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# NI UNA MENOS. POLITICS ON A PLANETARY SCALE<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

In the twenty years that have followed the emergence of globalization, the political scene has gradually lent itself to analyses centered on the crisis, not only of the tendency towards integration between different regions of the world, but of the globalizing perspective itself, to the point of converging towards the exact opposite, i.e. the renewed fragmentation expressed by neo-sovereignisms. This analytical periodization, however, does not question the very constitution of the political, since the role played by the conflicting forces that have marked different regions of the globe is neglected. The beginning of the twenty-first century, although with some differences compared to the great mobilizations of the late twentieth century, was in fact marked by significant conflicts, widespread and connected in a peculiar way, which not only complement and extend the phenomena examined, but impose a paradigmatic shift. Which in turn demands a conception of politics in line with the approach of “new materialism”, a large scale and situated expression of which can be found in the transnational movement «Ni Una Menos», and in its analytical and conceptual production.

## Keywords

Feminism, Transfeminist Movements, Cosmopolitics.

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## Resumen

En los veinte años que han seguido a la aparición de la globalización, la escena política se ha prestado progresivamente a análisis centrados en la crisis, no sólo de la tendencia a la integración entre las diferentes regiones del mundo, sino de la propia perspectiva globalizadora, hasta el punto de converger hacia todo lo contrario, es decir, la renovada fragmentación expresada por los neosoberanismos. Esta periodización analítica, sin embargo, no cuestiona la propia constitución de lo político, ya que se descuida el papel desempeñado por las fuerzas conflictivas que han marcado las diferentes regiones del globo. El inicio del siglo XXI, aunque con algunas diferencias respecto a las grandes movilizaciones de finales del siglo XX, estuvo de hecho marcado por conflictos significativos, extendidos y conectados de manera peculiar, que no sólo complementan y amplían los fenómenos examinados, sino que imponen un cambio paradigmático. Lo que a su vez exige una concepción de la política en consonancia con el enfoque del «nuevo materialismo», cuya expresión a gran escala y situada se encuentra en el movimiento transnacional Ni Una Menos, y en su producción analítica y conceptual.

## Palabras clave

Feminismo, Movimientos transfeministas, Cosmopolítica.

In the twenty years that have followed the emergence of globalization as a key to geopolitical interpretation, which articulated the analysis according to the perspective of a techno-financial trend in homologation or functional differentiation, the political scene has gradually lent itself to analyses centered on the crisis not only of the tendency to integration between different regions of the world but of the globalizing perspective itself, to the point of converging towards the exact opposite, i.e. the renewed fragmentation expressed by neo-sovereignisms. This type of analytical periodization, however, rests on approaches that do not question the very constitution of the political; even when progressive integration at a global level is presented in terms of socio-economic and technological flows and processes, rather than identity and cultural dynamics in the constitution of political subjects, the role played by the conflicting forces is neglected. The beginning of the twenty-first century, albeit with some differences compared to previous mobilizations, has in fact been marked by relevant conflicts, widespread and connected in a peculiar way, that not only integrate and extend the phenomena examined, but impose a paradigmatic shift.

In partial resonance with the Foucauldian invitation to investigate the different forms of power by reversing the perspective and “taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point” (Foucault, 1982, p. 780), conflict as a key to analysis works as a conceptual operator that allows to identify lines of connection and fractures that would otherwise remain invisible; it allows to capture the emergence of new tensions deriving from previous processes, based on peculiar connections; to identify a multiform temporality, which escapes both the progressive linearity and the cyclicity of economic and institutional crises; it allows to consider as political actors those that the hegemonic models or the tradition of political analysis itself does not recognize as such; in other words, it allows to bring out subjects, activities and conditions—as they emerge from feminist and decolonial and environmental struggles—that the disciplinary and cultural canon has left out or relegated to minor history; last but not least, it allows to grasp how the dimension of the political, and its very characterizations, are modified by the tensions that break it up and recompose it (Castelli, Raparelli & Giardini, 2020).

