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## DECOLONIAL FEMINISM, INFRASTRUCTURAL CONTRADICTIONS, AND THE AESTHETIC IMPACT OF THE ARGENTINEAN PRO-CHOICE GREEN SCARF

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**ABSTRACT** — The green scarf for the right to legal abortion is the material culmination of the Argentinian feminist struggle against gender violence and macho culture. This vibrant object creates empowering alliances and opens debate on participation, representation, and inclusion. Its function is to build a decolonial, queerfeminist infrastructure for greater and more unbiased healthcare. However, the green scarf utilizes exclusionary and colonial-normative infrastructure, reproducing patriarchal dynamics. Challenges to the production, distribution, and political objectives of the green scarf have yet to be addressed. Thus, its very existence both opposes and upholds oppressive infrastructures. Focusing attention on the aesthetic impact of the embodied apparition of the green movement, I will analyze its ambivalences and critically review the infrastructural contradictions that the mobilization of the green scarf is based upon. Although no spaces for feminist debate exist outside of white, colonial patriarchy, the green scarf framed the debate on reproductive justice and found an aesthetic of feminist struggle, allowing us to imagine another future.

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In Spanish *pañuelo verde*, in U.S.-  
American context green bandana.

— Since 2003, a ‘green scarf’ has symbolized the national campaign for the right to legal, safe, and free abortion.<sup>1)</sup> Until the passage of the law in 2020 in Argentina, the green scarf went from being a symbol of identification related to the bill to an emblem of feminist self-determination and sovereignty over one’s own body and a symbol of resistance against patriarchal violence. During the pro-abortion protests in the country, the synchronized use of raised scarves together with feminist phrases on flags, banners, and on the skin of the protesters, the rhythm of the constant drumming, and the smell and color of smoke from the flares re-created a moving protest monument in the urban space. Through the performative and mobile use of the scarf, the washable phrases on bodies, and the ephemeral scenography of colored smoke, a living statement was shaped time and again with the assemblies like a giant wave of green cloth, smell, and sound.

— The green scarf came to inaugurate and frame a space for political debate on reproductive justice and to found a (functional) aesthetic of feminist struggle, introducing a color – green –, an

object – a triangular cloth scarf –, diverse forms of showing that specific object – open with the arms up, around the neck, around the wrist –, songs – most of them with drums and lyrics – and specific texts/emblems to wear on the skin/naked body. Since its creation in 2003, it played a foundational role in what over the years became a key feminist symbol for the political participation of historically underrepresented groups and the right to decide whether to carry a pregnancy or not or whether to give birth or not – ultimately, a symbol for the autonomy of bodies.

— What I propose is that this bodily, visual, and acoustic experience brings a (functional) aesthetic that allows another possible world to be imagined (see Butler 2018 and Ponce de León 2021) and can be observed as a visual and performative practice. The feminist green tide borrows an aesthetic language/vocabulary and turns a militant act into an embodied performance in space. To this end, I suggest analyzing the staging of



the feminist pro-abortion protest through its aesthetic relevance, since it is through it that it reconfigures the way we think about feminism and, thus, the way we think about the world we live in. On this basis, an infrastructural feminist critical analysis of the green scarf as a vibrant object, and of the ambivalences within the movement arising from it, can be made. The aim is to provide relevant insights into certain contradictions such as the scarf being produced in conflicting infrastructural contexts, and yet not wanting to reproduce precisely this and fighting for another world. I argue that an analysis that allows the understanding of the entanglements of aesthetic practices with infrastructural dimensions in feminist activism or feminist movements can make a rich contribution towards a broader understanding of the intertwining of feminist movements, politics, art, and life. This is to some extent close to Butler's (2020) argument that we need infrastructures to fight for them; in this case, aesthetic mediums and performative practices to fight for the healthcare infrastructures they mobilize for. Yet these infrastructures embody white, colonial, supremacist patriarchy, so these processes merit a critical infrastructural analysis in pursuit of a further development of the feminist movement. Based

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Luciana Rolón (@lulirolea), Demonstration with the scarves (Pañuelazo) for the right to legal, safe, and free abortion in Buenos Aires in front of the National Congress of Argentina, on February 19, 2018. Printed on the scarf of the Argentinian Campaña Nacional por el Derecho al Aborto Legal, Seguro y Gratuito (National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion) is the emblem of the campaign: Educación sexual para decidir, Anticonceptivos para no abortar, Aborto legal para no morir (sexual education to decide, contraceptives not to abort, legal abortion not to die), 2018, Photography.

on this case study, I propose a method of analysis useful for other feminist activist movements, in order not to embody neo-colonial, white-supremacist, patriarchal infrastructures when that, in fact, is what we are trying to overthrow.

