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Feminist Metaphilosophy

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PHILOSOPHY, FEMINISM, AND THE POPULAR FIELD IN LATIN AMERICA

by Luciana Cadahia*

Abstract. *In this article, we intend to provide a meta-feminist reflection on the current links among philosophy, feminism, and the popular field in Latin America. To this effect, I divide the article into four sections. First, I elaborate a reflection on the specificity of the nature of philosophical practice in Latin America and the feminist field. For this purpose, I adopt the distinction proposed by Amorós between philosophical feminism and feminist philosophy in order to support the importance of preserving both expressions. Second, I show how, through the signifier 'woman', both expressions are contaminated and why it is important to sustain this term from theory in its vocation to accompany the usage of language in feminist movements in Latin America. Thus, I attend to the impossibility of associating a name with an identity. Third, I reconstruct current debates in the field of Latin American and Caribbean feminist thought in order to make explicit a tension between the legacies of affirmative power and the legacies of negative thinking. I present a few limitations of the first legacy and position myself within the second. Finally, through the understanding of feminism as negative (or failure), I offer an interpretation to think about the role of feminism within the popular field and the importance of connecting with other struggles against oppression in the configuration of an emancipatory horizon.*

Keywords. *Meta-feminism; Feminism; Popular Field; Latin America; Negativity*

1. *Eccentric Positions: Feminist Philosophy in Latin America*

Working as a philosopher, as a woman, and as a Latin American person is a complex space within the philosophical practice. First, this is because our knowledge production occupies a peripheric space with regard to philosophical knowledge centers, such as Europe or the United States of America (USA). The writing, with a

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few exceptions, tends to be limited to a strict and exegetical interpretation of classic, modern, or contemporary canonical philosophy texts. Second, our position as women implies a placement of exteriority with regard to the history of philosophy. It is supposed to penetrate into a field where not only a hegemonic masculine practice has been configured but where women have been overshadowed or subordinated within the same reflections. Despite the efforts for recovering feminine voices from the history of philosophy, the truth is that it is only since the middle of the twentieth century that we have a production that is sufficiently rich to elaborate a canon inhabited by women as well. Nevertheless, this constellation has been mainly characterized by positioning women in the field of feminism. Thus, even today, the role of women is that of a minority among philosophical themes beyond the strict matters organized by feminism. In this direction, building a place of philosophical enunciation in the dual condition of women and Latin American people assumes a ‘meta-feminist’ exercise. By meta-feminist we do not imply a normative interpretation of what philosophy and feminism must be, but rather the fact that our position places us in a land of estrangement that compels us to question the nature of our own philosophical practice. In this sense, we use the expression ‘meta-feminism’ in accordance with the terms proposed by the Canadian thinker Lori Saint-Martin¹, who expresses that this perspective «surpasses and

¹ As Marie Carrière suggests in her article *Metafeminism and Post-9/11 Writing in Canada and Québec*, the term elaborated by Lori Saint-Martin is similar to the term ‘cryptofeminism’ proposed by the thinker Jennifer Henderson when she said, «“a kind of work that is feminist in a subterranean way,” in keeping with the scientific sense of “crypto” as “a life form with a concealed part that is below the observable surface”(69). Cryptofeminism, argues Henderson, is still “indebted to developments in late twentieth-century feminist thought but it is not integrated into a feminist tradition because it has exceeded what has seemed to be the proper or recognizable scope of feminist inquiry, understood as the struggle for gender equality or the enunciation of sexual difference” (69)» (M. Carrière, *Metafeminism and Post-9/11 Writing in Canada and Québec*, «Studies in Canadian Literature/Études en littérature canadienne», VXXI (1), 2016, pp. 223-247, p. 228; quotes are from: J. Henderson, *Can the Third Wave Speak?*, «Atlantis», XXXII (1), 2007, pp. 68-78).

includes the object [of feminism] in itself². Thus, what does it imply to want to be part of a practice that has expelled and subordinated the position of women? Can what we practice be considered philosophy beyond the exegetic work of history of philosophy? Ultimately, what is the link between feminism and philosophy?

In her classic collective book *Feminismo y filosofía (Feminism and Philosophy)*, Celia Amorós elaborates a meta-philosophical reflection and suggests a distinction between ‘feminist philosophy’ and ‘philosophical feminism’. The purpose of this distinction is to reject the first possibility and opt for the second one. In the author’s words,

The expression «feminist philosophy» seems to connote a constructive and systematic task that, in fact, we are yet in precarious conditions to address: without even considering the problems that currently mean producing a systematic philosophy in general, whether it is feminist or not. The deconstructive outcomes are more frequent, then, doubtlessly, than the reconstructive ones and, if it would be possible to produce a feminist philosophy, perhaps, thus, it would become meaningless: feminists could then feel, easily and without getting into traps, identified by the Philosophy made by everybody. (The «thinkers of sexual difference» would disagree radically with these estimations of mine, for reasons that may be sensed already and about what we come back later). I would rather, for these theoretical reasons and some other pragmatic ones, talk about philosophical feminism. (The distinction and what it suggests belong to my good fellow José Luis Pardo.) Well, what is intended to be suggested with this denomination is that feminism is susceptible to be addressed philosophically.

