

# Feminist Political Imagination

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Translated by Alex Brostoff

Imagining always comes from somewhere predetermined by experience. Even if the aim is to imagine pushing beyond all that is known, our imaginations don't fully let go of every fiber of the familiar.

What if what we need is "political imagination"? Today, it is not uncommon to hear precisely that: we know what must be changed, we have a clear analysis, but we lack the political imagination to change the actual sentient order of this existence: that which is lived as injustice.

Imagination cannot totally destroy the frame of existence. Politics, for its part, tends to reenact accords, agreements, and contracts. Such is the dilemma of contemporary politics. In this way, the double formulation "political imagination" does not manage to take us much beyond what is currently possible, for it is constrained by two limits: one that is proper to the imagination and another that is produced by political activity itself.

On the one hand, these two limitations make the incessant search for the new and the original chafe the framework at some point. On the other hand, these limitations also mean that politics only recapitulates some scene that is familiar to it in one way or another. It bears mention that this familiarity presupposes an attachment, a place, and a body politic. This body proceeds from a universalizing claim subjected to the mechanisms of heteropatriarchy. In turn, this claim implies that what underlies this mechanism is a narrative of the self as singular, the iron link between body and identity, and the narrative of that body as "natural." Faced with the subjective knot that binds politics to imagination, we must acknowledge that the coordinates that enclose the imagination are none other than those of singularity, identity, and the natural.

In *Not One Less: Mourning, Disobedience, and Desire*, María Pia López pushes back against these two limitations, eschewing simple and familiar invocations of the political imagination. Such repudiation is not an abandonment of politics. No. It is a protest against an order, a disruption of its framework. Supplementation is the strategy for such disturbance—supplementation of what the political imagination excludes, what it neglects, what it cannot imagine. Hence, supplementation makes change through two interrelated acts. First, it makes the limits of a collective body visible, and, second, it crosses those limits, conjuring an unforeseen body for politics itself.

That supplement is feminism. The meaning of the word *supplement* must be made clear. The dictionary warns us that a supplement is that which reinforces, adds, or increases, but it is also a “loose leaf,” one which is inserted into a work when it is already finished. When the androcentric political imagination is in decline, when it cannot exceed the limits of its own imaginings, feminism will not be an addition or reinforcement but a change in common sense and politics itself.

A necessary and urgent change, like the one that brought norms prevailing in Argentina in 2015 to an end, a change in which thousands and thousands of women said no more murders, no more disappearances, no more institutionalized patriarchal violence, no more domestic violence, no more abuse and rape.<sup>1</sup>

This unflinching opposition against existing norms is crystallized in the cry “Ni una menos” (“Not one less”). From this intervention and transformation in the politics of men and their violence, María Pia López’s book resonates with that cry, reverberating in the writing of another possible politics: “a single phrase, which has become password and symbol, common code, filled with multiple meanings, a tool employed by diverse political constructions.”<sup>2</sup>

In the bond between activism in the Colectivo Ni Una Menos, between taking to the streets and writing, *Not One Less* seeks to be a record and a report. But at the same time, it also traces a genealogy of the Argentine feminist political imagination. The cry “Ni una menos” is tied to the unfathomable mourning of the mothers and grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the experiences of imprisonment and torture suffered by militant leftist women during the dictatorship in Argentina (1976–83).

They all count; they all matter. María Pia López rightly reminds us of Antigone’s body and status as an archetype whose politics disrupt androcentric reason. Antigone is a repudiation and a supplement.

Another transformative figure when it comes to the politics of men (and their imaginations) is Demeter, the mother of black fury. It is Demeter who turns melancholy into insistent action. According to the Greek myth, Demeter searches ceaselessly for her daughter, who has been kidnapped; she will even go down

to Hades to rescue her if necessary. Demeter does not stop, and her ire conjures another body (and experience) for the collective. Both figures point to the limits of the political imagination and experiences of men who, by voicing their politics, do nothing but exclude the bodies and the experiences of women.

It is time to begin to change these narratives.<sup>3</sup> It is time to express other meanings and stories in the spaces we share. It is time to give voice to grief as a public, collective experience, to disobey patriarchal rule, and in this process, to wish for other stories and other relationships to emerge—stories and relationships capable of enabling a new *poiesis*, one that unites other bodies, experiences, and attachments, giving rise to a feminist political imagination.

Writing this book has a political objective: to further understand the actions and achievements of contemporary feminism; to impede the conservative appropriation and stop the work being done from devolving into something purely ornamental; to describe the powerful process of constructing a feminist political subject. We are witnessing the dawn of feminism in real time, hearing the questions it poses and seeing the disobedience it incites. . . . The pages that follow are an attempt to contribute to the discussion on how to conceptualize this movement and also an attempt to gather some “strands of thread” with which to weave our political imagination.<sup>4</sup>

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#### Notes

1. For an analysis of patriarchal violence, see López, *Not One Less*, 22.
2. López, *Not One Less*, 3.
3. In this respect, see López, *Not One Less*, 42.
4. López, *Not One Less*, 11.

#### Work Cited

López, María Pia. *Not One Less. Mourning, Disobedience, and Desire*. Translated by Frances Riddle. London: Polity, 2020.