**QUEERFEMINIST DECOLONIAL INFRASTRUCTURE** — The green scarf for abortion rights is a queerfeminist political object and an actor with agency. It brings protesters together, makes them debate, and empowers them. The use of the scarf has a very particular function, as it makes people visible and allows them to take over the urban space and move through it by creating a massive and partly unspoken choreography.<sup>2)</sup>

— The green scarves in movement highlight the bodies of the people wearing them and the inscriptions on their bodies. Phrases such as *Las ricas abortan, las pobres mueren* (The rich have abortions, the poor die), *Aborto legal ya* (Legal abortion now) and *Que sea ley* (Let it be law), allow the demonstrators to claim their bodies as their own territory. These insignias, together with the purple feminist symbols and the colors of the LGBTIQ+ flag, configure and make visible the representational complex of the movement. Bodies and scarves come together to say “we are here, we are together and we matter.” In addition, the gatherings include singing and drumming, whereby an articulation of visual and acoustic elements also create a soundscape, a living intervention in the urban space. Bodies, fabric, music, and smells fill the space with a vibrant energy that resonates and bursts into the urban infrastructure, so that the materiality and visibility of the green scarf open a space for debate on feminist visibility, gender equality, and social as well as reproductive justice. In this debate, for example, the categories of *woman* as a political category (Vergès 2021: 23) and *gender* as a cultural category (ibid.: 31) are questioned and the experience of everyday oppression of certain groups based on sex and gender is critically reflected upon. Around the green scarf, symbolic and physical violence is also understood within the logic of a state-patriarchy-capital matrix (ibid.: 23), and the oppressive norms of Western body politics are debated (ibid.: 27). The green scarf also opens a space of resistance and total rejection of patriarchal norms in which rape and murder are not only accepted, but even encouraged as weapons to discipline women (ibid.: 6). The goal of the protesters is to create a more decolonial queerfeminist infrastructure for greater and more unbiased health care, as well as inclusive spaces of intersectional empowerment. Throughout this process, the boundaries between (functional) aesthetics, performativity, and activism become fluid,

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This way of using the scarf is not an invention of abortion rights protesters. It is an appropriation and homage to the *Pañuelazos* (demonstrations with white scarves) of the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo. With a call for the first *Pañuelazo* on May 10, 2017, five hundred thousand people gathered, raised white scarves in front of the Argentinean National Congress, and chanted: *30,000 compañeros detenidos-desaparecidos ¡Presentes! ¡Ahora y siempre!* (30,000 comrades arrested-disappeared! Present! Now and always!), referring to those who disappeared in the hands of the armed forces during the last Argentinean military dictatorship.

affirming that the power of the green tide is (also) explained by the multisensory and embodied spectacle created and inhabited by its protesters.

— Now, the purpose of the green tide is not to carry out performative practices in urban space, but to embed a decolonial queerfeminist infrastructure within the healthcare system, as well as an infrastructure for a space of intersectional visibility and empowerment. For this, the feminist movement of the green scarf uses one infrastructure to build another one, which provokes a high dependence between them (existing infrastructures, infrastructures in formation, and infrastructures to be built). In this context, the contributions of Austin (2009) and Butler (2020) are particularly useful to think of the performatic as a fundamental component in the formation of infrastructures and as a generator of reality. For Austin (2009), who observes language and the performance of speaking, language exists exclusively in the performance of speaking. Furthermore, he claims that certain forms of linguistic utterances are capable of changing the states of the social world. Judith Butler (2020), addressing performativity in gender, argues that the subjects who set performative acts are also the result of performative utterances. This interrelation between performativity thought as a generator of reality and feminist infrastructures becomes useful to think about how the decolonial feminist mobilizes and deploys.

— According to Vergès (2021), decolonial feminism is an umbrella term that proposes to think feminism from an anti-colonial perspective and looks at the connections between birth control, forced abortions, colonial slavery, European colonialism, and racism (ibid.: viii). It is multidimensional and intersectional, emphasizing the connections between reproductive and environmental justice, an end to femicide, and critiques the pharmaceutical industry (ibid.: 20) for its exploitative and patriarchal business model. It is an anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist, anti-sexist, and anti-nationalist feminism and identifies with an intersectional struggle for economic, cultural, political, reproductive, and environmental justice (ibid.: 66). It is a feminism that accepts the existence of other feminisms and enabling transnational and international alliances (ibid.: viii). Focused on post-pandemic outbreak recovery, for Krasny, a matter of care-feminist planetary imagination is at issue (Krasny 2023: 159). Around the green scarf, all these ideas are taken up with the aim of fighting against the oppressive structures that determine colonized bodies-territories and therefore their freedom. Yet this is not free of tensions. Different forms of power relations and domination coexist