In fact, if we abandon the idea that the scope of the political is already defined in its components, from sovereignty to demos, and in periodization, including crises, aftermaths and reactions, and assume instead the perspective of the dynamism of the same constitution of the political in its extension and characterization, it becomes clear that the tools of the analysis need to change. In this sense, the socio-environmental crisis and

the pandemic itself are not to be considered as political issues only when they become the subject of national, international and transnational public policies, for which the health of populations, rather than citizens, raises problems of socio-economic government; rather, they should be considered as dynamic elements that reconstitute what we mean by politics, right down to its material and spatial articulations. A significant example comes from the now well-established debate on the anthropocene (Bonneuil & Fressoz, 2013), of which the pandemic itself can be said to be a declination: thinking the political has always posed the question concerning the shared dimension that underlies it – in the different forms of demos, state of nature, contract or identification with a physical and symbolic space –: how should this commonality be considered today?

According to the established readings, this is a dimension that emerges from the crisis of the modern pairs State-Nation and State-Society as an effect of the deterritorializing scope of techno-economic processes; a dimension that affects the very constitution of human beings, between biopolitical governmentality and the anthropogenesis of *homo oeconomicus*; a dimension that, moreover, enters into crisis because of the complexity with which the activities of government are confronted. However, these different perspectives do not convey the specificity of the processes that at present affect political life itself on a planetary rather than global scale: in fact, commonality appears not as homologation to a predominant order, nor as the return of a given condition –the condition of the human species undifferentially affected by natural forces– but as a dynamic, which is constituted through dramatic tensions at the crossroads of interdependence and interaction between forces that are not only human. It is therefore a matter of conceiving of politics in line with the approach developed by “new materialism” (Haraway, 2016), an expression of which, both large scale and situated, can be found in the transnational movement *Ni Una Menos*, and in its analytical and conceptual production.

## **A spatio-temporal multiverse**

Assuming this approach, which considers the material emergence of conflicts, a first modification concerns the temporal and spatial dimension of politics. In a renewed materialist conception, it is in fact a matter of taking into account also the tensions that, although exercised, do not appear or cease to appear on the different scenes of representation and communication, from the mainstream mass media to the most formalized debates, thus taking into account also what is not limited to the domain

of the visible and the verbal. To this end, we may borrow, on the one hand, from the Deleuzian considerations on the transformation of power and resistance —the mole that digs is replaced by something more pervasive and volatile, the gas and the snake (Deleuze, 1990) — and, on the other hand, from the feminist category of invisibility —the non-recognition and representation of violence as well as the extraction of value from what is not even considered to be a resource (see Picchio, 2020; Gago & Mezzadra, 2015)— thus complementing the widespread observation about the karstic temporality of movements.

The transnational movement *Ni Una Menos*, in fact, is not the continuation or the simple resumption of the season of conflict sparked by the economic policies of privatization and the conflictual institution of new commons (Linebaugh, 2008); and yet from that humus it emerges and elaborates new fronts of conflict and new analytical tools. The previous mobilizations against “the new reason of the world” (Dardot & Laval, 2009) had as a constituent projection a renewed sense of the “common” and the public, materialized in processes of self-organization and self-government, as happened in the laboratory par excellence that was the impressive Spanish movement of 15M. Also belonging to this phase is the elaboration of a renewed critique of neoliberal political economy which, through the *dispositif* of debt, extends exploitation to subjectivation (Lazzarato, 2011) and at the same time intensifies it by transforming the labor force into a mere resource from which to extract value (Zibechi 2011; Gago & Mezzadra, 2015).

Although there have been attempts to read the front of conflict opened by these mobilizations as a unified perspective, against a renewed law of Capital that insisted and unfolded in the space of globalization, the mobilizations expressed conceptual and analytical innovations and showed potential for more than just reactive elaboration. Indeed, it was a season that redefined the sighting points with regard to the constitution and transformation of politics, incubating an awareness of the plurality of needs, conflictual fronts, and related tools of analysis that were needed. In fact, it is precisely this material capacity to intervene on the forms of associated life, creating alternative ones – from the anti-eviction pickets in Spain to the occupations of cultural and artistic spaces and housing occupations, from the self-organized cooperative networks to the referendums concerning the water services to the redefinition of urban spaces such as Tahrir Square in Cairo and Gezi Park in Istanbul. On the contrary, it was precisely this capacity to produce alternatives, to redefine politics itself, that prompted an equally multiform repressive reaction, from military and police repression in Turkey and the

countries of North Africa to the evictions of European cities, to administrative repression accompanied by the ideology of a “return to legality”. If the analyses of the phase following this wave of mobilizations have generally focused on the ideologies generated from the forced retreat of these drives —ideologies of resentment and fear, which have produced scenarios interpreted according through the lenses of populism and neo-sovereignism—, it is however in those same years that a mobilization such as Ni Una Menos emerges, unfolds and relaunches on a global scale the conflicts, as well as the practices of self-organization against neoliberal policies and violence<sup>2</sup>. Silvia Federici, one of the major references of the movement, well expresses the relationship of recovery as well as of innovation that the feminist perspective entertains with the struggles for the commons (Federici, 2018).

