

## Formations of Feminist Strike: Connecting Diverse Practices, Contexts, and Geographies

### Formations de grèves féminines : établir des liens entre divers contextes, pratiques et géographies

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Résumé de l'article

Cette introduction du numéro spécial portant sur la grève féministe soulève la question de ce qui reste marginalisé et négligé dans les discours dominants sur les manifestations féministes contemporaines. En nous inspirant d'expériences du refus féministe et d'approches qui y sont liées, qui intègrent des questions relatives au travail, nous présentons les façons dont on peut adopter l'optique des conceptualisations de la grève féministe pour établir un dialogue entre différentes pratiques, échelles et géographies, plus particulièrement dans les contextes postcoloniaux et postsocialistes. Au moyen d'une interprétation du documentaire d'Aliki Saragas, *Strike a Rock* (2017), qui traite de femmes vivant aux alentours du village minier de Marikana à la suite d'une importante grève, nous examinons la façon dont les notions relatives à la grève féministe peuvent être approfondies en positionnant les luttes de femmes noires en Afrique du Sud dans une longue tradition de résistance des femmes et en montrant la façon dont la résistance politique est liée à des questions relatives au travail reproductif. Pour comprendre l'entrecroisement des transformations du postsocialisme, de l'après-conflit et de (ce qui a précédé) l'europanisation, nous examinons le cas d'une grève de grande envergure et de manifestations publiques contre la faillite du chantier naval croate Uljanik, qui se sont déroulées en 2018 et 2019. Nos points de vue par rapport aux grèves de Marikana et de l'Uljanik démontrent la façon dont les femmes de ces deux endroits exercent une politique de refus et de résistance contre la ruine, la violence et la défaite. Dans la dernière partie, nous résumons le contenu des articles de ce numéro spécial.

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# Formations of Feminist Strike: Connecting Diverse Practices, Contexts, and Geographies

by Senka Neuman Stanivukovic, Ksenia Robbe, Kylie Thomas

**Abstract:** This introduction to the special issue on Feminist Strike takes up the question of what remains marginalized and overlooked within dominant discourses on contemporary feminist protests. Drawing on experiences of and approaches to feminist refusal that involve questions of labour, we propose the ways in which conceptualizations of feminist strike can be employed as a lens to build a conversation between different practices, scales, and geographies, particularly across postcolonial and postsocialist contexts. Through a reading of Alike Saragas's film *Strike a Rock* (2017) about the women living around the Marikana miners' settlement in the aftermath of a major strike and massacre, we explore how notions of feminist strike can be expanded by situating Black women's struggles in South Africa within a long tradition of women's resistance and showing how political resistance is bound to questions of reproductive work. To understand the intersection of postsocialist, post-conflict, and (pre-)Europeanization transformations, we consider the case of a large-scale strike and public demonstrations against the bankruptcy of the Croatian shipyard Uljanik that took place in 2018 and 2019. Our perspectives on the Marikana and the Uljanik strikes show how women in both places practise a politics of refusal and resistance against ruination, violence, and defeat. In the last section, we summarize the contents of the articles that comprise the special issue.

**Keywords:** feminist strike; Marikana; post-apartheid; postcolonial; postsocialist; reproductive labour; Strike a Rock; Uljanik

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## Introduction

This special issue draws inspiration from feminist strikes that have taken place across the world over the last decade in response to the rise of authoritarianism and the erosion of rights relating to bodily integrity and reproductive justice. The essays collected here grew out of our discussions about what it would mean to bring together a variety of perspectives on feminist protest movements that use methods and strategies of strike from across the world, and particularly from postcolonial and postsocialist contexts.<sup>1</sup> We view feminist strike as a lens for focusing on the various ways in which oppression and exploitation intersect in postcolonial and postsocialist settings. Simultaneously, we embrace the intricacies found within contexts, spaces, and subjects referred to as “postcolonial” and “postsocialist” to uncover multifaceted resistance that exists beyond conventional definitions of work, strikes, and internationalism. This helps us to extend and nuance feminist strike as an analytical framework by exploring topics such as work as a form of exploitation of women, LGBTQI+ individuals, feminist strike as a citizenship claim, rhythms of striking, and women’s internationalism in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Feminist strike presents itself as a global challenge to different forms of structural oppression and exploitation. Through a multiplicity of local and subterranean movements, the practice of feminist strike exposes the interlocking of colonial and gendered divisions of labour, racialized and gendered violence, and exploitation of land and resources. For instance, the 2015 *Ni Una Menos* strike in Argentina laid bare connections between femicide and laws restricting reproductive rights, and the entanglement between sexist and economic violence (Draper and Mason-Deese 2018; Gago and Mason-Deese 2019). The series of women’s mobilizations that took place in Poland from 2016 to 2018, that came to be known as the Polish Women’s Strike, and the 2017 women’s strike in Italy, also expose these connections (Kubisa and Rakowska 2019; Rudan et al. 2018). The struggles of Moroccan seasonal workers in Spain reveal their double exploitation as racialized women and migrant workers from the Global South; they also render visible how the exploitation of women’s reproductive work on the one hand, and resource extraction and land dispossession on the other, are linked (Filigrana 2020). Women’s hunger strikes position a pained body at the centre of resistance against the biopolitical control of the

state and other struggles against exploitation and oppression. At the same time, a hunger strike opens space for understanding the emergence of embodied forms of solidarity that entangles vulnerability and care with pain and discomfort. In their discussion of the 2016 hunger strike by the Montenegrin mothers against the government’s decision to limit and withdraw social and child-care benefits for mothers, Smolović et al. (2020) demonstrate how bodies can be used to create solidarity and new ways of living together without erasing the differences between women and their struggles. They argue that striking mothers have made their bodies open to the hardship of others, allowing for alliances across different struggles that might not have formed otherwise (Smolović et al., 918).