² L. Saint-Martin, *Le métaféminisme et la nouvelle prose féminine au Québec*, in *L’autre lecture: la critique au féminin et les textes québécois*, Vol. 2, ed. by L. Saint-Martin, Montréal, XYZ, 1994, pp. 161-170, p. 165.

The latter, due to it has philosophical implications and because, as a thread of thought is, in its roots, philosophical³.

It is interesting for us to note this distinction because we consider the importance of the notion of philosophical feminism to be the purpose of this article. We agree with the author that feminism is philosophical «in its roots», but we believe that this consideration must not reduce the possibility of a feminist philosophy. However, it is not necessary to contemplate a dichotomy between both expressions in order to assume the idea of ‘philosophical feminism’. Furthermore, it could even be more productive to make both expressions coexist. In other words, on the one hand, there exists the inquiry exercise of a philosophy of the feminist kind, the main interest of which lies in reading the history of philosophy from a feminist perspective more than abandoning philosophy and being able to find, beyond the author’s will, key philosophical criticism with the logic of patriarchy. This, to our understanding, may be thought of as an eccentric position within philosophy itself. Jorge Alemán, an Argentinean thinker, suggests, in his book, *Horizontes neoliberales en la subjetividad*⁴ (*Neoliberal horizons in subjectivity*), that eccentric positions are not those assumed passively as peripheral – in the sense that one ‘other’ has assigned that place – but those who are capable of creating a place *outside* the center. In other words, far from pointing to a position of exteriority or marginalized minority where we decide to position ourselves, it is possible to assume the position of those who are transforming – although ‘against the tide’ – the political, epistemological, and symbolic coordinates that are capable of disputing the established common places in the fields of legitimation of political knowledge and praxis. It can never be assumed that this eccentric will be present within – in a very different manner – the official spaces that would be seen as their own by previously legitimized voices. Thus, a controversial and external position is assumed. The feminist dimension of this position is not only the contents of what is believed but also the manner in which

³ C. Amorós, *Feminismo y Filosofía*, Madrid, Síntesis, 2000, p. 10.

⁴ J. Alemán, *Horizontes neoliberales en la subjetividad*, Buenos Aires, Grama, 2016.

the philosophical activity is assumed. The manner in which the tradition is read is what conceives a feminist manner of assuming the philosophical practice⁵. If we could believe that this eccentric movement of feminist philosophy is metaphorical, we would agree with Joan Scott, when she argues that it operates as «expansive waves that moves from dispersed epicenters and transform geological formations on their way», because this operation «implies a sense of causes of infinite regression – reverberations are re-echoes, successions of echoes and in effect reverberations are also repercussions»⁶.

This eccentric position that we assume as feminist philosophers, simultaneously, can be related to the philosophical feminism that has enabled us to make thinkable this attitude toward the philosophy. It is our double position, as Latin American philosophers and feminists, that provides a creative contamination between both positions, to the point of making such separation indistinguishable in certain moments. Hence, for the present article, we use both ends of the distinction (philosophical feminism and feminist philosophy) in order to be able to believe the importance of retaining the concept of ‘woman in Latin America’, in positional and strategic terms, within intellectual debates. To this effect, we penetrate into the main philosophical debates regarding the use of this term in the field of feminism. Second, we explain that the importance of retaining this term in the academic sphere finds its reasons in the practical field or, more precisely, in the political articulation of the Latin American popular field and its struggles for emancipation. Third, we briefly go through Latin American intellectual debates with the aim of indicating the limits and possibilities for the feminist articulation of women. Finally, and according to the landscape of current philosophical reflections, we establish a distinction between the feminist intellectual field that is close to the

⁵ This perspective of a feminist philosophy has been worked by eleven Latin American and Caribbean women philosophers in a collective book edited by Ana Carrasco and I. L. Cadahia and A. Carrasco, *Fuera de sí mismas. Motivos para dislocarse*, Barcelona, Herder, 2020.

⁶ J. Scott, *Reverberaciones feministas*, «Revista CS», X, 2012, pp. 339-370, p. 355.

philosophy of affirmative difference on the one hand and the feminist field inheriting the notion of negativity in philosophy on the other. We are interested in demonstrating that between the philosophy of difference and the philosophy of negativity, what is at play is a comprehension of the feminist popular field and its possibilities for the articulation, with other oppressed political subjects, of the struggle for emancipation.

