless of their level of education, has been verified (ECLAC, 2019). Migrant women are especially excluded and exploited in and out of labor markets. And, in general, many informal labour markets or low-productivity sectors are feminized, and women from low income, racialized and migrant sectors are more present in them.

When care work is paid, the situation is no different. Although it is a feminized⁷ and precarious⁸ sector, there are clear markers of race, class and place of origin. In the case of the Unpaid Domestic and Care Work, this precariousness still has regulatory and institutional backing in some countries, as we shall see below. This sector concentrates the employment of indigenous and Afro-descendant women, who are in the majority or always have a high level of representation (ECLAC, 2021). For these workers, legal protection and social security coverage are very low (Coffey *et al.*, 2020). In Latin America, only 24% of paid domestic and care workers are affiliated with or contribute to social security systems, and in some countries this number is lower (ECLAC, 2021).

This whole situation presents the complex challenge of making the universal right to care (to care, to receive care and

⁷ It is estimated that 67 million people perform Unpaid Domestic and Care Work, of which 80% are women as a global average (Coffey *et al.*, 2020). In Latin America, the proportion of women doing so is much higher (Torres, 2021).

⁸ At least 25.8% of women employed in the Unpaid Domestic and Care Work sector live in households in poverty.

to self-care) compatible with the need for policies that act in a differentiated manner on the conditions of reproduction of multiple and intersecting inequalities.

6. Rules and guarantees of the right to care

An examination of care standards and programmes and services shows tensions of a different order.

Compared to other regions of the global South, Latin America has made significant progress in the regulatory field (Esquivel and Kaufmann, 2016) and today the changes that have crystallized and the processes underway to ensure others are evident⁹. In recent years there have also been changes in terms of public policies, laws and services. However, at least some of these laws and policies reproduce the unequal sexual division of labor, have a paternalistic or family emphasis, and are divorced from a comprehensive understanding of inequalities and their mechanisms of reproduction.

Torres (2021) counted nearly a hundred statutes (constitutional articles, laws, decrees) in twelve countries of the region related to care. Maternity and paternity leave for childbirth or during the first months have been expanded in time, care leave has been regulated, leave conditions have been modified, etc. However, at present, they still present important biases. Some of them are mentioned below.

Maternity and paternity leave times continue to be unequal, with exceptions such as Cuba and Chile¹⁰. And in a significant number of national cases, women's leave continues to be below the limit established by the International Labor Organization (ILO)¹¹.

⁹ See the ongoing processes in Chile, Paraguay, Peru, Dominican Republic, Mexico and others, in Torres (2021).

¹⁰ See Lupica (2016).

¹¹ In some cases, extensions are established in case of illness.

The vast majority of regulations related to employment and care benefit only those who work in formal labor markets, leaving out large groups that remain in the informal sector. These include domestic workers, family members of the employer, women working in family businesses, casual or seasonal workers, and agricultural workers (ILO/UNPD, 2013).

On the other hand, the laws associated with care and employment pay little or no attention to the post-breastfeeding period (they do so only in some cases and only for short periods), and there is a serious mismatch between paid employment schedules (even in the formal sector) and school schedules, which are always shorter, to the detriment of caregivers.

Similarly, regulatory frameworks often fail to consider the care needs of people other than minors, which is problematic because the number of services and programmes for the elderly or people with disabilities is very low, and because the demographic trend structured or expected in the region is that of a growing aging population, with a corresponding increase in the care needs of the elderly. Again, the result is the expulsion of women caregivers from labour markets.

Programmes and services, on the other hand, are fundamentally aimed at children (mostly at a preschool level), older adults, those with lower incomes or in poverty, and those with special abilities and needs. Although in some countries there has been progress, services and programs tend to lack coordination among themselves. This considerably limits their scope and leads to a targeting of services that tends to reproduce the logic of assistance.

Information on these programmes and services, and their quality and coverage, is scattered, scarce, incomplete and outdated. Nevertheless, it is possible to affirm that a significant part of them are aimed at care related to the first stages of life (with a low coverage, never exceeding 30% of potential demand) and are more present in urban areas. In the case of national programmes, they focus more on monetary support and target groups (families, the elderly or people

with functional dependency) identified as living in income poverty or considered vulnerable. Programmes and services for older adults have a much lower coverage, and the same is true for people with functional dependency. In the group of older adults, women are in a worse situation because, having participated less in the labour markets throughout their lives, they have less access to pensions or, when they do have them, they are more precarious.

It is therefore evident that, on one hand, there is a gap between regulatory progress and the production of wide-ranging policies and services and, on the other hand, restrictive approaches remain intact, even within the regulations, which hinder progress in guaranteeing the right to care. It is urgent to think of a better and more agile collection of proposals. Regional transitions towards proposals for comprehensive care systems—and Uruguay’s experience in this regard—could provide clues.

7. Care and other redistributive proposals

An additional point in this incomplete list of controversial issues and realities surrounding care is how policy proposals on care are (mis) connected to other redistributive proposals that focus on the issue of the economic autonomy of individuals, and women in particular. One example is the Universal Basic Income (UBI) or Minimum Citizen’s Income, which has gained an audience in Latin America.

Feminisms have polemicized about it, producing critiques and welcoming the proposal. Indeed, the UBI connects with feminist concerns: it interpellates issues related to economic justice and, along the lines of the first section of this text, it may politicize the need to recover resources for work developed to sustain individual and collective life. However, there is no agreement on this.

One area of feminisms argues that the UBI has no democratizing or gender-transformative capacity and that, rather, it would perpetuate the sexual division of labor and the unequal distribution

of care. Another view, on the contrary, reflects on its possibilities to combat gender inequalities by broadening the spheres of non-conditionality of reproductive work; it recognizes the virtue of this policy to disidentify work and pay, without renouncing income; it raises the need to complement the UBI with other social policies, and to strengthen the quantity and quality of public services; it identifies its capacity to stimulate socio-productive initiatives based on cooperation within and outside the market, and how it can fight for better working conditions (including those of domestic workers) and strengthen the collective energy of mobilization. The latter framework argues that the UBI could help to avoid the growing domestic indebtedness and to stop the patriarchal family perspective that many social policies, including care policies, have today¹².

In practice, the most important debates on care and UBI run in parallel, and rarely connect. There are certainly reasons for this beyond those mentioned above. For example, the UBI proposal does not have care at the center of its operations or its architecture: it proposes to establish an income amount for all people and it must always be higher than the poverty line, but the calculations of monetary poverty lines do not include care. Even if this decoupling were solved and care were taken into account in poverty calculations, the issue of how to make viable the appropriation of the wealth produced mainly by women through their Unpaid Domestic and Care Work would remain unresolved.

The solution may be to complement the UBI proposal with the Care Income proposal mentioned at the beginning. This would make the web of activities and subjects of exploitation (which are not only those who receive wages) more visible, would account for the real length of the working day (beyond the job), would bring to the forefront the gendered and racialized divisions among those who produce social wealth on a daily basis (Federici, 2013) and

¹² A detailed argument on feminisms and RBU is presented in Vega y Torres (2022).

would defend the universal right to existence, recognizing the inequality that existence embodies.

In any case, the possibility of thinking in an articulated way about the proposals on care with others that are making their way into the debates, would encourage new discussions and could give each of the programmes the possibility of attaining greater scope and a larger audience.

8. Autonomy and interdependence

Up to this point, we have discussed how the unrecognized, redistributed and unpaid work performed mainly by women is a barrier to their economic autonomy and how it limits their ability to earn their own income. In effect, the question of autonomy is key to politicizing care, while at the same time it needs to remain in dialogue with another strong idea that feminisms have placed in the political field: interdependence.

In order to be satisfied, the network of needs that structure daily life requires other people, institutions and groups. The self-sufficient and totally autonomous individual is a pernicious and politically self-serving fiction. Care verifies this interdependence. On this basis, the feminisms have asked themselves whether non-dependence is a value or whether, on the contrary, we need to build a framework in which interdependence is the key to political relations by valuing it (Torres, 2020). This allows us to return to the question of autonomy in another way: autonomy and interdependence maintain a fundamental relationship, they are co-constituted.

The framework for understanding “*cuidadanía*” [a fictitious word created from the union of two Spanish words, “*cuidados*” (care) and “*ciudadanía*” (citizenship)] (Rodríguez, 2010) attempts to move in this direction, making both values compatible¹³. In dialogue with

¹³ A reflection that converges with that of “*cuidadánías*” is that of Durán (2021) and his question “who is afraid of “*cuidatoriado*”?”

that conception of citizenship that projects the political existence of free people, without ties of domination, “*cuidanía*” certifies that citizens can only exist in relationship, linkage and networks; that their existence, individual and collective, implies care, and that this is a major subject of public affairs. The “*cuidanías*” speak of the public responsibility to universally ensure the right to existence and to diverse existences; of the commitment to ensure that no person is excluded, not because of the good will of any employer, company or male partner, but because it is institutionally assured; of the interdependence of rights and also of the duty to be active agents in the reciprocal assurance of the conditions of possibility of our lives.