Feminist mobilizations activate strike as a practice that exposes the limits of the so-called general strike, to account for the significance of reproductive struggles, the varied forms and performances of interruption and refusal, and the calls for alliances in resistance to different and unequal experiences of exploitation. This is why scholars have described March 8 International Women’s Day as a practice that activates a strike as a means to assemble different protests and claims across time and space (Çağatay et al. 2022). Ewa Majewska sees feminist mobilizations as an attempt to establish counter-politics beyond the margins of a particular group or a single country (Majewska 2021, 57). Veronica Gago expresses the commitment to a feminist strike as a counter-power that works through assembling together “everything and everywhere” (2020, 243). As such, feminist strikes provide a critical lens through which to explore material and intangible connections between different bodies, conflicts and territories, and to assemble diverse politics and poetics of struggle, protest and liberation across space and time. Feminist strikes expose women’s reproductive labour as the backbone of neoliberal exploitation and oppression (Gago and Mason-Deese 2019). By interconnecting different struggles, feminist strikes have shown how different forms of violence directed at women work through distinctions between formality and informality, employment and unemployment, paid and unpaid labour, productive and reproductive work, migrant work and work done by nationals. It recognizes and includes rights claims, lived experiences, and spaces inhabited by those who are made invisible by these binary distinctions.

During the twentieth century, countries of the Global South and the Global East experienced large-scale modernization processes, both state-led and in the form of anticolonial movements, part of which was women's empowerment as equal citizens and workers. At the same time, women's self-organized forms of resistance were often captured and co-opted by dominant movements during the struggle, and by state narratives and institutions in their aftermath. The continuities in the forms of violence to which women were subjected during and after political transitions are also often overlooked. The end of the Cold War and the global advance of the post-Fordist neoliberal economy altered the meanings of work, class and resistance, and presented a significant challenge to the radical potential of strikes. However, the last decade has seen the global re-emergence of strike as a feminist manifestation that combines a focus on productive and reproductive work, and a critique of gendered biopolitics and of political economy.

Since the mid-2010s, large and small-scale feminist strikes have been among the most powerful forms of protest in many places across the world. The broad mobilization generated by some of these strikes has been due to the strategy of interconnecting the questions of bodily integrity and control (in the contexts of domestic violence and femicide) to issues of economic exploitation (precarious labour, feminization and abuse of care work, lack of legal protection), racism and exploitation of migrant labour, as well as extractivism and environmental depletion. As the Call for the International Women's Strike on March 8, 2017, written by members of the Argentinian *Ni Una Menos* put it, "[feminist strike] disrupts the domestic space as confinement; it alters union discussions; it activates resistances in the sphere of production and popular economies; it radicalizes fights against extractivism and plunder; it breaks apart the industries of spectacle; it permeates artistic languages; and it contests finance's control over our daily lives. It explodes in our protests and in our beds. Nothing is separate from the feminist revolution" (Gago et al. 2018, 268).

The resonance of this strike, which took place in more than fifty countries across the world, and of other feminist strikes of the mid-2010s, was due to their transversality—the engagement and interrelation of many different agendas from situated and embodied feminist perspectives (McGlazer 2018). At a time when many states embraced authoritarian politics and asserted their legitimacy through campaigns to 'defend traditional values,'

i.e., patriarchal norms, feminist activism that reached beyond rights perspectives and towards questions of systemic justice created a viable alternative to the politics of the state and state-aligned trade unions. In these new feminist practices informed by post- and decolonial critique and defined by calls for social equality, scholars such as Françoise Vergès argue that we might be seeing a return to, and reinvention of, anti-imperialist feminist movements of the mid-twentieth century that were depoliticized with the institutionalization of feminism during the 1980s and 1990s (2018).

The 2017 International Women's Strike created multiple connections and dialogues across the world that have generated further action and reverberated in academic-activist reflection (see, for example, Gago and Gutiérrez Aguilar 2020; Mayerchyk and Plakhotnik 2020; McGlazer 2018). This movement has redefined political mobilizations around work by connecting diverse struggles against exploitation and oppression across time and space. At the same time, there is a recognized need to cultivate dissensus when connecting these struggles (Gantt-Shafer, Wallis, and Miles 2019). Through this special issue we consider how the transversality of the feminist strike is reflected in struggles across different geographies. This special issue is an attempt to think through conceptions of feminist strike, to consider processes of feminist resistance that involve questions of labour, but do not use the framework of the international strike, and to see how existing theorizations might be extended through new juxtapositions.