within the green scarf. In it, partisan politics, notions of social and environmental justice, anti-speciesism, anti-abolitionism in relation to sex work, trans-visibility, the struggle for legal, safe, and free abortion, and notions such as the separation between Church and State are intertwined and discussed not always in a way that is liberating and overcoming for all. Narrow political ideas, certain forms of classism and racism, sex-work-abolitionism, and transphobic discourses also inhabit the green scarf, and are expressed during street gatherings and in the movement's discursive construction.

— As for the creation of better infrastructure in the public health sector, based on the assertion that abortion has to be treated as a public health issue, it is a combination of three measures that accompanied the campaign: The Law for Integral Sexual Education, the National Program for Sexual Health and Responsible Procreation, and the Protocol for the Integral Care of Persons with the Right to a Legal Abortion. The *Ley de Educación Sexual Integral ESI* (Law for Integral Sexual Education) was passed in 2006 and provides sex education in Argentina from kindergarten to the end of high school, with a focus on a human rights and gender perspective. The main objective is for children and adolescents to cultivate positive values related to sexual and reproductive health, in addition to developing self-confidence and respect for human rights and gender equality (Amnestía Internacional Argentina 2021). To this end, it strengthens the capacities of children and adolescents to live their sexuality in a free and pleasurable way. It encourages them to know their rights, develop critical thinking, and enrich the exercise of their civil rights, as well as to become aware of the responsibility for their own choices and behaviors (especially in relation to how they may affect others). The *Programa nacional de salud sexual y procreación responsable* (National Program for Sexual Health and Responsible Reproduction) is a law promoted by the women's movement as part of the claim for the right to decide, involving the State in the full exercise of human rights (Peker 2021). Its main objectives are to guarantee universal and free access to contraception and to reduce class inequalities. It also focuses on teenage pregnancy, clandestine abortion, contraception, women's participation in decisions about their fertility, as well as the prevention of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (ibid.: 2021). The *Protocolo para la atención integral de las personas con derecho a la interrupción legal del embarazo* (Protocol for Integral Care of Persons with the Right to a Legal Abortion) is a policy instrument that, as of the approval of the law in December 2020, establishes standards in Argentina for access and quality of care related to abortion and the post-abortion period.

The Protocol also establishes standards for the support and backing of the institutions that guarantee this right (Ministerio de Salud de la Nación Argentina 2021). It ensures that the procedure in Argentina is consistent with international standards for the protection of the human rights of women and people with childbearing capacity and promotes a normative model that focuses on health and allows for a greater level of social justice in the enjoyment of sexual and reproductive rights of the population. In particular, it expands the capacity of the State and all health systems (public, social security, and private) to guarantee the safety and opportunity of abortion (ibid.: 2021). Within this framework, according to Article 2 of the aforementioned law, women and persons with childbearing capacity have the following rights: to decide on an abortion; to request and access an abortion in the health system services; to request and receive post-abortion care from the health system, regardless of whether the decision to terminate is contrary to the assumptions allowed by law, and to prevent unwanted pregnancies through access to information, comprehensive sex education, and effective contraceptive methods (ibid.: 2021).

— It is clear that the traction of the movement has permitted another possible world to be imagined and to even manifest it in reality. Because all these measures together with the premise of a decolonial-feminist debate are fair, we are allowed to think that the green scarf symbolizes the struggle against a misogynist, racist-colonial, and patriarchal infrastructure. However, the green scarf simultaneously opens up a space for debate that is not free of colonial power relations and mechanisms of sexist and classist oppression. Therefore, in the following section I will analyze in terms of a decolonial-feminist epistemology in and from the South the ambivalences of the visibility and the use of this symbol of protest.

**INFRASTRUCTURAL CONTRADICTIONS** — The green scarf is an ambivalent political object. At the same time that it represents the feminist struggle for more public healthcare, more rights, and more visibility of the women's collective, it makes use of an infrastructure that mimics oppressive, racist, and sexist logics. I will briefly review different aspects in which I argue that the green scarf movement makes use of the infrastructure that sustains neoliberal capitalism and therefore abuses the collectives affected the most by the crisis, labor informality, racism, migrantism, and/or hetero-cis-sexism.