Starting from the pervasive wave of feminicides affecting disparate countries and cultures of the world —officially acknowledged by international Conventions since 2011 (Council of Europe Convention, 2011) and appearing in international media since 2013— the genesis of the name Ni Una Menos is linked to the denunciation of feminicides in the Mexican city of Ciudad Juarez and in particular to the injunction *Ni una muerta más*, launched by the poet and activist Susana Chávez Castillo, who was also killed. However, it should be noted that since its inception, the movement has gone beyond the denunciation of violence against women and reworks the previous systemic analysis accompanying them with innovative practices that redefine politics itself. In fact, a diagnosis is developed on the destructive effect of the economic and financial policies in force which, weighing primarily on women, affect everyone’s life, the personal sphere as much as the public one and exert violence not only on human but also on non-human life. From the publications in Argentina (Gago & Cavallero, 2019) to the document collectively written by *Non Una di Meno* in Italy (*Non Una di meno*, 2017), it is clear that femicide is no longer a “gender issue” and has become the key to an active reinterpretation of living conditions on a global and planetary scale. The practices of mobilization and self-organization are developed in the capacity of alliance between different contexts and mobilizations and in an intersectional approach, that is, an approach that takes into account the differences of gender, race and class. Also, violence against women and gender leads to the collective elaboration of a different organization of human relations and activities, and their interdependence with non-human actors,

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2. The approach here adopted allows to trace the emergence of the Ni Una Menos movement without resorting to a presumed continuity between the different phases of movements united in a preliminary and unproblematic way by gender characterization, as for example in Chironi (2019), especially pp. 1472-1473.

starting from the primary and disavowed role of the activities of care and reproduction, historically attributed to women.

## Material and not only human subjectivation

If in Europe the season of mobilizations preceding *Non Una di Meno* bears the memory of the European governance of Greece's financial crisis, in Argentina, from where the *Ni Una Menos* movement unfolds on a transnational scale, this memory carried the traces not only of the 2001 debt crisis but also of the strong response in terms of popular self-organization (Gago, 2015). This is the approach adopted with feminicide, the critical awareness of the ambiguity inherent in assuming women as victims or as specifically vulnerable subjects<sup>3</sup> and in the consequent need to identify the conditions that produce a multiplicity of forms of violence.

To grasp the innovative characteristics of the transnational movement *Ni Una Menos*, a first indication comes by differential comparison with the #metoo campaign (Peroni, 2018). The latter, in fact, unfolded primarily through the gesture of individual denunciation, which then gained public extension through media resonance and the consequent coming out of further denunciations. This is a mode proper to the tradition of mobilizations for civil rights, within the framework of liberal democracies, which is triggered by individual exemplary gestures and aims at a goal included, or partially extending, in the framework of the existing legality (Giardini, 2020). However, the very subject of the complaint —the violence acted and suffered in a relationship where gender is an essential component— being codified on the basis of an individual measure, encounters strong symbolic and representational limits, also with respect to responses in legal terms. In fact, while “feminicide”, although laboriously, has come to be codified as a crime, the complaint of other forms of violence is placed in an area that exceeds the legal framework and therefore gives rise to the evocation of private, ethical and cultural mitigating circumstances. On the other hand, individual denunciation, in addition to the difficulty in gaining a public dimension, has regularly been exposed to the risk of delegitimization through the argument of the subjective perception of what happened. It is therefore no coincidence that, in Italy, *Non Una di Meno* has from the beginning supported the depsychologization, as well as the deindividualization of violence against

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3. The category of vulnerability, popularized in LGBTQ movements through the work of Judith Butler, becomes problematic, if not unusable, in these new analytical and activist circumstances (Pedace, 2018).

women, opting for a systemic reading that is alternative to the neoliberal models of analysis of social phenomena (*Non una di meno*, 2017a).