Accordingly, articles in this collection address vernacular environments from which strikes emerge to explore how strikes continue to be an effective form of resistance against various forms of violence. At the same time, we examine how contradictions and tensions that emerge from situating the term *feminist strike* in postcolonial and the postsocialist settings further our grasp of terms such as *internationalism* or *transversal dialogue* (Koobak, Tlostanova, and Thapar-Björkert 2021). These contradictions involve the symbolism and debates surrounding March 8 in postsocialist settings, the fact that International Women's Day protests in the United States were historically dominated by white feminists, and how Western-centric interpretations of women's internationalism disregard the historical interactions between anticolonial and socialist feminists (de Haan 2023; Kis 2012; Moss and Maddrell 2017).

The articles included in the special issue foreground struggles that trouble the established links between the terms *global*, *feminist* and *strike*, and take up the question of what remains marginalized and overlooked within dominant discourses on contemporary feminist protests led by women. This collection addresses the massive demonstrations that have been widely recognized and discussed, and also includes analyses of protests that until now have been largely overlooked. The special issue includes the following: feminist analyses of diverse forms of resistance against state violence in Belarus, India, Iran, Liberia, and Zimbabwe; reflections on activism in times of war in Syria, and in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as anarcho-feminist protest in Poland during the postsocialist transition; and perspectives on feminist struggles in Italy. The authors draw attention to places where work has always been precarious and where class struggles intersect with other forms of resistance to oppression, such as in India, where class status remains bound to the caste system, or in South Africa, where, as we note in our analysis of post-apartheid feminist strike, industrial and domestic labour have been, and remain, strongly racialized.

Through the works assembled here, we aim to rethink the meaning of a feminist strike through the dissensus that arises from the encounter of different mobilizations that can be understood as a feminist strike. Furthermore, we are interested in mobilizations that are not necessarily connected and entangled in transversal alliances and solidarities. To understand what is made relational by a feminist strike and what stands outside of these relational encounters, we explore the specificities of situated experiences of feminist strikes across different geographies. In their research, Bonfiglioli and Ghodsee (2020) insist that contemporary transnational feminism needs to be built on a more robust reading of history that resists the erasure of coalitions of women in the Global South with socialist women's movements throughout the Cold War. Staying close to the contradictions and tensions formed by alliances that emerge from the strikes in practice helps us to avoid dehistoricizing the phenomena of feminist strikes.

In the section that follows, we illustrate and elaborate this approach through two case studies, asking: who can use a strike as a tool in their struggles? We explore the intersection of productive and reproductive work in the aftermath of the 2012 strike and massacre as taken up in the documentary film *Strike a Rock* (2017), made by South African director Aliko Saragas. We then situate the

same question about gendering of work and protest in the context of the 2018 strike at the Croatian shipyard Uljanik. Accordingly, we use feminist strike as a lens to build a conversation between the daily struggles of women living in the settlement around Marikana as represented in the film, and the silenced women's reproductive and productive labour in the Uljanik shipyard. This conversation exposes how the "post" in these postcolonial and postsocialist experiences links current inequalities and exploitation of women's work and bodies with enduring structures of past oppression as well as resistance. In the case of Marikana, we reflect on how the film situates the exploitation of Black women's reproductive work within the frame of the enduring regime of racial capitalism. Uljanik shows continuities in the glorification of shipyard workers as an ideal of a masculine socialist man on the one hand, and resistances to economic (neo)liberalization of industry on the other. Whereas memories of socialist work open space for resistance to inequalities and exploitation, they also render work and struggles masculine. Also, feminist strike—and the conversations across different women's struggles that we build through it—helps us see the 'posts' beyond the ruination and rupture dichotomy. It shows how promises of economic and political transformations are conditioned by industrial degradation and negated by state violence. Our perspectives on the Marikana and the Uljanik strikes show how women in both places practise a politics of refusal and resistance in the face of ruination, violence, and defeat.

### **The Marikana Massacre through the Lens of Feminist Strike: Aliko Saragas' *Strike a Rock***

The question of the interrelation of productive and reproductive work, and of who can use strike as a tool, is one that is taken up in the documentary film *Strike A Rock* (2017) made by South African director Aliko Saragas in the aftermath of the 2012 Marikana Massacre. On August 16, 2012, thirty-four of the thousands of miners who were participating in a strike at Lonmin platinum mine in the Marikana area near Rustenburg, South Africa, were killed by the police. The police encircled the miners and opened fire, shooting at them with automatic rifles. No fewer than fourteen of the miners were shot in the back, while others were hunted down and shot at close range as they fled from the police. In the aftermath of the massacre, a commission of inquiry was held, and although it determined that the actions of the