2. *Practical Meta-feminism (or When Praxis Disrupts Theoretical Debates)*

To obtain a better understanding of what it means to assume this contamination between feminist philosophy and philosophical feminism, we would like to address this contamination from the perspective of the classical debate regarding the sense of using the term ‘woman’ and how everything is decided in the crossing between feminist philosophy and philosophical feminism. It is known that the debate is fruitful among the theories of difference (Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, etc.), the thinkers of anti-sexual difference (Monique Plaza, Monique Wittig, etc.), the thinkers of queer theory or gender theory⁷, and Lacanian feminists⁸ regarding whether or not to use terms such as ‘feminine’ and ‘woman’. With regard to the first stream, authors such as Luce Irigaray⁹ and Rosi Braidotti¹⁰ assume the necessity of the inhabitation of these terms as a paradox; they ascribe a non-essentialist use to these terms, neither *a priori*. Therefore, they consider these words as the name given to a form of exclusion and, hence, they question if, from there, it is possible that a «feminine feminism» – as a political, historical, contingent, and non-essentialist project – is open to the

⁷ R. Braidotti, *Feminismo, diferencia sexual y subjetividad nómada*, Barcelona, Gedisa, 2004, pp. 69-106.

⁸ J. Copjec, *Imaginemos que la mujer no existe*, Madrid, Fondo de Cultura económica, 2006.

⁹ L. Irigaray, *Este sexo que no es uno*, Madrid, Akal, 2009; L. Irigaray, *Espéculo de la otra mujer*, Madrid, Akal, 2007.

¹⁰ R. Braidotti, *Metamorfosis. Hacia una teoría materialista del devenir*, Madrid, Akal, 2005; Ead., *Feminismo, diferencia sexual y subjetividad nómada*.

multiplicity of ways to be and exist in society¹¹. With regard to the second stream, thinkers such as Monique Plaza or Monique Wittig consider that these categories associated with a sexual difference become excessively essentialist, as they are open to an ahistorical or political interpretation of problems and reintroduce the symmetric binarism of masculine/feminine¹². The third stream, echoing the second one, also considers that these terms conserve a metaphysical trace provided by an essentialist «heterosexual matrix» from which authors such as Judith Butler or Paul Preciado prefer to maintain distance¹³. Among these three streams (sexual difference, anti-sexual difference, and queer or gender theory), the matter turns to two fundamental aspects, although these are not the only ones. The first matter questions whether or not the use of expressions such as ‘feminism’ or ‘woman’ implies the reactivation of some kind of essentialism. In contrast, the second one is a question regarding the issue of desire, the tension of which fluctuates between pondering if it is a dispute between a heterosexual tradition (the sexual difference) and a lesbian tradition (the gender theory) or if it is between two different traditions of naming the feminine homosexuality¹⁴. If it is the former, then the lesbian desire would be independent of the feminine desire and the category of woman must be dissolved. If it is the latter, the lesbian desire works as a *continuum* of feminine sexuality. With regard to Lacanian feminists, we could say this to indicate that they are separated from all mentioned streams in two fundamental aspects: the negative character of desire and the place assigned to the feminine in the Lacanian theory.

Having said that, we believe that terms such as ‘feminine’ and ‘woman’ are absolutely left behind if we take them as a datum, a biological fact, or a metaphysical essence of a historical character that would essentially determine a society that is divided into ‘men’

¹¹ Ivi, pp. 9-32.

¹² Ivi, p. 92.

¹³ J. Butler, *El género en disputa. El feminismo y la subversión de la identidad*, Barcelona, Paidós, 2007, p. 38.

¹⁴ Braidotti, *Feminismo, diferencia sexual y subjetividad nómada*, pp. 91-92.

and ‘women’ – with all the historical associations assigned to each gender condition. Nevertheless, if we believe ‘the feminine’ or ‘the woman’ from within the debates we just mentioned, there exist opposing views and it would not be a debate that has already been closed. Furthermore, this debate is not resolved if we take into consideration the usage assigned to these words by sexual-difference feminist authors, Lacanian feminist authors, and – in what is important to this article – the use within the current Latin American political experiences, where our commitment is rooted. Is this term used in the feminist and popular organizations in Latin America? What is more fruitful from the intellectual field for the emancipation fights, to dissolve the term or participate in the performative construction of the term? In this sense, we believe that it is interesting to track a few reflections of Braidotti and Scott (although we do not commit to their ontological presuppositions of the affirmative difference between Derridean and Deleuzian keys), who consider that «it is not the deliberate self-denomination what will allows us to find the outcome for the chains of phallogocentric language»¹⁵. Therefore, resigning the use of expressions such as ‘woman’ and ‘feminine’ – and looking for other categories to think about the issue – does not assume an automatic transformation of the tangible structures of power with which old names were associated¹⁶. Furthermore, we add that many times, rather sophisticated debates are produced within the academy that end up separating themselves from the concrete political fighting fields and from the terms that these fights use to express their unease and inspire a social transformation. We share Braidotti’s idea that resigning specific words could lead to a certain naïve voluntarism of naming – if just a different name was sufficient to open up new practices and revert old practices of oppression – that, paradoxically, reactivate the worst traces of the omnipotence of consensus theories. Just like the choice of naming ourselves in some other manner would automatically free us from the socio-historical ties that escape to

¹⁵ Ivi, p. 96.