Another possibility for the compatibilization of autonomy and interdependence are approaches to sustainability. They emphasize the need to analyze and politicize forms of cooperation and interdependence that go beyond the household and the family nucleus, and take place, for example, in community spaces that reveal collective capacities to meet immediate and local needs, as well as to demand from the State foresight and political decision-making with bottom-up participation (Vega, Martínez-Buján & Paredes, 2018). In addition, the sustainability perspective advocates the need to consider issues related to the preservation of nature, the environment and the necessary infrastructures (water, housing, etc.) where they are not guaranteed or are expropriated. And interdependence is not only between human beings but also with nature. For this reason, it is essential to continue to emphasize the structural register of social reproduction and care relations in eco-territorial dynamics.

However, autonomy and interdependence are not alternative or parallel approaches, although in many discussions of care they appear to be. Their linkages need to be consistently developed and expanded in practical policy.

9. International convention on care vs. applicability of existing standards

At this point, having clarified the scope of the discussion on care, its wider audience at present and the density of approaches that articulate the debates, is it feasible and necessary to move forward with a specific international convention on care? This is another open question.

As mentioned above, there has been an expansion of regulation around caregiving. In 2007, at the 10th Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean (Quito), Laura Pautassi prepared and presented an analysis of the presence—in international covenants and treaties or in the interpretative work of the committees of the main human rights covenants or other bodies of the system—of issues related to the right to care. Her main conclusion was that the right to care, either explicitly or implicitly, was enshrined in different instruments (Pautassi 2007).

In 2015, the same study was updated and it was found that, although there was no explicit consideration of care as a right, there was a profuse legislative recognition of tasks related to care. However, with the exception of the case of children, most laws were linked to policies to reconcile work and family responsibilities (Pautassi, 2018).

A 2021 report by FES-ILDIS analyzed 33 international instruments (agreements, reports or documents of organizations), from the period 1970–2021, to assess the presence of the concept of care, care tasks or similar. This review also noted that there has been a reference to the field of care since 1975 and reported that there is a remarkable variety in the use of concepts or terms related to care (domestic work, unpaid work, care work, household work, care provision, unpaid care, special care, preventive care, child care or care of relatives, among others). In this sense, the analysis observed a conceptual dispersion, though less visible more recently. It also noted bias at the level of content, including: i) insufficient attention

to the intersections between race, class, ethnicity, place of residence and age when regulating, analyzing or standardizing care in the international arena; ii) a weak development of a framework of interdependence between rights (care, health, education, social security, etc.), and iii) a pre-eminence of the labour paradigm over care (Martínez y Espinosa, 2021).

Is there therefore a need for an international standard, such as the Convention against Violence, to institutionalize international instruments with respect to the right to care? Some positions affirm that what is necessary is to take advantage of the existing regulatory arsenal and produce real change. Others argue that there is a the need for a specific international standard on the right to care that synthesizes the advances in the field, crystallizes accumulated social processes and advances a consistent political project in that order. It is thus another area of controversy.

Moving towards a specific international convention could be beneficial because litigation for the recognition of a right has indirect or symbolic effects: publicity, mobilization, political pressure, the interaction of collective forms of identity and the elaboration of unifying categories. Moreover, this can contribute to the real recognition of the right to care and to its reinforced legal mobilization, in the same way as what has happened with the right to abortion, to a life free of violence, etc. But the formal recognition of a right, in this case to care, does not necessarily generate institutional transformations. Rather, the right can be a mechanism for fossilizing social action from below. It remains an open question.

10. Sexual diversities and their care

Up to this point, fields of tension and open questions about care have been mentioned. But there are also absences in debates. One that is key concerns the reflection of the connection between care and the LGTBIQ+ community.

The largest amount of analysis of this area concerns care in health systems¹⁴. These have shown that the processes of health-illness, care and attention are totally conditioned by the assemblages of the different vectors of inequality, including, in a very special way, the one articulated around gender identities and sexual orientations. Health institutions and the care they provide reinforce ironclad barriers for LGTBIQ+ people, while at the same time, the studies have revealed the former's lack of knowledge of their needs, demands and resources, and the notions of gender that structure the institutions. Among these barriers is the still persistent pathologization of gender identities and non-heteronormative sexual orientations, the lack of problematization of the frameworks of health practices and rights, the obligation to respond to a legal identity different from the self-perceived one, or to be interned in wards of a different gender. All this ensures physical and psychological dangers that are omitted from the conversation about care in the health care system and, also, in the medical accompaniment in the processes of physical transition (Zaldúa *et al.*, 2015). In general, we know from studies in some countries in the region (Jaime, 2013) the serious problems of LGTBIQ+ people's access to health services, despite the existence of laws, statutes and jurisprudence regarding their rights.

LGBTIQ+ elderly people and their care in institutional settings have also been analyzed, although very occasionally, in Latin America. Studies show that, in older people in that community, there is an increased risk of mental distress, poor general health and disabilities, as well as habits detrimental to overall health that lead to an earlier stay in long-stay facilities. Add to that ageism and sexual stigmatization, which can worsen the morbidity and mortality burden of an older member of the LGBTQ+ community compared to their heterosexual counterparts. The need

¹⁴ Even in the field of health studies, those that consider the situation of LGTBIQ+ people have been most notably concerned with HIV/AIDS behavior.

for specialized training of direct institutional caregivers is as mandatory as it is absent from the policy discussion on caregiving in the region.

Some steps are beginning to be taken in this direction, such as the implementation in Argentina, in 2022, of a course for caregivers that offers more job opportunities for trans people and contributes to thinking about old age from and for sexual diversities (Present 2022). The question of how to organize care for LGBTIQ+ people needs to gain presence in relation to old age, but also to all stages of life, and continues to be a challenge.

11. Caregiving: a gender perspective vs. religious neoconservatism

Finally, an obstacle to the current politicization of care can be linked to the co-optation and instrumentalization of the need for the right to care by neoconservative political agendas that undermine, and directly prevent, the democratization of the sexual division of labor. This is not entirely new.

A major barrier in terms of care standards, programmes and services in the region is that they are not always based on—nor do they always include—a gender perspective. The persistence of welfarist approaches is a fact and, with them, the reproduction of maternalist and conservative family principles, where the sexual division of labour remains intact or little questioned. All this has been and continues to be debated and disputed from different fronts. However, the increased deployment of religious conservatism today is a more present part of the picture, providing a warning that needs to be taken into account.

Since the 4th United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing, the Holy See began to warn about the need to participate more aggressively in the political discussion on issues of gender and sexuality. On this issue, the reaffirmation of the ‘Maria’ notion

of the sacrifice of women was central to the Letter to Women (1995) sent from the Vatican in the context of the Conference debates.

The neoconservative programme is focused on the re-traditionalization of the family. It is a heterosexual, nuclear family, with a male head, reproducing the male-provider/woman-caretaker order. The possibility of any transformation of this family is presented as a sin to be feared.

The family is, in fact, an axis around which the anti-gender, anti-feminist policy orbits. The slogans of “Less State and More Family” or “Don’t Mess with my Children”, the struggles against gender ideology or the deployment of the “cultural battle” against feminisms and democratizing actors, are gaining more and more presence. The neoconservatives in Latin America have managed to stop laws, lower-level regulations and sex education policies in all countries, and they have organized marches and carried out very strong political lobbying. In their advocacy work, they claim that the family—traditional, heterosexual, patriarchal—is the nucleus of society and that it is necessary to respect “the original design”. One of the most important spaces for their action, in fact, is the Ibero-American Congress for Life and Family, which brings together Christian politicians and activists who promote this agenda, challenge rights-related recommendations in international organizations and deploy a strong influence at national and subnational levels (Torres, 2020).

During the pandemic the programme of re-traditionalization of families played an important role. Isolation served to indoctrinate traditional gender roles and the value of the “original family” through (technologized) cults and pamphlets teaching women to be good wives and homemakers. In an early publication called “Pandemonium,” Germany’s Birgit Kelle stated that “women are at home right now and therefore out of control, and perhaps that is the best news of the coronavirus pandemic” and that what the feminist movement calls the “horrible re-traditionalization” is their greatest fear. “A mother is and will continue to be the biggest problem of the

feminist movement,” she concludes (Beltramo and Polo, 2020). Diplomas in “family counseling”, action in social networks and deployment of the programme of affirmation of traditional gender roles in cults are part of the scenario. The objective is to privatize the domestic space and locate it away from politics. In this way, the subordination and dependence that only politics can dispute is naturalized. The struggle for the politicization of care has done just the opposite. In this context, this continues to be a central debate.