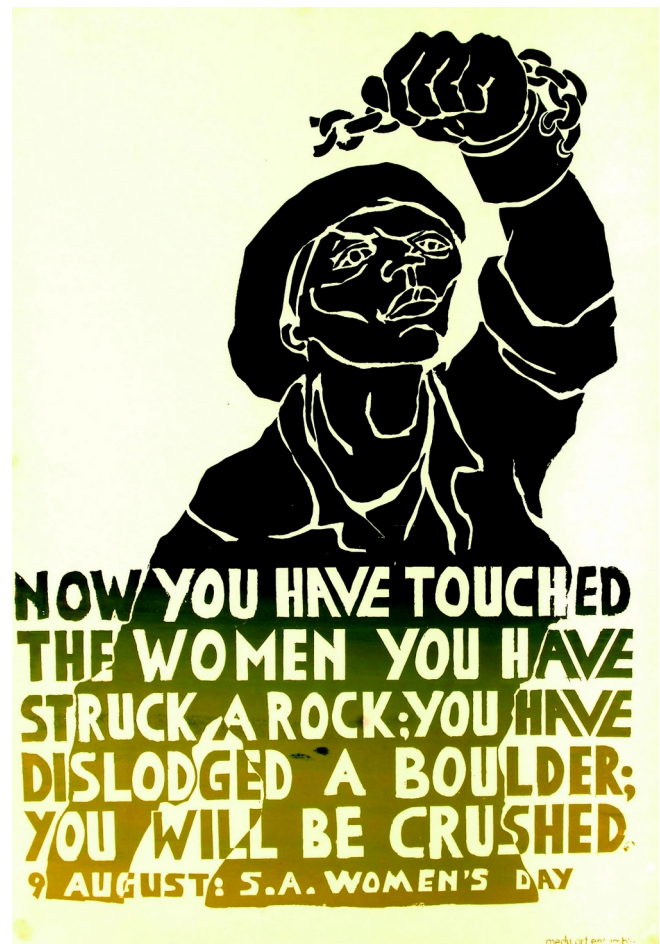
police, the Lonmin Mining company, and state officials were to blame for the massacre, none of these parties were held to account. The commission failed to interrogate the systemic inequality in the mining industry and the living conditions in the area surrounding the mine, which led to the strike. In the three years that the commission sat, just one hour was allocated to Sikhala Sonke, the organization of the women of Marikana, to articulate their concerns. Although women live and work in Marikana, most accounts of the strike and massacre, including documentary films, have focused entirely on men.<sup>2</sup>

*Strike a Rock* represents the daily struggles of women living in the Nkaneng settlement near Marikana and their ways of political organizing after the massacre. It portrays the everyday living conditions on the mines and the care work performed by women in the absence of proper sanitation, housing, or possibility of waged employment. This focus is entwined with the depiction of women's political organizing as they form Sikhala Sonke to call the Lonmin mining company to account and protest ongoing violence in the aftermath of the massacre.

We argue that the politics and aesthetics of entwining the private and public, political and economic, productive and reproductive aspects of women's work constitutes the locus of a feminist strike. By applying this understanding of feminist strike as a lens for reading *Strike a Rock*, we can see how the mediation of women's struggles in this film rests on the entanglement of metaphorical and material aspects of strike. After all, the community of women depicted in the film does not go on strike, nor do they refer to their activism as feminist. However, everything they do—the carework and political work they perform—is represented as closely related to the Marikana strike, its causes and its consequences. The film connects the ongoing struggles of this community to the longer histories of women's struggle against apartheid and reframes our understanding of strike, both general and feminist, by focusing on the materiality of women's daily labour that sustains life in an informal settlement, thus rendering visible the types of work and working subjects that are 'struck out' by the narrow conceptions of labour and the political that have historically dominated how strikes are conceptualized.

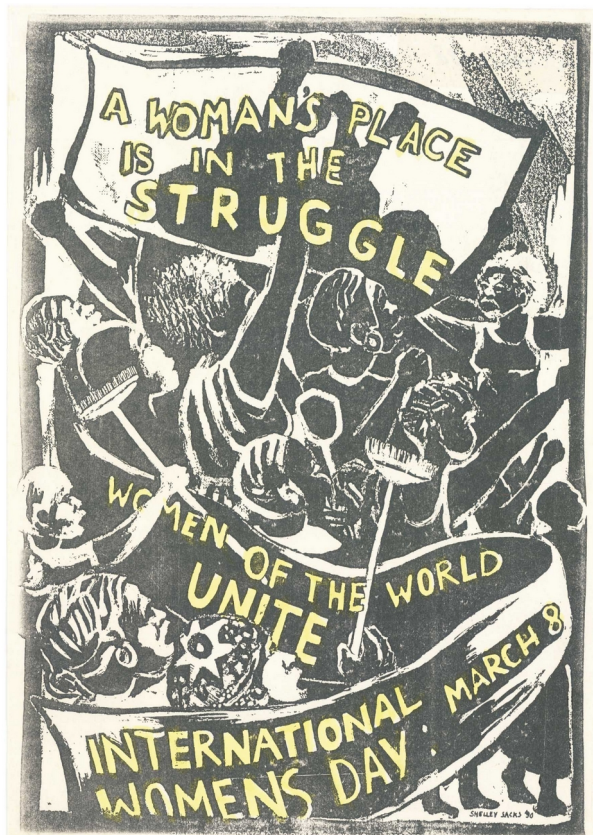
The film's visual and verbal language relies to a great extent on historical allusions, through which it creates the sense of a continuity of women's labour and resistance

during and after apartheid. The title of the film invokes a line from a famous anti-apartheid resistance song: "Now you have touched the women, you have struck a rock: you have dislodged a boulder; you will be crushed." The song was sung during the Women's March of August 9, 1956, when more than 20,000 women marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria to protest against the pass laws introduced by the apartheid state. During the 1970s and 1980s, the line "You have touched the women, you have struck a rock" (*wathint' abafazi, wathint' imbokodo*) became a slogan that was used during anti-apartheid protests as well as in protest literature, visual art, and theatre. The phrase was used in the widely circulated poster produced in 1981 by Judy Seidman, who formed part of the anti-apartheid art collective, Medu Ensemble, to commemorate the Women's March of 1956.



