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**Argentina**

# **Making Everything a Feminist Issue: Argentina's Feminist Movement**

- IV Online magazine - 2023 - IV581 - June 2023 -

Publication date: Tuesday 13 June 2023

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**The feminist movements in Argentina have been at the frontline of the fight against both neoliberalism and the right. The first thing to note is that when we talk about neoliberalism in Argentina, in other countries like Chile, in South America and Latin America more broadly, we are talking about a very specific history that permeates how society is constituted and that shapes struggles against exploitation and oppression. Neoliberalism was installed through state and parastatal terrorism in the form of brutal military dictatorships in the 1970s and '80s, which were supported by the US.**

In Argentina, 30,000 people were disappeared by the dictatorship, in very gruesome ways. One of the more notorious examples being what we call death flights, when people, after having been kidnapped and placed in the camps, were drugged, undressed, and loaded onto planes or helicopters, and then thrown into bodies of water. At the same time as they were repressing, murdering, and sequestering people, the dictatorships were also restructuring the country economically.

They implemented financial reforms, austerity policies, the expansion of credit and debt, and the consolidation of big corporations and banks. So, for a place like Argentina, from its very beginning neoliberalism wasn't cloaked in the language of individual rights or any kind of progressivism—it was very much coupled with the kind of extreme direct, repressive violence that some in the US and Europe have characterized as a degeneration of a more “classic” neoliberalism.

Fast forward to 2001 and 2002, Argentina experienced the largest debt default by any country ever at the time. It went through a deep crisis, where the majority of the population was thrust into deep poverty, and society had zero political stability; if neoliberalism had any political legitimacy before then, it was totally gone at that point.

In December of 2001, five presidents came and went, and there were massive uprisings. Millions took to the streets, and the expression that the revolt took was against all traditional political parties—the slogan of the uprising was “everyone must go” (which I think everyone can relate to)—and this process of an entire society plunged into crisis while also fighting back on a very broad scale, also meant that new political possibilities were opened up.

There were factory occupations, worker, union, student, unemployed movements, neighborhood assemblies, queer and trans organizing, mutual aid networks. Everything was being challenged from below, and that organizing laid the groundwork of future struggles, all of which had women as protagonists.

So this is the context of social crisis and struggle in which people grew up, this is the history that is carried both individually and collectively, and is a key component of the mass feminist movement that emerged in Argentina over the last five to ten years.

The twenty-first century in Argentina is in many ways defined by a crisis wrought by neoliberalism. This crisis is best understood as a profound crisis of social reproduction. It is sustained by a brutal increase in feminized work, super-exploitation, the privatization of public infrastructure and services, and the restriction of their scope.

These changes have forced tasks of social reproduction (things like caring for children, the sick, and the elderly as well as work to provide food and education) into the private sphere to be carried out overwhelmingly by women, by queer and transgender people, as unpaid and obligatory labor. This vast privatization of social care has forced

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lower-income sectors to go into debt to pay for necessities from food to illegal abortions. So, at the same time that the country went into external debt to imperialist institutions like the International Monetary Fund, working class and poor people went into massive personal debt.

To justify all this privatization, marketization, and austerity, the state has invoked “family values,” reinforcing traditional gender roles with the idea that social reproduction is the responsibility of the nuclear cis-heteropatriarchal family. Thus, economically and ideologically, neoliberalism worked to consolidate a structure of obedience, forcing us to shoulder the costs of austerity individually and privately, and to accept and normalize all the moral and ideological baggage that entailed.

It was just a matter of time before all this detonated massive resistance, which drew on the deep wellsprings of opposition over the last few decades. In 2015, the Ni Una Menos movement, which translates to Not One Less, a movement against femicide and gendered sexual and domestic violence, exploded in Argentina.

It was triggered, like many movements around violence, by specific cases that were reported in the media. One of them was the femicide of Daiana Garcia, a 19 year old who was found by the roadside in a small city in the province of Buenos Aires, with her remains stuffed inside a trash bag.

Three months later, Chiara Paez, a 14 year old and a few weeks pregnant, was discovered buried in the garden of her boyfriend's home. She had been beaten to death by her boyfriend after being forced to take medication to terminate her pregnancy. He confessed and admitted that he was helped by his mother.

In response to the murders, thousands of people took to the streets, there was a hashtag, there was an explosion of discussions around gendered violence among people, friends, in school, as well as on social media. Twenty-four hours after the big march ended, the government announced that a registry of femicides would be set up to compile statistics.

The next year, after another femicide came to light, the Ni Una Menos collective organized the first national women's mass strike, which consisted of a one-hour work and study stoppage in the early afternoon, with protesters dressed in all black. These protests became region-wide and spread and gained international momentum. There were other strikes and demonstrations in many other countries like Chile, Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Spain, and Italy.

Amid the economic crisis, Ni Una Menos, and other movements, such as the abortion movement—which had been organizing for years—really took off as a very concrete struggle with demands, with a horizon, with an effect on mass consciousness. The latter eventually culminated in the legalization of abortion as a right and service as part of the country's healthcare system. The day of the victory in December 2020 was a day of mass celebration.

This struggle exemplifies how feminism in Argentina takes on a distinct collective and class dimension. It's not just about my body, my choice, it's not about an individual right, even though those are important. The struggle rests on an understanding that my body does not exist separate from other bodies. It does not exist separate from what happens to the land, water, the planet, Indigenous struggles, police violence, and austerity imposed by our government to pay the International Monetary Fund for a debt we were not responsible for. What the feminist movement was able to do was make everything a feminist issue.

We can see this broadening that became characteristic of contemporary feminism in Argentina as a weaving together of all these different ways the Argentinian people have experienced crisis and violence, and a weaving together of how they have experienced themselves as primary agents of political change. It has opened up new ways of thinking

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about what was happening in society—how we think about gender, violence, work, disenfranchisement, dispossession—and began breaking down the almost binary understandings of the domestic and the public, the streets and the neighborhoods.

I want to emphasize the importance of this because when we think about how to build a mass movement, we are often taught to think about its conciliatory element, that massivity always requires political compromise. And while I'm not saying that there weren't or aren't debates or internal dynamics or that certain arguments didn't have to be made, I am saying that, on the whole, in Argentina, the opposite was true. The feminist movement was everywhere, both fighting around what are considered "traditional" feminist demands like gendered and sexual violence or abortion, and at the same time—and often because—it was meeting, organizing, and fighting around other demands, which are also feminist but are not traditionally thought of in that way. The key is to make everything a feminist issue.

*June 12, 2023*

Source: [Spectre](#).

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