12. Final notes

- The issues noted refer to fields of polemics about care. They are not the only ones, but rather a narrow selection, but they serve to highlight pending issues, to transcend the consensus achieved within feminisms—and in the political field more generally with respect to care—to present some of the solutions to its unequal distribution.
- The main point outlined in the text is that of controversial issues related to distributive justice and, also, to the recognition of caregivers, care work and the right to care.
- As mentioned above, this route leads to the problematization of issues related to the monetization of care; the consequences of defining the provision of care as work and not defining those who perform it in an unpaid manner as workers; the universality of the right to care and the need for intersectional policies, public policies and care services; the relationship between autonomy and interdependence; debates on other redistributive proposals with consequences for the social organization of care; the international standard of care; care guarantees respecting sexual and gender diversity, and the democratization of care in a context of neoconservative policy outflow.
- The overall picture shows that it is imperative to identify open questions about care and the sexual division of labor and place

them at the center of our discussions. More in-depth and disruptive debates are needed that build on and, above all, transcend our consensuses.

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4. Ecofeminism in Brazil: Lessons Learned for Future Research

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What can an ecofeminist perspective contribute to the study of reality? Can it expose circumstances different from those revealed by a gender lens alone? For example, are the inequalities women experience the same in the global North and in the global South? What about in rural and urban areas? Do aspects such as race or ethnicity have an influence? Closely connected to the spirit of intersectional approaches, and especially interested in highlighting the complexity of reality and the normally combined (and almost never static) presence of discrimination, ecofeminist analysis can be of great use in detecting biases and blind spots, not only in our research but also in our international cooperation, development and public policy interventions. In this chapter the reader will find an abridged explanation of ecofeminism, a critical review of its school of thought and an example of this perspective applied to Brazil, followed by some final recommendations for future research.

2. Feminism(s) and ecofeminism(s)

Alicia Puleo, a recognized Argentine-born feminist philosopher known for the development of ecofeminist thinking, once stated that there are practically as many ecofeminisms as ecofeminists. If this were the case, it would substantially compromise the goal of this analysis since the term's roots would, in effect, prevent any attempt at generalization.

Nevertheless, it seems clear that what Puleo was trying to highlight, in a somewhat provocative way, is that, as happens with feminism, it is expected that plurality should be included in ecofeminism, and consequently, ecofeminisms.

But let me take a step back. What is ecofeminism? A simple and economical definition, one on which all ecofeminists could agree, would say something like this: ecofeminism is a school of thought and a movement where feminism and ecology converge. To be fair, we should give credit to feminism more than ecology for the initiative of this fertile encounter. And, given this clarification, it goes without saying that we should immediately warn that the ecological dimension within feminisms is still somewhat a minority. For this reason, it is important to attempt to elucidate the relatively low level of success that ecofeminism seems to have gained among feminists.

First, there is no one homogeneous and monolithic ecofeminism. Second, it is useful to remember that ecofeminism tends to identify itself with the first ecofeminist manifestations of Anglo-Saxon origin. For this reason, given the plurality and the evolution of its different positionings, various criteria have been deployed for the task of classifying and depicting its trends.¹

¹ See Mellor (1997) and Puleo (2016).

3. Essentialist and constructivist ecofeminism

Bearing in mind the generalist and educational aims of this brief, I organize the different eco-feminist proposals into two groups: essentialist ecofeminism and constructivist ecofeminism. In case of doubt, I assume that there is a broad palette of greys between each stance and, that with this dichotomy, I am forcing the panorama by assuming the validity of the inclusion of all proposals into one of these two boxes. My intention is to present a historical photograph in a very schematic way, and to clearly set out the mistrust that the ecofeminist project arouses, above all among different feminisms.

Essentialist ecofeminism is mainly responsible for the controversies alluded to above because it is often recognized by its tendency to assume an innate biological connection between women and nature. A seminal article by Sherry Ortner (1974) contributed to establishing the parameters of the debate when she asked, “is female to male as nature is to culture?” In response, a variety of authors searched for foundations for building a new relationship with reproduction, maternity and childcare, all traditionally excluded and subordinated by hegemonic patriarchal categories such as production, reason, individualism and self-sufficiency. The results favoured an exclusively women’s viewpoint that was especially suitable for setting in motion a sustainable life respectful of other beings, human and non-human.

However, several ecofeminists have identified and thoroughly analysed the weaknesses involved in this proposal. For example, essentialist ecofeminism presumes a singular female subject without establishing differences due to class, race, ethnicity, ability or age (Agarwal 1992). Furthermore, its theories—above all, those from the global North—tend to consider patriarchal and anthropocentric domination in strictly ideological terms, without analysing the influence of the material conditions in which they are (re)produced (Agarwal 1992). Finally, its conceptual framework looking at sex, nature and culture suffers from timeworn historical

and cultural analysis which leads people, often unintentionally, to make the mistake of slipping into anachronistic and ethnocentric attitudes (Merchant 1980; Moore 1988).

These and other criticisms have resulted in many ecofeminists, and some feminists, feeling uncomfortable with the label ecofeminist. Consequently, many have adopted other labels to differentiate themselves, such as ecological feminists or feminist environmentalists, to mention only two. In fact, the latter, as well as some who continue to call themselves ecofeminists, tend to identify themselves instead as constructivists. Thus, they reject any special connection between women and nature and tend to position themselves as critics in debates that attempt to identify links based on sexual difference. This is not at odds with the fact that, occasionally, they are prepared to accept that *some* women, conditioned by their material and historic relationships, may find themselves in a better position (although never biologically) to highlight the need to defend a more just, egalitarian and sustainable model.

One of the flaws of essentialist ecofeminism, just as with other forms of essentialist feminism, is that although it is right to warn against not critiquing liberal (read, masculine) universalism—which Fox Keller illustrates in her famous reproach of “add women and stir”—it also often tries to achieve too much by recovering and valuing everything the patriarchal order has excluded or rejected.² In sum, it subverts and romanticizes the model instead of replacing it, and it therefore continues to be trapped within the patriarchal order. This is what Laura Llevadot very lucidly warns readers about in her book, *My Wound Existed Before I Did*, where she asks:

What femininity are we appealing to when we know that it has always been a masculinist construction? The danger of essentialism festers everywhere. Maternity, clitoris, care. ... Where do we begin to subvert it? Any positive definition of femininity ends up reproducing the violence it is battling against (Llevadot 2022:70–71).

² See Plumwood (1993).

4. Ecofeminist theorists and grassroots movements

Another aspect important to remember is that ecofeminism does not only include the body of thought produced by ecofeminist authors, but also that of grassroots women's movements that can be, but do not necessarily have to be, categorized as such.³ And this division is revealing in various ways, since it defines to a great extent the manner, approach and level of commitment.⁴

Theoretical ecofeminism emerged in the mid-1970s coinciding with the unfolding of third-wave feminism and green and peace movements. In particular, grassroots ecofeminist movements around the world intensified with the advent of neoliberal globalization. Theoretical ecofeminism, when utilized in perspectives deriving from the global North, is often influenced by a new theoretical and political empathy documenting a vision of a future free from all andro-and-anthropocentric domination.⁵ By contrast, theoretical ecofeminism in the global South is most often influenced by the destruction of their way of life and how this affects them due to their gender.⁶ As the Brazilian theologian and ecofeminist Ivone Gebara has noted, and which I explore below in more detail, “those who do not live in touch with the land, who hardly see the seasons because they spend their time in their offices and universities, don't usually understand.” This helps us discern, for example, why theoretical ecofeminism has been particularly interested in broadening its horizons and how feminism without ecology would fall short of being unsustainable, while grassroots ecofeminism tends to focus on the intersection of ecology and feminism and why environmental change is affecting women and

³ Concerning this distinction, the observations of de Silva (2016) are interesting, even though they transcend the field of ecofeminism.

⁴ This is what Svampa has wisely called a “variable geometric space” (2021).

⁵ See Haraway (2016).

⁶ It is important to highlight the role of Shiva (1998) for her pioneering work, often labelled as “ecofeminism from the South”.

men differently (CEPAL 2012). In the case of the former, feminism moves closer to ecology; in the case of the latter, ecology moves toward feminism.