The refusal of the individual scale and measure —already present in the conceptual production of feminisms of the second half of the Twentieth century<sup>4</sup>, and already scrutinized by the criticalities of the new precarious generations— starting from the second decade of the 2000s further unfolds in the genealogical resumption of feminisms characterized by the critical reinterpretation of Marxian categories, and in particular of the theoretical production of the group claiming wages for domestic work, founded in Padua in the Seventies and developed internationally through activists and authors such as Selma James and Silvia Federici (*Non Una di Meno Padova*, 2020). In this case too, it is possible to appreciate the innovative scope of Ni Una Menos through the differential comparison with the approach, also Marxist-inspired, of the text *Feminism for the 99%. A Manifesto* (Arruzza, Bhattacharya & Fraser, 2019). The transnational dimension of the movement, in fact, while researching and identifying the fronts of conflict in a trans-individual dimension, does not rely on the resumption of a collective and therefore uniform subject —“women” as a contemporary analogue of the “workers of the world”— but rather takes up and updates the feminist lesson on the criterion of difference against the universalism that persists in the Marxist conception of the subject of struggles (*Non Una di Meno*, 2017b). In other words, to the age-old aporias of the relationship between socio-historical totality and subjectivity, between structure and superstructure, as well as between theory and praxis, the assumption of a framework of analysis and denunciation that invests the couple formed by capitalism and patriarchy allows for entirely innovative developments (Federici, 2004).

It is here that politics encounters a first redefinition of its boundaries and stakes. Violence against women and gender allows to consider processes that combine the economic, the ethical and the symbolic, thus overcoming the opposition between a critique of political economy based on the key concept of exploitation and analyses in a culturalist key based on the concept of domination (Giardini, 2015). Rather, violence is presented as the result of economic, legal, and moral pressures, which are articulated in a vast ideological orchestration and aim at a renewed division of labor, both productive and reproductive, able to guarantee social and economic order at the same time. Subjectification —being identified and identifiable as functional components of such a

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4. This is a paradigm critique that unites the most diverse feminist approaches: from Carole Pateman's critique of the liberal contract to the proposals for a relational conception of the subject as in Carol Gilligan and in Italian difference thought, and to the situated subject of Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway.

productive and social order— becomes a component of renewed *dispositifs* of exploitation which, avoiding economic reductionism, reveal the use of gender and race marks.

In the formulation “If I have no value, I won’t produce” —which accompanies the mobilizations and the launch of the 2017 strike— the value extracted, which is neither recognized nor returned to sexualized and racialized activities and forms of life, is identified as the point of exercise of a violence that achieves economic ends through cultural and symbolic tools. The concept of extractivism, elaborated by the struggles in Latin America against the intensive exploitation of natural resources (Zibechi, 2009), is thus extended to the human, to different forms of life and characterizations of identity, which become resources from which to draw extra value that is not returned in any form, not only because it is not quantified according to the wage measure, but above all because the negotiations and conditions characterizing the exploitation of what is still recognized as labor force are annulled (Gago & Mezzadra, 2015). As in the case of domestic activities, and as it became visible in the struggles of the Seventies, the extraction of value takes place in the intertwining of economic processes, normative and ideological dimensions, which entail a symbolic and economic regime of invisibilization that instrumentally uses gender, race, and class identifications as well as behaviors traditionally excluded from the scope of political and economic analysis, such as affective and love relationships (Tabet, 2014). The concept of “naturalization” of the activities and characteristics of the feminine (Guillamin, 1992), elaborated to capture the symbolic dynamics that establish the hierarchy between the sexes, in these more recent elaborations has regained the economic dimension and extended the exercise of violence beyond the merely human and productive sphere.

Exploitation and the category of reproduction become not so much the key to a partisan claim, but rather the paradigm for redefining the critique of the economic system through the forms of life that constitute it (Simone & Giardini, 2015). Moreover, such analyses extend beyond the limits of claims related to a presumed gender issue because of the progressive extension of the status and function of reproductive activities to other social groups, as well as the tertiarization of productive forms in the Global North (Morini, 2007), the new colonizations that make human resources available through the new international divisions of labor (Busi, 2020; Ciccarelli, 2017), as well as the extraction of value from the living and from the very conditions of human reproduction (Cooper, 2008; Barca, 2020).

