

Will the dinosaurs disappear? Manzur and the perspectives of feminist struggles

Via [Marabunta](#)

The appointment of Juan Manzur as the new head of the cabinet of ministers in Argentina forces us to reflect on the achievements of the feminist movement, its scope and its challenges.

Until a few days ago, the governor of Tucumán was a recognized opponent of the Legal Abortion Law, he participated in events organized by sectors opposed to the law, but he is also the promoter of the approval in his province in 2018 of an anti-rights law called the “pro-life” law, as it is known by civil and ecclesiastical sectors that oppose the right of women and pregnant women to decide over their own bodies. This position marked the biased validation of violence against women in the health policy on sexual and reproductive rights in the province, generating gigantic obstacles to access to the legal termination of pregnancy. The most important case was the prevention of a legal abortion for an 11-year-old girl, victim of rape, who was forced to continue her pregnancy, with the torture and the physical and subjective damage that this action by the judiciary and the public health system implies. In addition, a woman who had suffered a miscarriage was kept in prison for 3 years.

Manzur becomes chief of staff after the archbishop of the city of La Plata, trusted by Pope Francis, criticized the national government for deviating from the “priorities of the slums” for promoting the debate on non-binary language, for promoting legal abortion, as if the abuse, violence, oppression suffered by women and dissidents were not a priority and did not have

an organic link to class inequality and poverty.

In addition to Manzur, Anibal Fernández was appointed Minister of Security, known for his political responsibility in the Avellaneda massacre, in which the militants Maximiliano Kosteki and Darío Santillán were murdered by the repressive forces. Another new addition was Julián Domínguez as Minister of Agriculture, a key player in improving ties with the agribusiness sectors that have been pushing for a deepening of the extractivist model.

The composition of the new cabinet is a signal to the sectors of power, the church, the repressive forces, the agribusiness sectors, and in short, a gesture also to the US embassy and the IMF. After Vice-President Cristina Fernández acknowledged that a policy of fiscal adjustment was being applied, Martín Guzmán, Minister of Economy and the main responsible for this policy, remains in his position and pays the IMF 1.9 billion of the debt incurred. This is a cabinet of governability, of order, that closes ranks with the main responsible for the crisis that most workers have experienced and that we women are unequally supporting.

On the other hand, Manzur's appointment has generated a strong rejection from the different expressions of Argentine feminism. The collective Actrices Argentinas started a campaign calling for Manzur's resignation and pointing out his responsibility in ensuring impunity in cases of sexual violence, due to his refusal to comply with the current legislation on sexual rights. The National Campaign against Violence against Women also expressed its opinion with the slogan #ManzurNo. Different regions of the National Campaign for Abortion Rights expressed their repudiation of the appointment, considering it a "step backwards in the rights won in the streets."

All these signs of indignation have generated at the same time a debate with other official sectors of feminism who claim

that the law has been defeated and that the appointment of the chief of staff cannot reverse it, or that the demands of feminist collectives are made from a "porteño-centric" feminism that is very distant from the reality of the provinces. As soon as the appointment became known, the Minister of Women, Gender and Diversity of the Nation expressed her support for the national government, stating that they will continue to work to elaborate policies that favor women's rights and the LGBTIQ+ collective. The minister sees no incompatibility between Manzur's appointment and the prioritization of a gender and diversity line. One has to pause and think about what these statements mean in terms of compatibility between a completely masculinized cabinet, populated by a man who condones rape and violence and prides himself on being anti-rights, on the one hand, and the very prospect of defending the rights of women and dissidents, on the other.

In principle, this call for the coexistence of both perspectives is based on the absolute fragmentation of the gender perspective with respect to a comprehensive political project. It is thought that equal rights for women and dissidents can be limited to a few isolated measures, a chapter of government action. This leads us to consider that it is not enough to offer training courses in gender perspective for public officials while those who run an office are militants against this perspective, that it is not enough to generate policies for the care of women who suffer violence if a patriarchal perspective of justice is maintained and if networks of complicity are maintained between the violent, governments, justice, and police.