5. Ecofeminism in Brazil

Although it is possible to find early examples of theoretical ecofeminists in Brazil (Darcy de Oliveira 1991), there is one name that stands out from the rest: Ivone Gebara. She initially attracted attention as a Christian theologian who openly defended feminist viewpoints, but also because in her work we find a constructivist approach concerned with intersectionality and a clear biocentric sensibility. The objectives of her work are easily discernible as the “deconstruction of the patriarchal content of religion” (Gebara 2000:139). In the late 1990s her work expanded to include the search for a new cultural conscience. According to Gebara, this new cultural conscience would replace entrenched values, for example, hierarchies and competitiveness, with others, such as interdependence and solidarity, to establish conditions compatible with a “life story” in which humans are inexorably embedded with other living beings (Gebara 2000:139).

It is possible to venture that there may be scepticism, in part legitimate, among readers: Theology and ecofeminism? In effect, this relationship, against all odds, is entirely relevant, and even more so if we consider the women behind the grassroots movements in Brazil (Gebara 2000:36). If religion is the authority on which all beliefs, traditions and customs are based, then it is both logical and to be expected that it should also be the place where dialogue and critical reflection be proposed.⁷ It would be useless and absurd to seek any type of social mobilization invoking complexity and chaos

⁷ This and other interesting facts were found in a perception survey carried out by Oxfam Brazil (2022).

theories.⁸ In fact, over the past three decades, Gebara has bravely and tenaciously battled to detach herself from any proselytizing dogmatism in her work.

To neutralize possible suspicion, it might be advisable to bring into the picture some interdisciplinary studies that further explore what I highlight here. For example, Emma Siliprandi, agronomist and researcher at the State University of Campinas, observes in her study based on testimonies from women peasant farmers, *Mulheres e agroecologia* (Women and Agroecology), how

practically all the protagonists in this book began by participating in groups linked to Liberation Theology. The church groups functioned as a bridge, a preparatory school for participation in other movements, such as trade unions, those struggling for land and political movements (Siliprandi 2015a:186).

Similarly, human geographer Laura de Biase, a researcher at the University of Sao Paulo, observes the following after studying women leadership in a Quilombola (Afro-Brazilian) community in Sao Paulo:

The catholic church action groups in rural communities are the spaces for female protagonists. Traditionally men in the community have sought support mainly within trade unions, while women have worked together mainly through the church (Biase 2018:220).

As we can see, these passages mutually complement and reinforce each other. In Brazil, and especially in rural communities, religion

⁸ This is the proposal, for example, from the US academic Merchant (2003), probably having in mind her university audience. On various occasions Puleo has noted that the theoretical strength of this type of ecofeminism results in paying the high price of practical weakness. While recognizing the relevance of this observation, I also believe that the other extreme, the “mystique”, also gives rise to other problems. Merchant (1995:XXI-II) has also deliberated on this point.

and the church have served as the means and spaces through which women debate and become organized⁹.

However, there are two pending questions: Do women in the global South mobilize from an ecofeminist perspective? If yes, how do they adhere to its principles? Also, significant coincidences appear on this point that are repeated in testimonies of women leaders as well as in the assessment of professionals. Influenced by the important work of the anthropologist Maria Emilia Pacheco¹⁰, Sarah Luiza de Souza Moreira, Ana Paula Ferreira and Siliprandi all identify the heart of the question in the benevolent and pleasant notion that even today continues to conjure the image of the rural family in the most diverse range of auditoria. Leaving shared locations and idealizations aside, as these researchers repeatedly insist, is how

The idea of a single-family structure is reinforced—heterosexual, with a father, mother and children—in which the main authority of the father over the mother is normalised, establishing a traditional model of the family with a man who is the provider and a woman who is the carer, where women’s production is always considered ‘complementary’ and of less importance (De Souza et al. 2018:66).

This is a family model where women’s work is rendered invisible and unequal gender roles are justified. This perception has spread unchallenged into assistance programmes and many public policies in Brazil and elsewhere, thus privileging the domestic unit of production—the family—above the needs of individual family members. However, incisive and pertinent critiques find that it is not sufficient to design and implement a new model of production

⁹ The journalist Eliane Brum (2018) is a courageous campaigner who advocates against systematic injustices in Brazil, and has documented examples in several of her articles, for example, in “We just need to tell the Pope”, where she recounts the protagonist role of nuns in the Amazon.

¹⁰ There is an interesting interview that summarizes her vision and work in Pacheco (2005).

and consumption, for example, aspiring to food sovereignty instead of food security, without also questioning the lack of equity and the tensions that exist within the family dynamics (Silipandri 2015b:288).

In sum, we can glean some of the elements needed to understand why Gebara's deconstruction of the patriarchal content of religion is aligned with the task that Silipandri calls for in her work: The deconstruction of the myth of the family. In effect, despite best intentions, there is still a blind spot in the study of reality and in the political measures created to improve it and make it more just (Kabeer 2006). In Brazil, as well as in the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean, the work of weakening the inextricable link that unites patriarchy, religion and the family is still ongoing.

In fact, Silipandri has noted herself that one of the most difficult issues is precisely the deconstruction of the myth of the family as a harmonious group and one that is based on all its members fulfilling complementary roles (2015b:284). Here, religion, the main vehicle for transmitting and reproducing this model, is encouraging and holding within its core attempts at resistance by women. It is precisely they who are highlighting how the laudable impetus inspiring many ecological projects in rural areas, such as the transition of agro-economics to agroecology, is falling short when it does not incorporate a feminist perspective. By not doing so, the roles conventionally adopted by men and women, with the consequent sexual division of labour, for example, productive versus reproductive work¹¹ or men and women's varied interactions with natural resources in terms of access, ownership, voice and agency, knowledge and funding (PNUMA 2020), remain intact. Consequently, the intersection with feminism broadly and ecofeminism more specifically is more justified now than ever (Arana 2020).

¹¹ A question posed half a century ago by Boserup (1970), although without much success or influence over governmental or non-governmental agendas.

Conclusion

The case of Brazil, due to its scale and complexity, can serve as a paradigm example for the rest of the region. Brazil, with a vast expanse of rural areas and a population of great ethnic diversity, including Brown, white, Afro-descendant, Indigenous and Asian, to mention but a few, enables us to distil some key lessons for improving research processes and methodologies when it comes to ecofeminism. In this sense, research that incorporates an ecofeminist lens should:

- Assess epistemologically which strain of ecofeminism is more productive for the analysis of the situation. The image of the universal woman, or even at times the tokenism of including the voice of a woman from the global South, can contribute in turn to obscuring discriminations and/or differences.
- Include the diversity of women's voices to achieve a greater understanding of the contextual complexities and concrete nature of discrimination and inequality that they experience. To achieve this, researchers should only reflectively enter women's spaces of agency and empowerment as a guest when invited, and actively seek to create the conditions necessary for the most invisible and marginalized women to feel safe to recount their experiences and share their ideas.
- Deepen the analysis beyond the domestic unit of production, that is, beyond the family, in order to gain valuable disaggregated information about the individuals who constitute the family, and how they are affected by gender to different degrees.
- Question the presumed neutrality of scientific taxonomies and reveal the cultural footprints that create them, keeping in mind the biases in our assessments, as well as thinking about possible alternatives that may be more effective and just. And, in addition to these measures, reassess core political concepts such as progress and development.

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5. Socialization among women: the mandates of femininity and feminist policy proposals

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1. Introduction

The building of connections between women has been reflected upon in gender studies, gaining relevance for feminisms by unveiling the patriarchal thought embedded in such connections and their influence of women organising for political action (Librería de Mujeres de Milán, 1991: 9). These discussions have contributed to the study of how the social order that places women in positions of subordination is also reproduced in the relationships between women. While these discussions have generated tensions within feminisms, they have also pointed to the importance of continuing the process of deconstruction in order to strengthen women's political action as a collective. The latter is particularly relevant at a time when, although feminisms have gained visibility and presence at the local and global level, this achievement coexists with the return of ultra-right parties in the public arena (Monestier, 2021) and with the mass dissemination of anti-rights discourses. This is not a minor matter if we consider that in these contexts historically discriminated groups, such as women, are the first to experience a

setback in terms of rights and that, in Latin America, feminists are often persecuted and intimidated by the State (Carvajal, 2021).

The cultural dynamics of femininity produce diverse strategies that affect the socialization of women and, consequently, their possibilities for organization and influence in the public sphere. This dynamic is expressed in the mandate of femininity, which is framed in gender understood as a “(...) system of social organization that systematically produces relations of hierarchy and subordination between men and women in which all dimensions of human life converge” (Buquet *et al.*, 2016: 29). Gender legitimizes and constructs social relations, as well as helping us understand the particular and contextual ways in which politics and gender are mutually constructed.