¹⁶ J. Scott, *El género: Una categoría útil para el análisis histórico*, in *El género: la construcción cultural de la diferencia sexual*, ed. by Marta Lamas, México, PUEG, 1996, pp. 265-302.

the consciousness, and we could control it through naming the being of our subjectivity, the former does not imply that it is not a challenging game to begin naming things in another manner, at the point at which it expresses the experimental and performative in the order of the being. However, that experimental game must not be detrimental to retaining the use of expressions such as ‘woman’ or ‘feminine’ nor to the intention that the *usage* of these expressions conserve, *a priori*, a patriarchal metaphysics¹⁷. Perhaps the problem lies in the belief that the name exhausts all our identity and that once things are named differently, it is possible to recover the purity of the being. Perhaps the secret of emancipation is not in assigning the ‘right name’ but rather in the movements of thoughts favored by the contaminated, and not comprehensive, use of words to name the word. Is playing with expressions an attempt to mistrust the same words to the point of favoring contamination? Consequently, «changes in deep structures of identity require socio-symbolic interventions transcending the deliberate self-denomination»; thus, to assume «that unconscious processes are trans-historical and, hence, they need time to be modified does not imply that we can abandon or resign the unconscious through a counter-movement to the ‘historical or social reality’. Rather it means that in order to make effective political decisions we must assume the specific temporality of unconsciousness»¹⁸. Braidotti adds that it could be interesting to assume the paradox of the feminine identity as «a simultaneous necessity to confirm and deconstruct it»¹⁹, with the aim to conceive «the feminine» or «the woman» as a situated knowledge or a «politics of location». Dissolving the essentialist or oppressive dimension of these terms could be, simultaneously, due to its affirmative revindication in the field of social movements in terms of a project within a field of forces and, therefore, a symbolic and political «position»²⁰. On the

¹⁷ M.L. Femenías and M.A Ruíz, *Rosi Braidotti: de la diferencia sexual a la condición nómada*, «Revista 3 Escuela de Historia», I (3), 2004, pp. 1-18, p. 14.

¹⁸ Braidotti, *Feminismo, diferencia sexual y subjetividad nómada*, p. 96.

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 95.

²⁰ Ivi, p. 98.

one hand, using expressions such as woman or feminine does not have to imply that all women are the same or that we are referring to a naturalistic identity in a mechanical manner. On the other hand, because it can work as a platform for political action, it is not understood anymore as the *name of an identity* that has been previously given but as a *relational position* to be collectively constructed in a current manner. In other words, it is a position of a subject in an active and political sense that assumes the historical sedimentation and, simultaneously, the contingency and the indetermination belonging to all transformational practice. In this sense, the political position of «woman» as something to be constructed can open the door to figures working as «conceptual characters» of a scene without denying the existence of other characters that «illuminate aspects constituent blind point of their own practice until then» and that «are materially registered in the subject»²¹. Second, these figures express a constitutive paradox whose contradictory character does not seek to be ‘overcome’ but to be worked upon in some other manner. In other words, the feminine or the woman implies a place of oppression (historically sedimented) and a political position (a possibility of emancipation). Finally, the figures – having the particularity of working intelligence and sensibility – are capable of affecting us in such a manner that they drive us to political action.

3. *Theoretical Meta-feminism (or When Theoretical Debates Alter the Praxis)*

If we return to what was said in the first section of the article – that is, producing philosophy from Latin America is intrinsically linked to our situation of inherited oppression from colonial and patriarchal experiences, this implies an inexorable nexus within the field of praxis, a link with collective movements that give shape to this fight against oppression. Many of us (women) participate in both spaces simultaneously. In other words, we practice philosophy and, simultaneously, we are part of these movements against

²¹ Ivi, p. 95.

oppression. Thus, our place to think about the nature of philosophy positions us in the space that we term ‘eccentric’ and that is seeking ways to transform the coordinates of the socio-symbolic risks of society and knowledge. Hence, our relationship with the selection of terms that would enable us to think from a theoretical perspective mainly depends on the signifiers used within social movements. This is the reason that in the second section we made a theoretical reconstruction of the issue of the signifier ‘woman’, thereby revealing that our position to continue using it in the philosophical thinking field lies in its mobilizer capability in terms of an emancipating political position in the field of feminist movements in Latin America.