The concept of reproduction entertains relations of differentiation and consonance with the category of care, established in previous decades especially in academic debates

(see Casalini, 2020). Indeed, care tends to divest the boundaries between morality and politics and takes on a systemic dimension by using patriarchy —the normative social and cultural framework that establishes the hierarchies of gender differentiation— as a perspective that integrates the different phenomena and problems of associated life. However, the more recent resumption of the category of reproduction allows to include not only the dimension of gender but also other differential axes implied by the multifaceted exercise of violence, expanding the scope of the analysis both in the intensive direction of the elements considered and in the extensive direction of the integration of areas as political issues. On the one hand, in fact, through the use of the category of patriarchy, which exceeds Western historical periodization, it is possible to identify the cultural, symbolic and social structures that situate the different subjects affected by violence —transphobia, control of bodies, expulsion from lands and norms inspired by religious and ethical concerns; on the other hand, it is possible to situate in the different contexts the ways in which the cultural dimension contributes to the dynamics of exploitation— from the racialization of the functions of care in the organization of private and family relationships in the Global North to the reinvisibilization of reproductive activities in the pandemic, from the exploitation of biological materials to the renewed ideology of the heterosexual organization of society, a phenomenon that turns out to be characteristic of Western and European countries and not only of societies that are assumed as primitive in comparison to a presumed advanced Global North.

It appears, therefore, that the political dimension identified by the movement can be defined as systemic, but in a new way: it is a multiverse, which extends beyond the human, which is able to take into account the folds of subjective differentiations and different regimes of violence, which extends beyond individual intentionality and imputability —from seclusion to racialization, from invisibilization to symbolic and communicative distortion— and which considers the conditions of the exercise of violence, as well as its different degrees of perceptibility. A systemic and yet situated analysis, that dismisses all homogeneous representations for the purpose of mobilization on a transnational scale.

### **Commonality: alliances, self-determination, forms of conflict**

If in the modern tradition of political thought, strength and effectiveness result from the logic and organizational criterion that unfolds in the principle of the One-to-many,

at the beginning of the twenty-first century the diagnosis of the ineffectiveness of this principle had definitively matured, in the face of the dynamics of globalization and the mutations of the political that no longer presents itself in the synthesis of sovereign power, but in the multiverse of the glocal, of biopolitics and governmentality, as well as in the dynamic creation, both extensive and intensive, of new frontiers. Furthermore, also with respect to these more recent political elaborations, the *Ni Una Menos* movement has brought about further innovations, from the point of view of both political form and content.

What do transfeminist mobilizations for freedom from debt in Argentina, for the legalization of abortion in Argentina and Poland, for the legal and financial recognition of counseling and anti-violence centers, for freedom of education and affective relations in Italy, for freedom of demonstration in Turkey, for civil, social and political freedom in the countries of North Africa and the Middle East have in common? In fact, as much as femicide is invoked as the emblem and point of origin of the movement, the systemic and situated approach to violence against women and gender violence has made the expression and connection of a multitude of conflict fronts possible; the Italian example of *Non Una di Meno* is particularly significant where the transnational dimension has been refracted into a multiplicity of city collectives, which have allowed participation to be extended beyond the main urban centers.

The political commonality elaborated by *Ni Una Menos* first and foremost modifies its nature, making it a material process that removes it from both an act of initial identification and the end to which it aims through action. Echoing the preference for performative commoning (Linebaugh, 2008) over the substantive form of the commons, and assuming the centrality that feminisms attribute to practices, commonality presents itself as a dynamic and material dimension: there is no uniform condition of oppression attributable to a generic subject, “women”, from which to start; rather, in the face of a pervasive dimension of violence, mobilization constitutes its own points of encounter and alliance. The practices that accompanied the constitution of the movement reveal first the conflictual nature of the mobilizations; conflict appears as an operator of connection between situations, fronts of mobilization and different languages. The dynamics of the assemblies, precisely because they were constituted by ongoing conflicts, did not take place with the aim of reaching a discursive agreement—in the assemblies the critique of the naturalization of the sexed bodies of women and transgender subjects coexisted with the analogy between the plundering of land and violence against indigenous women’s bodies, without fear of running into aporias—but took shape starting