Gender operates under a logic of normalized cultural prescriptions about what is “proper” for women and men (Lamas, 2007: 312). In turn, it participates in the production of senses and meanings that guarantee the reproduction of its own logic, that is, of its norms, behaviors and constraints (Lamas, 2007: 315). Through symbolic violence¹, the cultural logic of gender normalizes the place of women in the domestic sphere, distances them from the public sphere, scarcely differentiates them from each other (Amorós, 2007), drives them to abnegation (denial of themselves) and to not consider themselves as autonomous and capable subjects (Ferreira Beltrán, 2015: 5). All of the above are conditions that hinder the achievement of goals, the development of the different capacities that each woman has and the production of female alliances that could move into to the public sphere.

Given the above, the present text is structured into three moments. First, I present three strategies of socialization among women, highlighting the reproduction of femininity mandates and their relationship with women’s political action. Subsequently, I an-

¹ This is the violence that dominated people exercise against themselves unconsciously, with their consent and against their interests (Bourdieu, 2013), and that allows the effective reproduction and maintenance of cultural mandates of gender.

alyze the political proposals of sorority and *affidamento* within the framework of these strategies. Finally, I present some conclusions highlighting the importance of recognizing and capitalizing on the differences between women understood as opportunities for the exchange of knowledge and capabilities.

2. Mandates of femininity and socialization strategies among women

The use of strategies by oppressed groups is the result of a cultural fabric that produces certain behaviors and subjectivities, which do not always transcend oppression but, on the contrary, reproduce it. As far as women are concerned, the mandates of femininity generate normative models of how they should relate to themselves and to others. Based on these models, socialization strategies are produced with the aim of reproducing the gender order and, therefore, the persistence of women's subordinate position in the social fabric. For the purposes of this reflection, I refer to three of these strategies and then discuss them in connection with the feminist political proposals of sorority and *affidamento*.

2.1. The logic of women as identical

The feminist movement “(...) has reconceptualized women to understand that we are all women and that the benefit and/or affront for one is for all” (Sánchez, 2006: 2-3). This pretense of unity has helped to consolidate the movement inwardly, but it has also projected a kind of uniqueness that reproduces a logic of women as identical that prevents the explicit acceptance of conflicts and difference. This represents an obstacle for women to emerge as full political subjects (Lamas, 2015b), since “power can only be exercised as an indirect, oblique and occasional influence, as a homogenous group, lacking any virtue of synthesis and any enhanced effect” (Amorós, 2007: 63).

In her reflection on the political subject of feminism, Butler (2007) problematizes the subject “woman” and questions whether there is a common element that can standardize all women beyond their oppression and without falling into essentialisms. She returns to the question of the production and reproduction of gender mandates to argue that, when the rights of groups are promoted as homogeneous agglomerates, there is a risk of reinscribing the same structures of male domination that feminism opposes.

Amorós (2007) conceptualizes this idea of women’s unity and identity under the concept of the “logic of the identical”, which seeks the existence of horizontal relationship dynamics between women that are alien to any form of hierarchy. Amorós argues that the elimination of all types of hierarchies, taken to the extreme of converting one woman and another into a fusion, results in women becoming replaceable by those who fulfill the cultural dynamics of femininity: women are the same, and are defined by their function and gender role (mothers, wives, daughters) in the private sphere, making this a space where it is not possible to discern difference among women (Lamas, 2015a). A failure to discern difference functions as an exogenous limitation of women to the private space, a space where power is limited, and it operates also as a limitation within the group, since women themselves hinder attitudes or actions of discernment or meaning among themselves. Attitudes of complacency and unconditionality cover up the failure to recognize difference, which in the long run produces resentment and feeds their social weakness (Lamas, 2015a).

The strategy of mutual identification derives from the need for emotional amalgamation, which in turn creates identity boundaries (Birgin, 1997) that hinder joint action. Identity boundaries cause many feminist groups to end up becoming “suffocating ghettos” in which complacency prevents criticism and political development (Lamas, 2015b). The excessive recognition of oneself in the other socially and politically weakens women, since “the goal of any social movement is to reach areas of agreement,

to advance in the construction of specific coalitions”, while the dynamics of creating identity boundaries hinder such processes by creating confrontations for the mere fact of belonging to different groups, avoiding constructive dialogues based on multiple areas of political common ground (Lamas, 2015a: 284–285).

Another strategy is the symbolic denial or fictitious concealment of the power relationship. Denial is a way of reinforcing the effect of ignorance and is, therefore, a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1995). The fictitious concealment of power does not prevent the existence of hierarchies, but it does prevent their recognition. According to the mandates of femininity, relationships of mutual support are admitted among women, but they do not anticipate relationships of any value, which makes it difficult to grant each other recognition of any value or superiority. Even if women are considered equal in every sense, differences of another order persist, such as talent, creativity and effort, which make some stand out above others, although the same failure to discern difference does not allow them to be expressed or sanctioned if they are manifested (the Women’s Library of Milán, 1991).

Under this logic, only unconditional support among women at the same hierarchical level is positively valued, but no recognition is given to a woman standing out from the group, even causing resentment, disputes and envy when this occurs (Amorós, 2007).

2.2. The tyranny of the lack of structures

Various feminist groups adopted the model of “small self-consciousness groups”² that emerged in the United States during the 1970s as a form of organization that broke the vertical and hierarchical androcentric model (Freeman, 1999). These groups served to give

² These groups functioned as meeting places for women whose motto “the personal is political” allowed a space for introspection and self-analysis, and they set in motion a highly powerful process of collective legitimization of female subjectivity. (Acevedo *et al.*, 1977).

recognition and value to the female experience. They also encouraged mutual observation and listening to experiences considered identical, yet they were unable to locate themselves in the “doing”. In Freeman’s (1999) view, anyone who tries to organize something without structure is only clouded “by a smokescreen”, for there is always a how—however informal—in the way power is exercised.

Taken to the extreme, the idea of eliminating hierarchies of equality produces the illusion of union that leads to the logic of all being identical. Correspondingly, women develop a logic of love and equality that prevents them from accepting conflicts and differences in order to preserve the illusion of identity (Birgin, 1997). When the organization or group makes its identity the main reason for staying together, rather than the pursuit of a goal, members invest energy in controlling others so that they do not differentiate themselves from the rest (Freeman, 1999).

The activities that are developed under the lack of awareness of power structures are limited and amount to activities that can be developed by small homogeneous groups that do not have a greater division of labor. Other negative consequences of the informal structures are that someone is only listened to because she is liked and not because she says meaningful things, and that they do not oblige the people who make up the group to answer to the group, since the power they exercise was not given to them in a strict sense (Freeman, 1999).

The lack of institutionalization leads to political inefficiencies and discriminatory behavior against those who do not or cannot adhere to the group. A power game is produced that combines compliance and confrontation, submission and rebellion, and where the mandates of femininity drive a subtle but destructive dynamic among women, different from the open and frank competition promoted by male socialization (Lamas, 2015a: 17). The power that arises from an informal structure is usually defended by those women who have the most power, whether or not they are aware of it. The rules about how decisions are made are known to only a few,

and awareness that a power relationship exists is limited to those who know the rules.

Those who belong to this type of group rarely stay long enough to operate effectively and have a significant impact on the public sphere (Freeman, 1999). In addition, passive-aggressive behaviors emerge when the horizontality closely related to a failure to discern difference is broken, and frustration arises when other women ascend to positions and roles that others long for. Passive-aggressive behaviour is, for example, unacknowledged rivalry that is expressed in a covert manner (Freeman, 1999). For the feminist movement, this type of dynamic hinders national coordination, in addition to making efforts to act repetitive and competitive. Faced with these scenarios, Dejours (2015) proposes the structuring and clear, explicit and democratic definition of rules within the group.

2.3 *The tricks of the weak*

The third strategy is the trick of the weak (Ludmer, 1984). The trick emerges as a form of resistance to power and consists in the fact that, from the assigned and accepted place of subordination, the meaning of that place and the very meaning of what is established in it is changed (Ludmer, 1984). This allows anyone, the weak in particular—Ludmer takes women as the paradigm of the weak—to do politics or science from the place where power has placed them. The weak will always have a private place and, in this privacy, they will be sovereign. Power can prevent them from certain activities in the public space, but they can always act with rebellion in private.