Meanwhile, it is important to realize that feminism in Latin America – as Eli Bartra Muriá²², Francesca Gargallo²³, and Sonia Rivera Berruz²⁴ suggest – has had its own evolution when assuming the problem of oppression²⁵. In this sense, it is characterized as moments or «waves» whose genealogy does not exactly coincide with those of the European or North American ones²⁶. First, we could refer to a proto-feminism before the nineteenth century, embodied in figures such as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and her peculiar relationship with language²⁷ or Juana Manso and Flora Tristán who

²² E. Bartra Muriá, *Mujeres en el arte popular. De promesas, traiciones, monstruos y celebridades*, Ciudad de México, CONACULTA-UAM, 2005.

²³ F. Gargallo, *El feminismo filosófico*, in *El pensamiento filosófico latinoamericano, del Caribe y «latino» (1300-2000)*, ed. by E. Dussel, E. Mendieta and C. Bohórquez, Ciudad de México, Siglo XXI, 2009, pp. 418-433.

²⁴ Gargallo, *El feminismo filosófico*, pp. 418-419.

²⁵ It must be noted that these three thinkers do not share exactly the same interpretation of the different moments of feminism due to the emphasis on the aspects that link aesthetics and politics. Thus, I combine the reading of all interpretations into a general consideration of these moments to suit the purposes of this article.

²⁶ S. Rivera Berruz, *Latin American Feminism*, «Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy» (Summer 2021 Edition), ed. by E.N. Zalta, URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2021/entries/feminism-latin-america/>>.

²⁷ F. Gargallo, *Ideas feministas latinoamericanas*, Ciudad de México, UACM, 2006.

stated the importance of feminist popular education²⁸. This is followed by Republican feminism from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries onward, which implies a combination of the continental pulsion of an emancipating republicanism – in keeping with the spirit of independence – and women’s right to vote within that libertarian context. A third moment was organized by the socialist revolutionary experiences permeated by guerilla experiences and exiles due to civilian-military dictatorships during the 60s and 70s, which opened the door to the feminism of the 80s and 90s, which has been termed ‘democratic transitology’ in the region. This finally landed on the popular conceptualizations of feminism in the twenty-first century, crossed by the articulation with other forms of oppression in the region: class and race. Thus, the colonial experience and the peripheric condition within the political scenario has shaped a unique drift in the thinking as well in the praxis of Latin American feminism. In this sense, the 80s and 90s determined a feminist field divided within by institutionalist feminists, activist feminists, and autonomist feminists. The first group was associated with professional feminists linked to institutional work among international organizations and non-government organizations (NGOs) during the reign of neoliberal governments. On the other hand, the second group was closer to ground work and popular movements. However, activist feminists did not renounce their links with left wing political parties or unions. Further, autonomist feminists did consider it a priority to create an autonomous women’s movement independent from political orientations or affiliations²⁹.

In parallel, authors such as Sueli Carneiro, Léila Gonzalez, and Ochy Curiel³⁰ felt the necessity of developing the specifications of

²⁸ Ead., *El feminismo filosófico*, p. 418.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ S. Carneiro, *Noircir le féminisme*, «Nouvelles Questions Féministes», XXIV (2), 2005, pp. 27-32; L. Gonzalez, *La catégorie politico-culturelle d’amefricanité*, «Les cahiers du CEDREF», XX, 2015, <http://journals.openedition.org/cedref/806>; O. Curiel, *Rethinking Radical Anti-Racist Feminist Politics in a Global Neoliberal Context*, «Meridians», XIV (2), 2016, pp. 46-55.

black feminism; authors like Yuderkys Espinosa Miñoso³¹ of a lesbian feminism; and authors such as Angela Ixkic Bastian Duarte and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui³² of an indigenist feminism, whose emancipation methods had a number of demands that classical feminism had not contemplated. Currently, it appears to be a new reorganization of the feminist field governed by two main questions. On the one hand, the necessity of articulating the plurality of feminism in Latin America (autonomists, activists, black, indigenist, lesbian, queer, etc.) with popular field struggles (class and race) and, on the other hand, the necessity to rethink the kind of link that existed between feminism and the state or institutions beyond the consensual logic of neoliberalism. This is where our reflection is positioned: How to think of feminism within the popular field on one hand and the capability of configuring a popular and feminist state on the other. This approximation echoes the work of feminists such as Carneiro, María Luisa Femenías, Sonia Álvarez, Alba Carosio, Marlise Matos, and Clarisse Paradise, among others³³.

Moreover, this double question that arises within the feminist praxis is, in the intellectual field, crossed by two thinking legacies revolving around the matter of how to treat the old philosophical question of *negativity*. We assume that the criticism of negativity by feminists of difference is very well expressed, while Braidotti rejects the role of this concept in suggestions such as those of Butler or Slavoj Žižek. According to the author, the role of negativity would lead to a kind of melancholy that is incapable of suggesting a social transformation³⁴. We reject this identification of negativity

³¹ Y. Espinosa Miñoso, *The Feminism-Lesbianism Relationship in Latin America: A Necessary Link*, in *The Politics of Sexuality in Latin America*, ed by. J. Corrales and M. Pecheny, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011, pp. 401-405.