**Figure 1:** "Touched the Women." Silkscreen poster by J.A. Seidman with Medu Art Ensemble, Gaborone 1981. Original print in collection of MoMA, New York. Image courtesy of Judy Seidman.

“Strike a Rock” was also used as the title of a 1986 play directed by Phyllis Klotz in collaboration with Thobeka Maqhutyana, Nomvula Qosha and Poppy Tsira, that toured nationally and internationally. During the last decades of apartheid, the image of Black women raising their fists as a sign of protest became iconic, symbolizing the struggle against racial and capitalist oppression. With its origins in early twentieth-century socialist labour movements and its wide use in antifascist and anticolonial movements across the world, this gesture and image was perceived as connecting a variety of struggles against oppression locally and internationally.



**Figure 2:** “Women of the world unite.” Silkscreen poster by Shelley Sacks, South Africa, 1990. South African History Archive.

The image on the poster for the film *Strike a Rock*, featuring Thumeka Maqwangqana posing with her fist high in the air against the background of the mining complex, creates an immediate link to the iconography of women’s political and labour struggles in South Africa. It situates the women of Marikana within a history of South African women’s resistance against apartheid that in-

involved a strong workers’ movement and internationalist accents during the 1980s.



**Figure 3:** Poster for the film *Strike a Rock*. Director Aliko Saragas

Women living in Marikana, as we see in the film, and as Asanda Benya’s (2015) anthropological research demonstrates, have been subjected to violence and marginalization in multiple ways, as informal workers, as migrants and speakers of languages other than the local seTswana (used in education and health care), and as unregistered partners of mineworkers. As Benya writes, “the exploitation of workers underground is seen by many women in Marikana as an extension of their marginalization, an attack on their dignity and contempt for their contribution to the country’s economy, its ‘growth and development,’ hence they sympathize with workers when on strike and join in solidarity with them” (2015, 554).

*Strike a Rock* underscores the link between the struggles of men and women in the mining community, as it shows that it was the women who kept the strike alive after the massacre, by protesting against police violence

and attending the hearings of the commission of inquiry. The film intertwines the scenes in which women perform reproductive work (household tasks, childcare, taking care of each other) mostly in the absence of men, and productive labour (organizing to protest, negotiating with the Lonmin management, party politics) and shows how their lives are a constituent part of the mining economy. It includes long scenes that represent the effort of cleaning and washing in the absence of running water, or when roads are flooded in the shack settlement.

At the same time, the film zooms in on the labour of politics—women holding councils, attending court hearings, holding protests, negotiating, and includes footage of one of the protagonists, Primrose Sonti, commuting between Marikana and Cape Town where she serves as an MP for the political party, Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). The EFF was launched in response to the Marikana massacre and received support from those who hoped it would protect the interests of the poor. The film follows these hopes as it depicts women welcoming EFF party leaders who visit the mine, as well as their disappointment when the party uses Primrose Sonti as a token without providing a space for women's politics and without addressing the conditions under which the women continue to live.

The aesthetics of the film is particularly evocative in the scenes depicting women's physical and emotional labour of sustaining and taking care of members of their community. The representations of hard domestic work, such as women clearing their flooded homes after heavy rains, alongside views of the mine in the aftermath of the massacre, reveal how Black women's labour is central to South Africa's extractive economy. According to Helene Strauss, these scenes "expose a South African energy legacy that continues to rely on two types of extraction for its own survival, namely, first and most obviously, of mineral energy (in this case platinum), and, second, of the muscular and psychic energies harvested from labouring bodies in the realms of both production and social reproduction—women's bodies literally become the sources of their own energy as they hand-wash clothing in the absence of electricity infrastructure" (2020, 264-5).

The ending of the film represents the protagonists, Primrose and Thumeka, exhausted by the labour of struggling for survival and justice. Can they strike? Clearly, for those women who are not employed at the mine, or who are employed under the most precarious conditions,

strike is not an available tool. But, as the film shows, all the work these women do is related to the Marikana strike to which they contributed through their reproductive labour and political effort. As such, the film can be considered a representation of a feminist strike through a radical critique of women's work and/as resistance in an extractive economy, rather than by withholding labour. This reading, however, necessitates a rethinking of both components of the term *feminist strike*. On the one hand, the women's work and activism here may not be regarded as feminist by themselves or the viewers. As director Aliko Saragas emphasizes, the film aims to show that "the idea of feminism can exist anywhere and in any circumstance. That it can exist and thrive in spaces of domesticity, where women are wives, mothers, sisters etc, in relation to a man. Feminism looks different in different contexts." (Medium 2018) On the other hand, the representations of women's activism and labour in this film gender our understanding of strike by reflecting on the types of work that make labour strikes possible.

This film expands notions of feminism and feminist strike by situating contemporary Black women's struggles in South Africa within a long tradition of women's resistance and shows how political resistance is bound to questions of reproductive work. By keeping its focus on a concrete situation and aesthetically framing it, *Strike a Rock* elucidates how the post-apartheid economy relies on devalued and invisibilized, yet essential, forms of labour.