Like the aforementioned strategy, the tricks of the weak ratify the patriarchal logic of relations between women, resulting in, for example, their weakening as a collective and as political subjects. According to Ludmer (1984), the strategies (tricks) developed by subordinates are threefold and interconnected. In the first place, the *separation of the fields of knowledge and of speech* or saying implies that one does not know how to speak in the face of

authority, which implies precisely the recognition of its superiority. Ignorance is a social relation transferred to discourse: one does not know what to say in a subaltern position. One example of these strategies is modesty, whereby women overemphasize the qualities of the other, considering her so unattainable that it is impossible to engage in a dialogue between peers. Hand in hand with this trick, the *restructuring of the field of knowledge* consists in knowing what is not said and not saying what is known. Knowing and saying constitute opposing fields for a woman, since doing both simultaneously produces resistance and punishment. The trick of the weak that separates the field of saying—the law of the other—from the field of knowledge—one’s own law—combines submission and acceptance of the place assigned by the other based on strategies of antagonism, confrontation, withdrawal and collaboration (Ludmer, 1984: 50). As a result, relationships marked by silence are established in the face of the “imposing” nature of the other. Needless to say, these relationships of silence are a breeding ground for misunderstandings, rumours and difficulties in expressing disagreements. This is a type of submission in the face of hierarchy because hierarchy is understood from the male view of control and abuse. In response, antagonisms and hidden aggressions are developed in accordance with the femininity mandate: direct confrontation is prevented and/or sanctioned (Lamas, 2015a: 52), but silence, an attribute linked to passivity and femininity, is rewarded.

The result of the above is a *reorganization of space*, which considers that it is always possible to take over a space from which to practice what is prohibited for others (Ludmer, 1984). One example is known as the “queen bee”: women in leadership positions are asked by other women to support them in order to receive the same benefits that the “queen bee” receives. However, this demand is accompanied by contradictory requests: if the woman in question fails to comply with the demand, she is seen as selfish or treacherous;

but, if she needs to implement masculine tactics (since the system imposes it on her) in order to comply, she is judged negatively. Instead of the system as such being challenged, the “queen bee” is seen as an obstacle to the progress of other women. The position of the woman making the demands becomes a position of power.

As we can see, silence and submission operate as mechanisms that lead to hidden forms of competition that reproduce the *status quo* and male hegemony (Mavin, William and Grandy, 2014: 236). Women working in subordinate positions, for example, respond to women’s leadership with micromanipulation strategies that may hinder, stall, delay and obstruct performance without jeopardizing their job, but risking that of their leaders and compromising overall achievements.

Likewise, emotions such as anger lack acceptable cultural channels to be expressed by women, since it is an emotion contrary to femininity; what can happen is that it is manifested in a “bad way”, provoking the anger of other women (Lamas, 2015a: 54–57). The meanings associated with the feminine and the masculine, and people’s internalization of them, contribute to the disapproval of anger in women, producing social sanctions and an unequal distribution of power in the emotional sphere (Hochschild, 1975).

3. Of sisterhood and *affidamento*: socialization among women and feminist political proposals

I think that sisterhood does not exist; it is a desire. Every time it is summoned it must be constructed. I believe that the collective construction of sisterhood as a condition or situation is a desire and demand of gender subjectivity. But what is sisterhood? A pact between sisters? A pact between equals? Between subordinates? A pact based on submission? A sisterhood of women? We know that men are not brothers, they are partners and combatants in a

struggle, they are accomplices. This is the male pact of patriarchy. It is the pact of those who dominate and those who have the social legitimacy to exercise power and violence. But how do we explain these pacts between women? Do they exist? And if so, how do they operate at the political level?

Many feminists want all women to constitute a harmonious and loving group where we protect and build generously for all. I don't think this idea rises above the level of utopia, but I believe it is sustained by necessity and urgency in the face of domination, abuse and violence. "The police don't take care of me, my friends take care of me," we read on posters year after year at the 8th March and 25th November women's marches. This is the urgent call. But it has to do with a context of an extremely high level of violation of rights; it is not necessarily a political call.

Sisterhood intersects with the logic of women as identical and feeds the idea that women constitute a uniform, supportive and solid mass. Given the need of many feminist groups to constantly reaffirm their identity within and outside the group, another strategy emerges that directly affects the performance of the group or organization: the denial of "the other women". Thus, recognition stagnates and admiration is invalidated; we are considered equal colleagues, as long as no one climbs the ladder. In a world where being a woman implies a disadvantage in terms of power, ambition is renounced, therefore, women's ambition represents a rupture, an irregularity.

Given the need for the fusion of emotions and identity, women who do not join the group and who seek institutionalized ways of operating successfully are rejected. Recognition can be given to a woman who is far above the rest (a popular example could be Sor Juana), but not to the one closest. For this reason, I consider that sisterhood is a practice to be built and it only happens when we are aware of the antagonisms. Sisterhood seeks a non-conflictual political relationship, as if conflicts and ruptures were only masculine, and reconciliation only feminine.

Another conception of the dynamics between women, the notion of *affidamento*³, understands that relationships are based on the need for others, and a recognition of difference and of the problems caused by distinguishing and separating oneself. *Affidamento* assumes the existence of an asymmetrical relationship between women because it accepts that another woman has something more: “(...) organizational capacity, greater intellectual development, greater ability for certain jobs, and we value her and invest her with certain authority” (Lamas, 2015b: 301). In this line, Haraway (2014) points out that women’s identities are contradictory, partial and strategic, therefore, this author proposes a recognition through coalition, and not identity.

Sisterhood (Lagarde, 2009) and *affidamento* (Cigarini, 2000) are both feminist political proposals. Both agree on the importance of solidarity among women, but *affidamento* considers that this is not enough (Cigarini, 2000); in fact, it maintains a critical stance against, for example, behaviours of complacency and unconditional support among women just because they are women. While sisterhood seeks to ignore disparity among women, *affidamento* considers that disparity exists *per se* and that it is desirable to accept it. In this approach, refusing to exercise any type of domination can be a form of condescension or of taking violence to a higher level of denial or dissimulation, that is, of symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1995: 104).

In synthesis, similar to sisterhood, *affidamento* is a proposal about relationships in the face of masculine forms of politics, but it is distinguished by problematizing and politicizing relations between women as spaces for building strategic and ethical alliances. If we believe that feminisms need to coordinate proposals with other movements (Arruza, Fraser and Bhattacharya, 2019), while avoiding idealized positions on privileged places for emancipation,

³ The Italian term *affidamento* (‘trust’ in English) comes from the publication “La Librería de Mujeres de Milán” (The Women’s Library of Milan), signed by Luisa Muraro.

affidamento broadly addresses these needs. For women to emerge as full political subjects, as citizens, I consider it necessary to dismantle this interweaving of processes of acceptance and, as Amorós (2007) highlights, to abandon the pretension-illusion of being identical. I argue that both individual and collective strengths are centered on the desire to do things, to achieve goals, to improve life, rather than on the feeling of assuming ourselves as equals.

Conclusions

- Groups and organizations with little or no formal structure and that use the criterion of not discerning difference as the axis of unity among their members are very effective in creating spaces for women to share life experiences, but are not very effective for the articulation of networks and the achievement of more far-reaching goals.
- This is because socialization strategies among women, such as not discerning difference and identity boundaries, reproduce gender mandates that prevent the recognition and deployment of leadership among women, which are necessary for effective political action.
- Genuine recognition and respect for difference implies coming to terms with others in all their complexity and valuing their political abilities, thus dismantling the mandate of femininity that sanctions women occupying public space and exercising leadership.
- *Affidamento* recognizes that women's capabilities and limitations make them unique and, although different, they can share projects and act politically to benefit the collective. Leadership is thought of as a position from which to share knowledge and opportunities, not to subjugate.
- Without ignoring the usefulness of the concept of sisterhood as collaboration among women, *affidamento* strengthens the

discussion by problematizing the terms of this collaboration. Its proposals should be highlighted, as they stimulate the appreciation and recognition of women's political abilities, disrupting the mandates of femininity and situating feminism as part of a broader political project. This is essential for the strengthening and internal organization of feminisms in the face of present and future global challenges.

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6. The “Standard” woman and racialization as gendered suffering. The racial question in discourses and practices against gender inequality

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1. Introduction

White feminism originated as an exclusionary movement. Its historical constitutive mechanism has been the tension between the elaboration of a singular model of woman—white, heterosexual, cis, middle class—and the responses produced to that model from within its own borders. Historically, outside or below that model, there have been black, indigenous, trans, migrant, transvestites, peasant, old, popular, Romany, Muslim, disabled, *crazy*, and a long et cetera (Espinosa-Miñoso, 2014; Curiel, 2002). This Eurocentric bias has resulted in power and authority relations among women with concrete consequences in institutional approaches to gender inequality.