³² Rivera Berruz, *Latin American Feminism*.

³³ S. Alvarez, *Feminismos en Movimiento, Feminismos en Protesta*, «Revista Punto Género», XI, 2019, pp. 73-102; A. Carosio, *Feminismo latinoamericano: imperativo ético para la emancipación*, in *Género y Globalización*, ed by. A. Girón, Buenos Aires, CLACSO, 2014; M.L. Femenías, *Esbozo de un feminismo latinoamericano*, «Estudios Feministas», XV (1), 2007, pp. 11-25.

³⁴ Braidotti, *Metamorfosis. Hacia una teoría materialista del devenir*, pp. 73-86.

and motionless melancholy. We believe that it is not present in the ethical proposal of Butler, and that, just like Butler, authors like Ernesto Laclau help to think of emancipation precisely from the negativity or constitutive absence of the subject (or social being). We consider that this rejection of negativity brings with it a rejection of antagonism, which is rooted in both European difference and Latin American feminism. In the first case, we discuss the feminisms anchored in the difference theory – *l'écriture féminine* or a certain renovation of queer and gender theories – that assume an ontological difference in its affirmative dimension in a constitutive manner and without undergoing the game of negativity. Among the most important representative authors are Irigaray, Braidotti, and Preciado. They collect Deleuzian and/or Derridean trends that consider the differences between themselves and further strengthen the negativity aspect of the difference between dialectic and identity from some kind of Lacanian root.

Further, autonomist feminism implies those feminist trends that originate from post-Marxist roots that collect – from authors such as Richard Hardt, Toni Negri or Gilles Deleuze – current readings of power, desire, and the common in Spinoza to think of emancipation. In the post-Marxist trend, we find authors such as Verónica Gago³⁵, whose idea of power, desire, or communal life is assumed from an affirmative ontology that dismisses any traces of the theory of negativity. With regard to the decolonial feminism perspective, we found the works of María Lugones³⁶ and Rita Segato³⁷, among others. Post-Marxist feminism as well as communitarian feminism tend to establish disagreements that appear to define the privileged and unprivileged platforms for emancipation in advance. Thus, on the one hand, the state, representation, political parties, leader figures, and confrontations are on the side of abstraction and patriarchy, communal life,

³⁵ V. Gago, *La potencia feminista. O el deseo de cambiarlo todo*, Madrid, Traficantes de sueños, 2019.

³⁶ M. Lugones, *Hacia un feminismo decolonial*, «La manzana de la discordia», VI (2), 2011, pp. 105-119.

³⁷ R. Segato, *La crítica de la colonialidad en ocho ensayos y una antropología de la demanda*, Buenos Aires, Prometeo, 2013.

immanence, new ways of feminist organization, and body are on the side of emancipator feminism on the other. It is possible that the coincidence that we could find between European difference feminism and Latin American autonomist feminism is their affirmative conception of desire. That is, an expansive desire that affirms itself without anything opposing or ‘resisting’ it. This is very different from negative desire, rooted in the Hegelian, Lacanian tradition, or even in the popular field of Latin America.

4. *Feminism and Popular Field: A Reflection from the Perspective of Negativity*

It appears that when we intend to think of feminism in proximity to the popular field or emancipating populist traditions, there is a kind of short-circuit that occurs. It is difficult imagining them together as a part of the same political struggle, thereby creating a split that debilitates the strength that unifies each of them³⁸. If we wonder about the disagreements between feminism and popular field (or populism), then we think that in the case of feminism, the rejection comes from certain Latin American (autonomists, communitarian, and/or Spinozists) and European (from difference theories) feminist traditions that expel the antagonism (hence, negativity) at the moment of configuring their own political bets. In other words, they consider that a real feminist organization would be that capable of eradicating the conflictive logic (Pólemos) characteristic of the masculine – and, therefore, populist – ethos and, in its place, configure an affirmative and conciliatory logic. However, in the case of the popular field, the problem would be certain difficulties in thinking about the feminization of the popular and the role that would fit the political category of care. In other words, it is about the difficulties that the popular field often experiences when it turns feminist demands into a second-order problem.

³⁸ L. Cadahia, *Amor y emancipación: hacia una feminización del populismo*, in *Un feminismo del 99%*, Madrid, Lengua de Trapo, 2018, pp. 83-100.

When stated in terms of care issues, when prioritizing contradictions among social production, the value (work), and the capital, then different kinds of oppressions are omitted, thereby generating a contradiction between the reproduction of social life (care) and capital.