## **Women of Uljanik through the Lens of Feminist Strike: Resisting Intersecting Labour Regimes in a Postsocialist Factory**

In the Croatian collective consciousness, Uljanik shipyard exemplifies complex transformations from Yugoslav self-management to a market economy. The shipyard moved from being a symbol of Yugoslav industrial expansion to becoming an epitome of struggles against postsocialist deindustrialization, aggressive privatization, and systematic degradation. In the 2000s, Uljanik developed another set of contradictions as it was seen both as a symbol of the socialist era's decline and as a place where Europeanization efforts aimed at bringing economic and creative rejuvenation. These diverse representations of Uljanik bring together visions of the shipyard as a restructured hub for future growth, as a symbol of Pula's working-class history and multicultural identity, as well



as a marker of urban decay and workers' struggles against deindustrialization. As such, Uljanik complicates notions of transition and the binary division between the past socialist industrial expansion on the one hand, and attempts to overshadow challenges of deindustrialization with promises of a better European future on the other.

The 2018 strike organized by the Uljanik workers against the delay in their paychecks and the threatening bankruptcy of the shipyard has challenged transition narratives by revealing the complex interplay of socialism, postsocialism, and Europeanization. Through the repertoires of work stoppages, public marches, and petitions, workers organized in the Initiative for Defence of Uljanik have demanded for the return of workers' control over the shipyard's management as a way to address mistrust in the governance structures, wage uncertainties, and anxieties about the future of the shipyard.

The Uljanik strike demonstrated how emotional attachments to industrial work or the factory can resist privatization and Europeanization pressures, fostering alternative production modes and opening space for alternative futures to emerge. It has connected early forms of resistance to Yugoslav market liberalization reforms, periodic union protests, and pushes for employee shareholding models in the 1990s, to contemporary resistance against deindustrialization. Furthermore, the strike portrayed Europeanization as a continuation of the destruction of socialist industry, revealing that promises of a better European future were linked to infrastructural decay. Since Uljanik declared bankruptcy in 2019, the strike marked the shipyard's decline as a symbol of Yugoslav industrial success and workers' self-management during transition, a slow and continuous process outside the temporalities of collapsed socialism.

To further explore how the Uljanik strike makes visible complex temporal entanglements between (post)socialism and Europeanization, we need an analytical vocabulary that exposes entangled temporalities of oppression and diverse resistances at the intersection of citizenship and work struggles. A feminist strike provides us with such a vocabulary. It helps us work through these contradictions to uncover how work can be a system of oppression and marginalization across continuities between socialism and Europeanization, and at the same time, make resistance to oppression possible. A feminist strike redefines a strike as a continuous process and not just a single event. As such, it also enables us to see how postsocialism encompasses the intertwining of past legacies

and potential futures and to understand postsocialist transformation beyond conventional narratives of evolution or revolution.

In the specific context of Uljanik, three core claims can be made. First, a feminist strike shows how socialist imaginaries of work can make resistance possible. Affective memories of socialist industrial labour and consequent attachments of workers to the factory or products of their labour unsettles the linear grasp of transformations (Petrović 2014). Protest narratives of the Uljanik strike show how memories of work and a factory under socialism provided a critical gaze that resists the normalization of discontents of Europeanization and related market economy transitions and refuses to allow these to be neutralized and normalized as remains of an inappropriate past (Bonfiglioli 2020). The Uljanik strike has transformed nostalgic memories of the past and uncertain promises of progress into a fight for a better present.

Nostalgia, in this context, becomes a productive force against the potentially damaging effects of progress, especially as articulated in Europeanization. Workers in the Uljanik context used nostalgia not as a defensive mechanism but as a way to resist labelling socialism as an uncomfortable past that must be overcome. They provided factual accounts of their experiences and emotional connections to their work, presenting it as a moral critique and an alternative to the devaluation of work in Uljanik.

More than reproducing state-building discourses that celebrated workers as heroes of socialist modernization and Yugoslav multiculturalism, the strike articulated lived experiences of work and the everyday under socialism and articulated affective attachments to the workplace as a moral critique of and an alternative to devaluation of work and production in Uljanik (Matošević 2019). Additionally, references to workers' self-management challenge the idea of a linear transition from socialism to a European future. In the narratives of workers, self-management is not seen as something that is lost but as a continuation and transformation of the past in the present. Brunnbauer and Hodges have shown how the paradigm of workers' self-management in Uljanik was an open-ended process that has outlived the end of socialism (2019). From the moment that it was introduced, workers' ownership and self-management was defined by the tension between demands for profitability and efficiency on the one hand and the shipyard's value as a contributor to workers' and public wellbeing on the other. Subsequent claims that the shipyard is a public good that

works for the community and the city are rooted in contemporary workers' struggles for the factory as much as they are rooted in the memories of the socialist past.

Second, a strike as a process makes visible how work as a form of oppression that silences women is made possible through the continuities between socialism and Europeanization. By collapsing rhythms of eruptive and slow resistances, feminist strike as a process connects the gendering of the work, factory, and city and related silencing of women's struggles in the context of Uljanik. It shows how masculinized work in the factory is entangled with feminized reproductive work at home.