Still, many women who do not conform to the “standard model” continue to contest their place within the feminist movement and institutions. Since Sojourner Truth’s speech, *Ain’t I a Woman?* (2021 [1851]), so-called black feminism initiated the de-

bate, critiquing gender essentialisms and highlighting how the confluence of multiple orders of domination produce differentiated experiences of oppression.

In Latin America, this demand for the expansion of the “subject of feminism” was reflected in testimonies such as “*Si me permiten hablar*” (If I may speak), by the Bolivian Domitila Barrios de Chungara (Viezzler, 2005 [1977]) or in the 3rd Feminist Meeting of Latin America and the Caribbean, in 1985. The Chilean National Association of Rural and Indigenous Women (ANAMURI, by its Spanish acronym) made it clear: the idea of generalized feminism does not recognize as a central part of the discussions “all their specificities as indigenous women and, therefore, should not be assumed as a universal and unique language to express the struggle against gender violence suffered by women” (Pinheiro Barbosa, 2021: 12–14).

It is on the basis of contributions such as these that the use of a more or less explicit idea of “intersectionality” has become widespread¹ (Crenshaw, 1991). Overall, this concept has been depoliticized multiple times (Curiel, 2002) and used as a tool to add up “points of oppression” and minimize the place of racialization in gender inequalities.

For this reason, this text reviews the absence or subordination of the racial question in gender discourses and policies in Latin America and Spain. The analysis will start from an understanding of racialization as an experience of gendered suffering in order to present three of the possible analytical routes from which it can be repositioned as an indispensable axis in the approach to policies, programs and discourses that address gender inequality.

¹ This concept addresses how the interaction between different systems of oppression (patriarchy, heterosexuality, racism, capitalism, nationalism)—neither independent, nor segmented—form particular disadvantages in certain bodies.

2. What is racialization?

The glossary to describe racialization is extensive. However, decolonial (Espinoza-Miñoso, 2014; Quijano, 1999), constructivist and constitutivist (Obasogie, 2014) studies coincide in defining it as the historical and situated process through which racial categories are invented and reproduced, in order to strategically present them as natural and fixed ontological determinants. Thought of in this way, the creation of hierarchical racial difference does not precede inequalities in access to rights between human groups, but rather they are interdependent and dialectical phenomena. This dual process involves political, cultural, legislative and educational institutions, as well as regulatory frameworks, communities of knowledge production and social movements (Campos García, 2012: 188) such as feminism.

Black feminist and anti-racist activists, non-white non-politically organized people, and black thinkers have converged in thinking of racialization as an experience of collective suffering involving sensory-affective forms such as fear, shame, pain, disgust, and others: a language that emphasizes the embodied and situated experience of racialization.

Grada Kilomba, for example, explains the psychoanalytic idea of trauma associated with everyday racism, asserting that the racialized experience of black people includes alienation, disappointment, and pain. Vilma Piedade's (2021) category "*doloridade*" is another good way to illustrate this affective language as a way of explaining the lived experience of black women, with historical and experiential nuances, of the ways in which racism and patriarchy intersect in the lives of indigenous, Romany and racialized women to define them as inferior² in general. In contrast to the concept of sisterhood, which does not take

² The word *racialized* is currently used in public discourse as a synonym for "non-white". A deeper analysis of the consequences of the coloniality of being and the capitalist and Western creation of "human races" would lead to the conclusion that white people have also been racialized and, in parallel, from that structural social position, a process of

into account the differentiated experiences of black women, Piedade proposes “doloridade” to name the historical suffering accumulated in our bodies due to the continuity between colonial enslavement and contemporary racism.

But the links between the processes of racialization and gender inequality are constituted by multiple non-white positionalities. The historical, differentiated and contingent pain of Romany, Muslim or Arab women has been constructed and exacerbated by violent contact with the white Western world, which now—as always—considers itself as morally superior. The pain accumulated in “The Great Romany Roundup” in Spain in 1749—which involved murder, forced labor, imprisonment and the separation of men from women and children under 7 years of age, (Filigrana, 2020)—and in World War II affects these women to this day. A history of stereotyping, explicit and covert anti-Romany legislation, frames their situation of socioeconomic precariousness, stigmatization and obstacles to access to health, education and housing. The expropriation of non-white women’s bodies is the basis for a cartography of inequalities not sufficiently recognized and poorly addressed by women within feminisms or by institutional efforts to address gender inequality.

Thus, racialization is a shared and collectively recognized sensory-affective experience. But this pain should not be understood in individual psychological terms, but as a product of historical accumulation and processes of continuous socio-cultural reworking: a pain that mutates, but remains. So what do we get out of understanding racialization as an experience of shared and gendered suffering? Here are three routes through which an answer can be tested.

de-racialization has been developed that implies the attribution of racial traits only to the *Other*, with the white position appearing as “neutral” and without “race”, without “ethnicity”. This de-racialization of whiteness has repercussions in the silencing of established racial hierarchies that operate in the granting of privileges that are always symbolic, and most of the time material, to people racialized as white. We are all racialized, but this racialization makes us occupy different places in the structural pyramid. Thus, I have decided in this text to use “racialized as inferior” to emphasize the power relations and hierarchy of the Western racial imagination, and to racialize the place of privilege and superiority racially granted to white people.

3. The first route: discursive instrumentalization and *escrevivência*

Let's start with a story. In Cartagena (Colombia) there is a small area of a popular neighborhood that its inhabitants call La Loma. It is located on the slopes of the highest hill in the city that serves as land for very impoverished neighborhoods. La Loma is a street inhabited mostly by black women and indigenous descendants that shakes and collapses a little every time it rains (González-Güeto, 2019). With persistence, the women who live there are in charge of rebuilding lives. They raise the walls again, raise the fallen roofs, relocate the earth that has shifted and feed the whole street from the same pot. They stubbornly tried to demand that local governments intervene to make it safer to live there. In response they receive stigmatization and silence.

The local press also did their homework and developed, in a more or less sophisticated way, a moral judgment on the communities that inhabit that hill. They accused them of being “invaders”, “irresponsible” and “underdeveloped” (Goez Ahumedo, 2020; Morales Gutiérrez, 2020; Gutiérrez Castillo, 2020). Not in an innocent way, words such as *environment*, *sanitation* or *degradation* were used by institutions, panels of experts and ordinary citizens. By doing so, they exempted the local government from its institutional responsibilities and imposed on these women a moral judgment that disqualified their voices in the midst of the public discussion on what to do with the hill.

Grada Kilomba (2010: 16) once asked, when analyzing the mask that prevented Anastácia from speaking, “what happens when we speak?”³. For example, during the rainy season in Colombia, the women of La Loma face the difficulty of speaking about their situation in a context of delegitimization, colonialism and racism (Spivak, 1998).

³ My own translation.

This context has direct effects, among other things, on the degree of political participation of non-white women. Today, indigenous and black women in Latin America suffer the institutional violence of laws that do not protect our territories, assassinations of the most visible leaders, hunger, forced displacement and cultural genocide. Various indigenous women's organizations have emphasized the need to incorporate all of these specific experiences of their peoples, as well as the knowledge derived from these experiences, into feminist demands and programmes.

But even with the existence of laws and constitutions that seek to guarantee their institutional political participation, the percentage of non-white women who actually participate in decision-making in the administration of justice, political parties, urban planning or governmental bodies remains relatively low.

This is even reflected in feminist exercises in academic reflexivity and international development institutions: what Mohanty (2008 [1986]) and Espinosa-Miñoso (2009) would call “discursive colonization”. The expropriation of our knowledge and languages—those of indigenous, black, Romany, popular and peasant social movements, those of doctoral students and recently graduated academics, etc.—appears systematically through uncited categories and reflections. People who occupy the position of whiteness continue to speak for non-white women and interpret our demands in a reductionist manner.

The case of La Loma illustrates this consequence very well: every rainy season their testimonies are used in social networks, institutional declarations, press and public debates to construct an image of women as people without good judgement. An urgency is created of moving them from their homes, together with their families, into rented, segregated stadiums or one-person apartments that are too small. In this case, the environmentalist narrative functions as a tool to justify their eviction, a narrative of the absence of risk mitigation programmes and, in general, the absence of political will to guarantee dignified living conditions for

racialized communities. So, which sufferings and which women's sufferings matter, how are they being described and, therefore, addressed by institutional policies and programmes?