However, what happens if instead of widening the gap between feminine and the popular field, we question this disagreement and begin to explore a bond between both of them? We believe that this possibility can be found among the current debates regarding the importance of *feminizing politics and culture*; in this sense, it would be pertinent to question not only this new place of enunciation but also enquire into where it leads us – that is, what kind of decipherment does it suppose for the theoretical proposals that seek to unite feminism and popular field (populism).

From this perspective, in *Problemas teóricos, problemas políticos* (*theoretical problems, political problems*), Paula Biglieri and Gloria Perelló wonder what happened to thinking when we assume, on the one hand, that patriarchy is one of the oldest ways of cultural domination, and, on the other hand, that this is precisely the cultural way, understood as a socio-historical order, which «inform to those categories with which we think the ontological think»³⁹. The questioning argued in the text helps them to elaborate the idea that the theoretical categories, which have been produced in a specific socio-historical context, cannot escape from it. In the authors' words, «these categories are 'contaminated' of ontic contents because only then can they be inscribed in the dominant speech of the time»⁴⁰. But they go one step further and wonder about the extent to which ontological categories and cultural ways are not already contaminated by the patriarchy. In turn, therefore, the following question arises: How «to rethink the theoretical wordings in a symbolic universe including the new manners of social organization resultant of equality rights conquests from last years?»⁴¹.

³⁹ P. Biglieri and G. Perelló, *Problemas teóricos, problemas políticos*, unpublished, for the conference *Derivas de una izquierda lacaniana. En torno a los textos de Jorge Alemán*, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2019.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

Following this thread of thought, the authors suggest that feminism performs a double role: from the ontic viewpoint, it would be the existing strength of the matter that enables us to produce a short-circuit from within the homogenizing practices of the master embodied in the figure of the dominant heterosexual white man. However, from an ontological perspective, it is a catachrestic figure that is used to thinking when names *fail* in their attempt to name what has not happened yet (and from the acknowledgment of this constitutive failure). Therefore, feminism operates as a failure from both viewpoints. In practicality, it constitutes both a cultural and political failure within the dominant *ethos*; ontologically, it indicates what cannot be named but only imagined – a feminist humanity. To the best of our understanding, this proposal suggested by the Argentinean thinkers Biglieri and Perelló, reintroduces – through the concept of failure – the question regarding negativity within feminist debates. Therefore, within the Latin American post-Marxist legacy, there appears to be a tension between thinking about feminism as an affirmative power (from Gago's perspective) or assuming it as a constitutive failure (from the perspectives of Biglieri and Perelló). In this direction, it appears to us that the second position is more fruitful for the purpose of this article. This is because we believe that the search for an affirmation in existence, without assuming the negativity that makes us deal with its opposition, risks killing politics and, in that manner, closes the source that opens this unique form of a fight for emancipation. The question we believe to be crucial is 'Is it possible to think about an idea of care that includes this antagonism?' We believe that in order to achieve it, three presumptions founded on certain communitarian notions of Latin American feminisms must be problematized along with the ontological trend of reading the new feminist dynamics in accordance with an affirmative power that extends from itself without specifying the negativity (antagonisms). These presumptions are autonomism, immediateness illusion, and the belief in corporeality as the 'otherness' of power. With regard to the first aspect, it is considered that any appeal to the state or to the forms of representation would function as a mechanism of cooptation of the immanence of the struggle for

emancipation. This may result in the need for self-management without any kind of institutional or representative mechanisms. The second aspect, linked with the first one, consists of believing that there are places prior to any kind of articulation – that is, places owe their existence to themselves; therefore, they would be privileged to lead social transformations. In turn, by not being articulated by the classical ways of politics, they would represent the ‘otherness’ of power. Finally, that place prior to any other articulation and free of any cooptation coming from the state would not be nothing else but the body and affections expressed in their multiple affirmative differences (without constitutive negativity); any attempt to articulate them in a unity would just complicate them in the traps of power.

In this sense, it is important to warn that the issue of care linked to this philosophy of affirmative power brings to the forefront an old problem of modern philosophy: the problem of community. We cannot forget that the appearance of the individual figure – understood as a disintegrative force of the community – produced a classical tension between the individual freedom and the dissolution of social structure. Facing the latter, different types of answers emerged, fluctuating among the longing of lost unity, the attempt for recomposition, the acceptance of the age of individualism, and the transformations of a sense of community.

We could say that the contemporary interpretation of this problem works as an unconfessed gender dichotomy: the feminine as the place where the sense of community or the possibility of communitarian life is recovered through the care or affective and expansive reunion of the bodies, and the masculine as the disaggregational element perpetuating the antagonism, power, and hierarchical organization of society.