from a preverbal encounter, as it emerged from the shared situation of mobilization (Giardini, 2020). In the perspective of a situated and differentiated constitution of commonality, intersectionality —a category developed in order to take into account the different conditions of racial, class and gender subalternity— becomes a practice of alliances between different economic, symbolic and legal contents and conflicts, through the material creation of their connections. The refusal of the political Subject —not the people, not the Woman— is substituted by the priority of subjectivation, which takes place through access to speech and to relational legitimation. The subject that emerged from these mobilizations is thus revealed not through nominal fixation but in an autonomous and relational attribution – sexed, gendered, racialized, transfeminist, transpecies subjects and issues.

A further innovative element takes up and situates in a different perspective what emerged in the mobilizations of the previous season, especially regarding the form of what have been called leaderless movements. Among the recurring characteristics, marking a discontinuity with the twentieth-century scenarios, these mobilizations were generally characterized as mobilizations in which the individuals that could emerge, especially in media communication, did not present themselves as reference figures for political decision-making and orientation, but rather as spokespersons for an elaboration collectively reached through assembly and writing practices, to restate the intention to redefine the institutions of associated life, therefore breaking with the top-down organization that characterizes representative politics. Another common feature is a form of mobilization —in Spain defined through the neologism “technopolitics”— that mixes physical actions, based on the interaction in presence, with the use of social media, both for organization and communication, to coordinate actions in different places of the city, for example, or guarantee continuity in participation to assemblies (Della Ratta, 2018).

*Ni Una Menos* has also rethought the forms of conflict, as in the case par excellence of strikes. Indeed, it has not only been a matter of re-signifying this instrument of revolt, assigned to the neutral canon of the Labor movement, but also of redefining it in its practical expressions, considering the transformations of labor and its use by subjects excluded from its traditional definition. The feminist global strike, called in over 40 countries in 2018 and 2019, blurs the distinction between economic and political strike by considering these two areas as being in a reciprocal relationship of action. It poses the material conditions to elaborate an idea of politics that considers economic struggles as a trigger of processes of subjectification and, at the same time, assumes the

struggle against gender violence as a point of access to the entire system of production and reproduction and its forms of exploitation, from which new economic struggles arise (Montanelli, 2018). It is a transversal conflict that triggers processes of subjectification by connecting different figures —dependent, precarious, intermittent, informal workers, unemployed, housewives— having productive and reproductive functions; it also considers the symbolic and discursive contribution to the extraction of value and exploitation that is exercised through the assignment of gender identities functional to the organization of affective, family and social relations, by proclaiming the “strike of gender and by genders” (*Non Una di Meno*, 2017a).

Further confirming the innovation brought about in redefining the political dimension of economic struggles, the claims for basic income combine, in continuity with the multiverse that characterizes the movement, specifically political issues —the subjectification and recognition of invisible or excluded subjects— with economic issues. The very formulation of an “income for self-determination” captures not so much the equity of economic treatment but the different scales of exercise of domination and violence that determine subalternity and new servile conditions (Chicchi & Leonardi, 2018, p. 18). In other ways, the claim for a self-determination income updates the demand for wages for domestic work of the political genealogies of the Seventies, thus becoming a tool for denunciation and above all for highlighting those specific forms of exploitation that burden the activities that guarantee social reproduction which are not considered productive labor (Global Women Strike, 2020). Not only a measure of economic equity, this specific claim for income presents itself as a tool for liberating the time needed to constitute the necessary spaces and institutions of social reproduction of dignified life; it is also as a tool for including invisible subjects and activities, affected by the double epistemic and socio-economic statute of violence, in the public discourse. It is no coincidence that during the pandemic the campaigns have denounced the invisible and yet essential subjects and activities such as the domestic care of relationships.

In its genealogy and in its karstic references to previous seasons of conflict, the movement *Ni Una Menos* – *Non Una di Meno* appears to be anticipating the new political coordinates necessary for an analysis of the present. In fact, what is at stake today —at a time when the insufficiency of the economic models based on productivity becomes patent, together with the reduction of the social domain to economic exchanges based on an individualistic anthropology, and the socio-ecological crisis exasperated by the pandemic— is a new conception of politics and the ability to include unexpected subjects and activities (Rispoli & Tola 2020).

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