An example that helps answer these questions is the fact that in Colombia—and in Latin America—a large part of the programmes, policies and strategies with an intersectional perspective that seek to address the specific circumstances of black, indigenous and poor women involve loans with banking entities: financial empowerment programmes. Many of the women's community strategies to continue sustaining their lives involve informal loans with daily debt collectors that, very commonly, include threats and harassment. Many of the entrepreneurship or housing support programmes targeting women in the region involve loans from public and private institutions (Azar, Lara and Mejía, 2018; Cardero, 2008).

Debt in Latin America is not an individual matter: it is rooted in the most ordinary and everyday aspects of addressing gender issues. It is an extension of colonial exploitation and a vicious circle from which it is difficult to escape. For non-white women who swell the poverty figures in the region, this indebtedness means a “differential of exploitation” (Cavallero and Gago, 2021: 15): worry, dependence, fragility and hopelessness; risk to the continuity of life.

On the hill I am talking about, women are more indebted. To leave the houses on the hill would mean for them to go into debt to pay rent for a place where, in any case, their whole family cannot fit. The unattended environmental risk has repercussions for them in the acquisition of new debts to raise the roofs again, rebuild the bathrooms destroyed by the rain or reassemble the kitchens (González-Güeto, 2019).

I was raised in that street. I am affected by that history of instrumentalization of the environmentalist discourse by institutions against black and indigenous communities that is repeated throughout Latin America. I wanted to begin with this exercise of *escrevivência* [life experience through writing] because the theoretical endeavour to identify the links between racism, gender and class

has resulted in rudimentary and abstract listings of oppressions that add up, like a tally of dots (Brah, 2004: 11). *Escrevivência* is a tool proposed and developed by Conceição Evaristo (2017), which uses the author's lived experience to reflect and "enable the production of narratives that correspond to women's collective experiences" (Soares and Machado, 2017: 206) in contexts of colonialism and racism. Through *escrevivência*, relations between racial, gender and class positions are de-essentialized.

And here is the first route: with the situated narrative of pain it is possible to address the difficulties of putting intersectionality into practice, better identifying how programmes and policies address gender inequality fail to integrate the complexities of the "intersection" of race-gender-class (Brah, 2004). Racism is neither a subsidiary nor an autonomous phenomenon, and thinking about a feminist present and future requires listening to what non-white women, who are still acting today from the margins, have to say.

4. The second route: the "machistometer"

Accusations of machismo by white-European feminists and Western societies towards racialized populations such as black, Romany, African, Arab or Muslim people have become one of the most frequent contemporary manifestations of structural racism (Filigrana, 2020; Agüero, 2022). Part of their narratives are being used to reproduce and intensify the oppression of non-white women.

A number of anti-racist thinkers have emphasized how these exercises in "measuring" machismo permeate the racism present in international organizations, civil society and institutions in the global North. This leads to peculiarly *paternalistic* practices and discourses on the part of some feminists and institutions in the North, based on the creation of an "Other" as opposed to the "self": "only a part of the ego, the 'good', accepting and benevolent, is experienced as 'self' [...] the rest—the 'bad', rejectable and malev-

olent—is projected onto the ‘Other’ and experienced as external” (Kilomba, 2010: 18)⁴

In Spain, an example of how the construction of the “Other” works is the mirror image of white women compared to Romany women. The stereotypes surrounding Romany women have been transformed according to the changes undergone by the ideal of white/Spanish/*payas*⁵ women of the time (Filigrana, 2020; Agüero, 2022). Filigrana and Agüero state that when the ideal representation of Western women involved “sexual purity”, obedience and subjection, Romany women were represented as libertine, sexually disordered, seductive. Once the archetypal image of the white-Spanish woman changed with the ideas of liberal feminism towards empowerment and independence, Romany women appeared to the collective imagination as submissive. In similar ways and with consequences for the historical construction of the “subject of feminism,” other non-white women have been instrumentalized to a greater or lesser extent in what Grada Kilomba (2010: 19) calls “the mental representation of what the white subject does not want to look like”⁶.

Here is the second route: this split way of understanding the continuities between oppressions and women’s rights reaffirms the old colonial dichotomy “savagery vs. civilization” and overshadows the transnational and capitalist power relations that exist between the acquired rights of women and the oppressions of these “Others”.

5. The third route: servitude, exploitation and care

To think about care from a feminist perspective is to recognize that a racial and colonial structure organizes, reproduces and sustains

⁴ My own translation.

⁵ A term used by the Romany people in Spain to refer to white people.

⁶ My own translation.

it. Cristina Vera Vega's research (2022: 39) attests, for example, that "the installation of servitude as a way of controlling labour that was performed in a forced and unpaid manner is what shapes domestic work in later times, through the updating of discourses and social processes". According to her, women inhabit different social positions that cause the division of reproductive labour to be defined not only by their position in gender structures, but also in terms of their race, class and age (Brites, 2007; Vera Vega, 2022: 15).

When we speak specifically of black women, the accumulation of pain is combined with the historicity of the relationship with the Spanish state—or, rather, of the kingdom of Spain, as Mayoko Ortega (2019) would say—with negritude. The experiences of black women today in Latin American and European countries are not significantly different from the colonial past (González, 2021 [1981]). In terms of access to rights and symbolic social legitimacy, black women continue to be a marginalized sector of the population in contemporary societies (González, 2021 [1981]): 40). The most marked historical example, which embodies all this discussion, is the figure of milkmaids, as an illustration of the accumulation of life extracted from racialized bodies (Vera Vega, 2022; Bueno Sarduy, 2019).

This results in the existence of a process of "stratified reproduction," a concept that specifies the particular ways in which gender and racialization intersect to generate suffering in non-white women. This experience of racialized and gendered suffering, resulting from colonial servitude and exploitation, is repeated in the life trajectories of other non-white women. Even though the number of black women in higher education has increased in Latin America in recent years, in terms of the jobs they occupy, their presence continues to be, in the majority, roles of servitude, precariousness and informality.

According to data from ECLAC (2018), black women mostly occupy low-skilled and lower-paid administrative positions in countries such as Argentina, Uruguay, Nicaragua and Panama. In Brazil, Ecuador, Honduras and Costa Rica, black women mostly

carry out manual, unstable, health-threatening and poorly paid jobs. The gap between white and black women is at least 11 percentage points. This reality is repeated, for example, in indigenous women who are dedicated to household work (Vera Vega, 2022), in whose life trajectories there is an intersection of racism-patriarchy that accumulates a history of servitude and exploitation by white populations, men and women; even by white feminists.

When we place anti-racist struggles at the center of thinking about gender, we understand that the experience of racialized servitude that is projected to this day in Latin America is repeated transnationally. The bodies of migrant women have been and continue to be used by white-European and white-mestizo Latin American populations as an exploitable resource for achieving men and women's freedoms and well-being.

The demand for the work of migrant women racialized as inferiors in Latin America and Spain has increased in recent years. However, in the case of Spain, it was only in 2022—after the struggle of migrant and racialized domestic workers' organizations—that the Plenary Session of the Spanish Congress ratified Convention 189 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on female domestic workers. Among other measures, the Convention requires the recognition of economic unemployment benefits for domestic workers. This ratification, however, fails to consider the situation of racialized and migrant domestic workers who, by not having regular documentation of their immigration status, are not registered and their work is not even recognized as existing. Addressing the specific situation of the oppression of these women requires a decolonial and anti-racist analysis of the Immigration Law, and the multiple obstacles that this regulation imposes on the migrant population to regularize their situation in Spain.

Here is the third route: the transfer of the burden of care from some women to others is not explained solely in terms of social class. It is a racially informed transfer of care that reproduces and updates the patterns of the colonial racial system and its hier-

archies: precarious, impoverished and even enslaved labour for the domestic, sexual, agrarian and reproductive work that sustains the welfare states of the North and the elites of the South.

6. Final notes

- This text has sought to emphasize that inserting racialization as a subsidiary topic of policies, analysis and programmes with a gender perspective for non-white women results in a paternalistic orientation that fails to meet their demands.
- The three routes presented in this text are not the only ones. Other possible routes would include analysis of: whiteness as a privileged racial position intersecting with gender; racial biases in health practices and policies, or the effects on non-white women of the rise of anti-rights discourses in the international political scene.
- Policies and programmes that address the differential oppression of non-white women require enhanced anti-colonial and critical international cooperation exercises. This involves the recognition of colonial power relations between different territories and government actors.
- In parallel, institutional cooperation strategies should aim for the material and symbolic reparation of the suffering historically experienced by non-white populations and, therefore, be based on listening to the demands of peasant, popular, black, indigenous, migrant, Romany, etc. feminist organizations.
- In short, we will not be able to design strategies aimed at gender justice without an anti-racist imagination that recognizes everything that non-white people have to say.

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