On the other hand, the struggles waged by feminism are not sectoral struggles, they are struggles that highlight the systemic articulation of this neoliberal phase of capitalism with the oppression and exploitation of women and dissidents. The agreement with the IMF implies conditionalities and

structural reforms (labor, social security, health and education) that will deepen the overburdening of women in the tasks of reproduction and the overexploitation of the world of labor. There are no national policies to care for 50% of people below the poverty line, underfunded health and education sustained by precarious work, a growing housing deficit and repression as a response to the struggle for land to live. Violence against women and dissidents is multiple, systemic, and cannot be reduced to scant and insufficient responses to violence suffered in the family.

There is no doubt that the Law 27,610 on abortion is an achievement of the years of struggle of the feminist movement. However, in the 2020 debate, some feminist sectors linked to the party in power were reluctant to sustain mobilization and presence in the streets to press for its approval, arguing that it was enough to wait, since the government's political decision had been made. After years of presence in mobilizations that occupied public space, irreverently challenging institutionalism, a certain channeling of demand through parliamentary or governmental channels began to take shape. This generated tensions within the co-generated organizational spaces that the abortion rights movement had created for itself.

Exploring these tensions by delving into debates about strategies of struggle against patriarchy should help us to avoid being absorbed by the existing institutional structure, to go beyond it, to transform it profoundly. In this sense, since the day after its approval, the sectors in struggle, the collectives, the networks, the campaigns continue to organize for its implementation, to guarantee access, to confront the offensives of the conservative and anti-rights sectors. Many women have argued that an official can't go against a law that has been won, and this may be true, but it is also true that the ways to deny rights are multiple and the battles to guarantee these rights are permanent. In the first days of

September, a doctor was arrested for acting within the law in the province of Salta, and this is just a sample of the multiple obstacles and reactions that we face daily.

In this context, the question is about the limits of disputes within the existing institutional structure. The question of the patriarchal character of the state cannot be answered only with the need for more gendered public policies; it must also look at the links between its own organizational form, its bureaucratic form, its class character, and the need to perpetuate the oppression of women and dissenters. This is why from feminism (or some feminisms) we propose the link between the oppression of women and the debt policies promoted by the IMF and the World Bank as a way of disciplining peoples, between extractivist policies and the plundering of our common goods and the subjugation exercised against community and collective practices, between the needs of fiscal adjustment and the overburdening of women who sustain the tasks of caring for their bodies.

This patriarchal character is not the heritage of just one power of the state; we saw it in force in the legislative sphere during the debate in Congress on the legalization of abortion. But the judiciary is also plagued with examples of the reproduction of this logic of patriarchal oppression in the impunity of femicides, the lack of protection for people who suffer violence, and the bureaucratic obstacles to filing complaints and accessing protective measures. This is also evident in the individual and fragmented logic with which it intervenes, and in the responsible gaze on the victims themselves, who have to "prove" their suffering.

The advances of the gigantic mobilizations of the women's movement and dissent have managed to permeate the entire social fabric, institutions, political organizations, workplaces, bonds within families, and even cultural expressions. But patriarchy is still in force, we have not managed to reverse its systemic functioning, and the challenge

is still to revolutionize everything. While we consolidate the conquests, we cannot have a naive view of confrontation, we cannot give advantage, nor be tolerant with the oppressors; they are not resigned to losing the privileges of use and decision over our bodies and our lives. The dinosaurs are not gone yet, they are still squatting.

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In the struggles for legal abortion, those who rejected the law were called dinosaurs, denying women and pregnant people this right. This text is an allegory of the song “Los dinosaurios” by Argentine composer Charly García, in which he predicted that they would disappear, as well as a way to warn that they are still among us.

Photo by **Fátima Chaves**, Argentinian teacher and social communicator. Student and cultural activist in the social and political organization Marabunta.