Continuities between the repertoire of workers' protest actions during socialism and in the 1990s and 2000s construct a strike as a masculine act and erase the role of women in these resistances. Rendering a strike masculine silences different practices of waiting, endurance, postponement or feelings of exhaustion and failure, and practices of withdrawal and mourning as parts of the protest repertoire. Differentiation between the strike repertoire and everyday resistances is gendered because the repertoires celebrate the roughness and physicality of workers as icons of industrialization, breadwinners, and heroic protectors of family and struggle for the factory as a broader social justice struggle. Figurations of masculine work and a masculinized factory as a space of struggle are juxtaposed with feminized homes and the city as objects of these struggles. Moreover, by bringing together different rhythms of strike, feminist strike exposes the gendered entanglement between work and citizenship where workers constitute themselves as citizens of Pula by building ships. It further exposes the gendered representations of a masculinized Uljanik as a shipyard that works for the feminized city of Pula. Ultimately, it also shows how the Uljanik strike is connected to, and silences, the strike of female workers, in, for instance, Pula's garment industry, or the roles women played in making the strike possible.

Third, the strike-process reinterprets socialist failure. Contrary to dominant narratives portraying the Uljanik strike as a collapse of the socialist model, a feminist strike shifts the focus to quieter politics of endurance and adaptation. Instead of viewing the strike as a desperate attempt to rescue a failing socialist relic, it prompts us to consider how to act in the face of defeat and how to rebuild what has been damaged. As in the case of the women living in Marikana in South Africa in the aftermath of the massacre at Lonmin Platinum mine, in Ul-

janik, feminist strike as a lens, foregrounds the mourning and coping strategies of workers and residents in the aftermath of the strike, emphasizing the transformation of struggles.

Following the end of the 2018 strike and subsequent bankruptcy of the factory, organized resistance refocused on coping with the defeat and the aftermath of failed protest ("Uljanik za bolje sutra" 2018–2019). The post-strike period was defined by both a sense of melancholia combined with feelings of urgency to make sense of what the potential stoppage of production means for the future workers and the city ("Solidarno s radnicima Uljanika" 2019). The struggle for waged labour and struggles for production have been transformed and rephrased as a way of learning to live in the ruins of the big shipyard.

In socialism, the trope of a woman who works promised empowerment and citizenship recognition, despite the challenges of strenuous labor and low pay or the ongoing exploitation of women's reproductive roles at home. Losing their jobs due to deindustrialization also meant a lost promise of empowerment and recognition. Women in the garment industry, especially, resisted reforms that devalued labour rights and led to factory closures. Bonfiglioli's (2020) research sheds light on how women in the Kamensko textile factories balanced both their productive and reproductive roles, struggling for recognition after the factory went bankrupt and eventually closed. Through public protests and a hunger strike, these women emphasized their contributions to the factory, while also working to reproduce the socialist and the postsocialist state-building projects by providing clothing for the partisans, workers, and the political elites. At the same time, many of these protests and strikes remained invisible and those that were publicly visible were never framed as a national problem in a way that is comparable to Uljanik. Feminist solidarities and problematization of deindustrialization and devaluation of women's labour as a part of the feminist struggle was limited, mostly due to the split between the liberal and proletarian reading of feminism that continued from socialist to postsocialist times (Petras 2013).

## Overview of the Articles

This special issue is being published within the context of the global backlash against feminism and LGBTQI+ rights, and in particular, an attack on the rights of transgender people, in a time of war in Ukraine, Gaza, and

Sudan, the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in the United States, and the passing of the anti-homosexuality bill in Uganda. We write at a time when gender studies have—yet again—become a target of authoritarian and illiberal politics (Petö 2020) and from locations where feminist scholars have risen against neoliberalization of the university and harassment in academia, and in support of academic freedom (Lewis 2018; Meade et al. 2023; Täuber et al. 2022). The writings assembled here draw attention to feminist activism and protests initiated and led by women in some of the most repressive states in the world today, focusing on the intersection of feminist, political, and economic demands. The forms of feminist strike considered here emerge from everyday struggles for survival under global capitalism and expose the structural violence of authoritarian regimes.

Not all the strikes that are considered here are explicitly defined as feminist by those who take part in them, nor would all the protests that are the subject of analysis in this collection be defined as strikes in the narrow sense. Many of these forms of protest exceed the conventional definitions of feminism, strike, and resistance. Bringing these terms into a conversation through the framework of feminist strike casts light on the limitations of feminism when it is disconnected from questions of (racialized) labour, and on worker's movements that disregard the gendered nature of labour itself. The collection also problematizes various forms of resistance including everyday resistances and quite(er) defiance that extend and expand the established repertoires of labour strikes. The articles collected in this special issue allow us to see, through their focus on local iterations, the diversity and specificity of forms of feminist protest across the world.

Points of dissensus and controversies explored in this special issue further existing discussions on how a feminist strike challenges established conceptions of work, feminist struggles and protest. They also raise questions about the limits of an encompassing approach to a feminist strike “that entangles everything in the desire to change everything” and about how not to flatten diverse forms of resistance if they are assembled under the banner of feminist strike (Gago 2020). Contributions show various acts through which women have claimed political, cultural, and social rights, while challenging conventional views of reproductive and productive work, unions, gender roles, and politics. The articles are not always directly connected to the March 8 feminist strike, and they open space for problematization of controversies that emerge from, for instance, the connections of

feminist mobilizations to established structures of power, or the limitations of strike as a rupture to grasp quieter politics or transformative efforts of feminist mobilizations.