The great inconvenience of assuming care from a communitarian or assamblearian perspective lies in this affirmative expansion – immanent from and for itself – that it does not explain how these articulations are produced, the extent to which they are debtors of the internal conflict articulating them, and, mainly, how they appear to manifest the absence of solidarity and political imagination with other spaces of political fights. It is as if they were repeating the naivety of believing that they are privileged subjects

for emancipation, of political fights that have been overcome – as if unions or the state were the trace of a past time – and, the most complicated, assuming that the fight being contaminated with other subjects or moments would deteriorate the actual emancipation. Are we not at risk of assuming a completeness of the subject, feminism, that jeopardizes the undetermined and non-guaranteed character of political affiliation? On the contrary, it appears that it is not about discovering privileged places (or subjects) of social transformation but about, following Nancy Fraser, reinventing within the political praxis the distinction between the reproduction (care) of life and production (work) of social value without sacrificing the horizon of emancipation; however, this must be done without sacrificing the social protection that offers a populist and feminist interpretation of institutions⁴². To the best of our understanding, the problem does not lie in the issue of care but in the autonomist matrix (communitarian as well as ontological affirmative) that is used to think about this problem. In this sense, we believe that it is possible to reflect on the political role of citizens from a different matrix using antagonism as a starting point, without assuming the politicization of the domestic or communitarian aspect as the only possible political horizon.

According to the Republicanism experts Julia Bertomeu⁴³ and Antoni Domènech⁴⁴, the idea of domesticity is a construction of the premodern power, which is tied to an idea of affection and property – that is, the domestic ‘thing’ is referred to as the property of a feudal lord with ties to their vassals. Thus, women, children, and slaves belonged to the sphere of domesticity, which was a space deprived of rights, and were at the mercy of their *feudal lord*. In other words, the domestic thing was the relationship between

⁴² N. Fraser, *Las contradicciones del capital y los cuidados*, «New Left Review», C, 2015, pp. 111-132, p. 132.

⁴³ J.M. Bertomeu, *Fraternidad y mujeres. Fragmento de un ensayo de historia conceptual*, «Estudios de Filosofía», XLVI, 2012, pp. 9-24.

⁴⁴ A. Domènech, *El eclipse de la fraternidad. Una lectura republicana de la tradición socialista*, Barcelona, Crítica, 2004.

the Lord *and* the Servant. Although modernity brought the destruction of the feudal lifestyle, it retained domesticity as a space of perpetuation of property ties within a patriarchal context. The thinker Carole Pateman⁴⁵ explained that while in the public sphere each owner would be a free citizen of the republic, in the private sphere, the owner would own everything assumed as such – lands, workers, wife, and children. Thus, each man is free as long as the owner is and, owing to that, can receive an equalitarian treatment by others; however, within the domestic ties, he retains the figure of a patriarch. Here, closer to Bertomeu than Pateman, women ‘under his charge’ and everyone dependent on this figure (workers, indigenous, blacks, peasants, children, etc.) play a role. Thus, the citizen, owner of his own, becomes an ambiguous figure, breaking the chains of feudal social ties, but guaranteeing for his status the propagation of the traces of patriarchal social ties. Domesticity, then, is not a ‘property’ of women but the place where they have been confined next to other oppressed subjects.

For this reason, perhaps the challenge is not a revindication of *domestic management* but rather thinking of how the same oppressed individuals have historically rebelled against this mechanism of domesticity through political organization. In this sense, the struggle of the oppressed has been characterized by the destruction, and not by the revindication, of domesticity as a social tie. We perceive it as more pertinent to assume that what is called domesticity, from a patriarchal perspective, in reality has been reconfigured as the popular field – that is, from the perspective of an oppressed subject. Then, domesticity is the closed reverse of the *re*-public, that public *res* whose *thing* all of us are required to decode; or, in other words, a public progression of domesticity, understood as a means of political organization that questions the idea of property organized from the conception of the public in accordance with the oligarchical-feudal stream. It appears to us that heterogeneous experiences of the popular field, in its multiple means of oppression – class, race, and gender – have been capable of cultivating an alternative comprehension of the public. It is probable that the dispute is between two conceptions of the public: the commoner

⁴⁵ C. Pateman, *El contrato sexual*, Barcelona, Anthropos, 1995.

public and oligarchical public. Therefore, we believe that it is in this dispute for the 'public thing' where one can observe the inauguration of a public scene of care and the possibility of configuring the common.

In this direction, when the task of thinking of the public from a feminist perspective was set (and from an ontology of negativity, in terms of failure), what is intended to be differently worked upon, in a negative manner, is the public *vs.* This action implies reverting the logic of neoliberal mediation through institutional arbitrations of the popular field. It is not about establishing a false disjunction between feminism and the popular field or between the latter and the state but about liberating our states of the neoliberal capture and their restitution for a common cause: the dissensual use of people. Then, a state of care is a historical opportunity for our republics, a form to revert our static inertias and dissolve the patriarchal traces that lead us, vertiginously, to the self-destruction of humanity.