— The fabric types of the various scarves vary between modal, acrylic, nylon, polyester, and other blended fabrics with synthetic content. This type of fabric is light and cheap, can be mass-produced,

as well as very easily used and washed. Such material is rarely produced in Argentina, so it is assumed that in most cases it would be imported for little cost given a high volume of orders. Interestingly, this information is missing, which raises some questions about global interdependencies and the invisibilization of exploitative-capitalist infrastructures linked to the green scarf. In addition to the question of the origin and working conditions of the people producing the cloth, as well as the environmental impact of synthetic fabric production, a second question arises concerning the production of the scarf itself, once the cloth is shipped to Argentina. On behalf of the official campaign for legal abortion, since 2003 the countless green scarves have been made by nine different women's cooperatives throughout Argentina. Scarves were also produced by individuals who made them on their own and by independent producers not commissioned by the campaign; however, these are not the focus of interest here, but rather the women's cooperatives. These cooperatives are self-organized and self-managed groups that live off their own resources. These are mostly women workers of color excluded from the wage economy who produce at risk with their own resources, so the commissioning of women's cooperatives in the popular economy can also be critically examined. An anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist, anti-sexist, and anti-nationalist movement that denounces the inevitable intersection of economic, cultural, political, reproductive, and environmental justice (see Vergès 2021 and Wilkes 2015), accepts neoliberal capitalist conditions to informally produce the green scarf at incredibly low prices and with long-term polluting synthetic materials (Küchler 2015). In this way, the production of the scarf makes visible an ambivalent aspect of the movement by not questioning the infrastructure of the neoliberal system that exploits women of color in precariousness and contributes to environmental pollution, to the use of fossil resources, and therefore to climate collapse.

— Another debatable aspect of the green scarf is how it bases its performativity on the neoliberal capitalist infrastructure necessary for the staging of the protest. In terms of a feminist infrastructure critique, it is arguable that the green scarf feminist movement makes careless use of the infrastructure provided by all the people who participate in the movement but are left out of the protest. I am referring to the infrastructure created by the drivers of the buses, trains, and taxis that take the protesters to the center of the big cities and back; by the people who clean and tidy the hotel rooms where the protesters stay overnight; by the precarious street vendors who informally sell food and drinks to the protesters (see Zakaria 2022);

by the people who care for the protesters' children and families; by the people who initially produced and imported the green fabric; by the people who clean the street after the protest; and by all the people I do not mention, mostly precarized women of color often with migration backgrounds, whose work makes it possible for more privileged women in the green movement to fight for justice.

— A further pending debate is the diversity of strategies and methods of emancipation, autonomy, and liberation of women and people with childbearing capacity in relation to abortion. The case of how Mapuche women, one of the *Pueblos Originarios*<sup>3)</sup> of Argentina, approach abortion is a clear example of this. In the Mapuche community, abortion is practiced with traditional ancestral medicine. Western medicine, on the other hand, is perceived as colonial and patriarchal, and is therefore rejected. One of the most important representatives of the Mapuche women's collective and co-founder of the *Movimiento de Mujeres Indígenas por el Buen Vivir* (Indigenous Women's Movement for a Good Life), Moira Millán, explains that they advocate the decriminalization of all medical practices that protect life and self-determination over bodies and territories (Meyer 2018). Among them is the Mapuche medicine, which allows contraception and abortion. When *white* feminists ask the women of *Buen Vivir* about this, they explain that they do not talk in detail about their abortion practices because the reactions have proven to be disrespectful, neocolonial, and racist. They explain that in Argentina they have historically been persecuted for much less than practicing their ancestral medicine (ibid.: 2018) and therefore prefer to remain silent and painfully respond that the exchange of knowledge with *white* feminists has never been equal. This has to do with the way in which women from the *Pueblos* have been systematically excluded from the *white* feminist collective, having been denied participation in discussions for decades, or only allowed to express their views briefly, or in the final moments of meetings. This long experience of exclusion and racism led them to organize internally.<sup>4)</sup> As for the legalization of abortion after the green tide, Mapuche women are skeptical. For them, the debate on abortion among *white* women is not about legalizing it, but about turning it into a commodity for sale with Western medicines, which they reject as colonial and patriarchal (ibid.).

— Taking all this into account, the same feminists who fight for broader justice and political representation become those who exclude, allowing mechanisms of oppression and violence to be reproduced within this liberation movement. In the face of this, Women for *Buen Vivir* argue that feminism must necessarily be

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In South America and the Caribbean, *Pueblos Originarios* is used to affirm the original identity and existence of the aforementioned groups locally. It is a self-designation used to contradict the I-word.