Pamela Scully intersects the problem of strike with women's anti-war mobilizations in Liberia. She argues that women's mobilizations around the concept of a sex strike as a form of anti-war resistance offered a broader critique of gender-based violence, and a way of connecting violence against women in armed conflicts and in the domestic sphere. Lidia Salvatori's “From Italy with Rage: Feminists Striking in Uncertain Times” is an autoethnographic account of the feminist movement *Non Una di Meno* in Italy and focuses on the role of digital connectivity in the formation of a transnational women's movement. Rejoice Chipuriro's article considers strategies, motivations, and methods employed by the Women's Assembly of the Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai in the 2016 #BeatThePot protest in Zimbabwe, showcasing the strength of women organizing across race, age, occupation, religious beliefs, and political affiliations under the unifying symbolism of “bodies that strike.”

In her contribution, Anagha S. focuses on work, land, and citizenship struggles in the 2015 Pombilai Orumai strike by women workers at the Kannan Devan tea plantation in Kerala, India. The author demonstrates that a sudden work stoppage involving more than 5,000 women workers led to wage increases, while also exposing union ties to the plantation owners and the negative effects of the developmental models of the Kerala state. Moumita Biswas's analysis of women's participation in the 2019 Shaheen Bagh protests in New Delhi against the discriminatory Citizenship Amendment Act highlights how economic exploitation is linked to the violence of intersecting patriarchies in the context of Hindutva nationalism.

Other contributions reveal connections between women's struggles for just work and other resistances by exploring protest practices beyond work stoppages and other forms of interruptions. Barbara Dynda examines protest practices of the Polish anarcho-feminist movement in the 1990s and 2000s. Dynda approaches the anarcho-feminist zines as an archive of grassroots feminist movements characterized by intersecting claims for reproductive, sexual, and environmental rights. The article explores the (dis)continuities between the early postso-

cialist practices that they mediate and feminist practices during socialism, as well as contemporary reproductive justice struggles in Poland.

In the article “Unveiling Feminist Strike: The Case of ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ in Iran,” Shirin Assa explores the transversal revolutionary potential of unveiling and hair-cutting by women in Iran in defiance of the imposition of the hijab and state control of both the public and private lives of women and girls. Writing in response to and in the wake of the murder of Jina Mahsa Amini at the hands of the morality police in Tehran on September 16, 2022, Assa provides insight into gender-based persecution and the ongoing protests in Iran. The Human Rights Activists News Agency in Iran notes that one of the key features of the “Woman, Life, Freedom” protests has been the participation of workers, with more than 150 strikes taking place in 53 cities across Iran between September and December 2022. During this same time period, 481 people were killed and approximately 20,000 people were arrested. Assa argues for understanding the protests in Iran as feminist strikes against what she terms, drawing on the work of Sergio González Rodríguez, “the femicide machine.”

Olia Sosnovskaya’s piece asks if a rupture is a meaningful concept at all and how we can understand continuities between disruptive protest practices on the one hand and everyday performances of care and healing on the other. The analysis is situated in the 2020–21 post-election uprising in Belarus.

Judith Naeff, in a conversation with Lebanese filmmaker, artist, and researcher Marwa Arsanios, engages with a feminist strike through radical feminist ecological resistance as practiced by autonomous women’s movements in the conflict zones of Syrian Kurdistan, Turkish Kurdistan, Colombia, and Lebanon. Arsanios shows the limits of the disruptiveness of striking and proposes derailing as a transformative practice that refuses the existing status quo while also generating new social forms.

In her interview with Sasha Talaver, one of the activists of Feminist Antiwar Resistance, which was founded in Russia on February 25, 2022, one day after the invasion of Ukraine, Ksenia Robbe raises the question of the conditions that make feminist strike impossible and at the same time imperative. Talaver and Robbe’s discussion engages with the metaphorical uses of the term *strike* and also surfaces the fact that there were 358 labour protests in Russia in 2022 alone, many of which took the form of

strikes. Talaver’s take on the role of strikes as a form of resistance to oppression mirrors the perspective we have aimed to convey throughout this special issue, which is inspired by the courage and tenacity of those who have participated in feminist strikes around the world. In response to Robbe’s question about the future of strike as a method under conditions of authoritarianism and war, Talaver states, “I still think that strike is probably our main hope, to be honest.”

## Endnotes

1. On March 21 2022, Kylie Thomas and Ksenia Robbe convened a film screening and discussion of Aliko Saragas’ *Strike A Rock*, a film that focuses on South African women’s activism in the aftermath of the 2012 Marikana Massacre. We are grateful to Nomusa Makhubu, Patience Mususa and Helene Strauss for the perspectives they shared. This event formed part of the programme of the workshop “Poetics and Politics of Strike in the Post-socialist/Postcolonial Encounter” organized by Senka Neuman-Stanivukovic, Ksenia Robbe and Judith Naeff which took place at the University of Groningen and online on April 7- 8 2022. We would also like to thank everyone who contributed to the workshop, including our keynote speakers, Francisca de Haan, Liz Mason-Deese and Marwa Arsanios.

2. Among the most prominent documentaries that were produced in the aftermath of the massacre are *Miners Shot Down* (dir. by Rehad Desai, 2014) and *The Marikana Massacre: Through the Lens* (eNCA, 2013), neither of which focuses on the women of Marikana.

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