4)

Since 2018, they have been meeting among themselves once a year, sharing knowledge, and organizing politically. These meetings are called parliaments. The first parliament, held in 2018 in Ensenada, Buenos Aires, was called *Primer Parlamento de Mujeres Originarias de Argentina* (First Parliament of Original Women of Argentina).



decolonial; otherwise, it remains patriarchal (Frontera / Litvinoff 2019). We must continue to reflect on these ambivalences in order to, while finding critical points, acknowledge that feminism has reached an unparalleled potential and is undoubtedly the great social movement of the twenty-first century.

**TOWARDS AN OVERCOMING POLITICAL PRACTICE** — As the pro-choice movement quickly recognized the power of the green triangle to construct a political identity and an atmosphere of shared, affective belonging, the scarf became progressively and indisputably part of feminist iconography. Using this symbol as an example, I showed that there are no public spaces for feminist debate outside of *white* colonial patriarchy. Even in the context of the intersectional feminist movement in the South, the structure that sustains colonial and patriarchal power remains nearly intact. Through these infrastructures (the one necessary to produce and distribute the scarf, the one created by the scarf itself, and the one that the green scarf actually aspires to create) things are held together and bodies, things, and technologies are organized.

— In my analysis, I argue that there are several infrastructures involved around the green scarf for abortion rights. One is the infrastructure that supports the production and distribution of the green scarf. The second is the infrastructure that the green scarf produces, staging the scarf, agglomerating feminists, and creating meaning. The third is the infrastructure in the judicial and health systems that the green scarf really wants to create. What I argued in this text is that a critical analysis of how the different infrastructures involved contradict each other in their methods and foundations is urgently needed. From the mistakes and failures in the creation of the infrastructure that the green scarf produces and distributes, the infrastructures that the green tide creates and the one that guarantees health around the decision to carry out a pregnancy could (and should) learn. For almost three years after the legalization of abortion, the third one (infrastructure to legal, safe, and free abortions) is still in the process of formation. The law decriminalizing abortion in Argentina now exists, but not all medical professionals perform abortions, not all patients who wish to have an abortion have access to clear and accurate information, and not in all cases in which an abortion takes place is there feminist accompaniment and guidance. This is central because one further infrastructure that I did not mention in this text (only indirectly linked to the green scarf and therefore not in the foreground of this analysis) is the infrastructure created by force of solidarity

and feminist militancy: *Socorristas en red*, a network of informal first aid workers that helped and accompanied persons interrupting ongoing pregnancies clandestinely until 2020. These not always heard first aid workers know firsthand the lack of infrastructure or rather what the infrastructure that the green scarf wants to create needs in order to be more feminist, sensitive, empathetic, and humane. I emphasize this because throughout my analysis I have stressed that it is not quite obvious that the feminist agenda is based on supportive, inclusive, and sustainable infrastructures when, ultimately, all these infrastructures in formation and types of cohesions have a single purpose: to treat women and people with pregnant bodies in a more humane way.

— Feminism in Argentina, with its (infrastructural) contradictions, came to contribute with a (functional) aesthetics capable of thinking of a transcending political movement. What I proposed in this article is that it is essential to critically analyze the infrastructures involved in this feminist movement, since at different levels infrastructures determine bodies. That is why the aesthetic and performative practices around the green scarf can and should be read in their interrelations with the respective infrastructures, since they have a direct link with the bodies. However, the intention of my contribution is also to rethink the infrastructural implications not only around the green scarf for the right to abortion but also in relation to social movements fighting for more rights. A genuine feminist infrastructural critique must accompany the whole process for the political struggle to be truly liberating and overcoming.

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Figure 1: Verónica Orsi, The green scarf of the Argentinian *Campaña Nacional por el Derecho al Aborto Legal, Seguro y Gratuito* (National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion). Printed on the scarf is the emblem of the campaign: *Educación sexual para decidir, Anticonceptivos para no abortar, Aborto legal para no morir* (sexual education to decide, contraceptives not to abort, legal abortion not to die), 2023, Photography.

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Verónica Orsi (she) is a consultant for diversity and inclusion, feminist and hegemony-critical education, and diversity-sensitive opening processes with a focus on discrimination-critical cultural work. She is also an expert on the transnationalization of the feminist movement in Latin America, the mass demonstrations against femicide *Ni Una Menos* (Not One Less), and the campaign for the right to legal, safe, and free abortion represented by the green scarf. She studied Visual Arts and Museum Management and Communication and is a Ph.D. candidate focusing on decolonial trans-feminism at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and the Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences Berlin.

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