“If We Stop, the World Stops”
A study on the viability of the strike as a tool of feminist resistance in São Paulo

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Abstract

This study investigates how the feminist movement in the city of São Paulo, Brazil, relates to the International Women’s Strike – a transnational feminist mass strike launched by the Argentinian feminist collective *Ni Una Menos* in 2017. Based on a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with representatives of 10 feminist organizations in São Paulo, this text explores the feasibility of a feminist strike in the context of São Paulo and highlights the structural challenges in its implementation. In addition, the text employs a qualitative literature review to examine the ways in which women in São Paulo have resorted to the strike as an instrument of their resistance since the early 20th century. Theoretically drawing on the theories of direct action and institutionalization of social movements, this work constitutes a synthesis of previous debates and sheds light on the implications that the institutionalization of the Brazilian feminist movement has had on the viability of direct actions such as the feminist strike. A central finding indicates a relative consensus that the feminist movement in São Paulo must first build a *massive* and *popular* feminist movement, before an inclusive and intersectional feminist strike can be carried out.

Keywords

Feminist Strike / Feminist Resistance / Strike / Brazil / 8M / International Women’s Strike / Feminist Movement / Direct Action / Institutionalization
Acknowledgements

*Tem saudade que é boa, que chega nostálgica e deixa o peito batendo alegre.*

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1. Introduction

We strike and stop the world to denaturalize violence and all forms of exploitation. We strike against the cruelty that takes our bodies as the spoils of conquest. We strike against racism and the appropriation of our bodies and our territories. We strike to defend our lives and our autonomy. We strike to invent our own time, one in which our desire can create another way of living on earth. Our strike is not just an event; it is a process of social transformation and of the historical accumulation of rebellious forces that do not allow themselves to be corseted in the rules of formal democracy. Our movement breaks through what now exists, crosses borders, languages, identities, and scales to construct new geographies that are not those of capital and its financial movements. (Ni Una Menos 2018, English version)

This was the strike call of the Argentine feminist collective Ni Una Menos\(^1\), a call to all women in the world to stop their work, paid and unpaid, and take to the streets to demand justice for the different types of discrimination and violence that women and feminized bodies face. However, Ni Una Menos was not the first group calling for a women’s strike to protest against social, political and economic gendered power structures. In 1975, Icelandic women called for a women’s strike to protest against the gender pay gap and the gendered division of labor inside and outside the home. Around 90% of the female population participated in the strike, which brought the country to a standstill and set a historic milestone in Iceland’s feminist resistance (Brewer 2015). Some 40 years later, on October 3, 2016, thousands of Polish women participated in a women’s strike against the government’s planned tightening of abortion laws (Kubisa and Rakowska 2018). Few days after, Ni Una Menos called for a one-hour strike in all possible spaces, whether at home, at work or in the neighborhood in response to the femicide of Argentine teenager Lucía Pérez, and in 2017, they crowned the International Women’s Day (IWD) as the official date for the International Women’s Strike, hereafter referred to as IWS (Gago 2020). Since then, feminist movements in over 50 countries have joined the strike movement and organized annual feminist strikes of various shapes and sizes on March 8, and although these mobilizations differ in their organization and demands, they have one thing in common: they recognize the strike as an appropriate instrument for feminist resistance at national and international levels.

The conviction that a mass strike is the decisive tool for the working class in the struggle against the capitalist system is deeply rooted in history. In fact, Rosa Luxemburg (1906:53) already put down on paper her theory of the mass strike more than 100 years ago, stating that “the mass strike is the first natural, impulsive form of every great revolutionary struggle of the proletariat”. Although Luxemburg’s hope for a social transformation through a mass strike has

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\(^1\) Ni Una Menos is a feminist mass movement that emerged in Argentina in 2015 in response to a femicide. Its message quickly spread to several Latin American countries and other regions of the world.
not yet been fulfilled, her ideas are still relevant today, especially in the feminist struggle in Latin America, as women disproportionately bear the burden of the capitalist system and continue to face obstacles to meaningful political participation in culturally and socioeconomically divided societies. Inspired by the thoughts of Luxemburg (1906) and in the heat of the mass feminist manifestations that have taken place since 2015, Argentine feminist and social scientist Veronica Gago (2020) wrote the manifesto *Feminist International - How to Change Everything*. In her manifesto, the author elaborates a theory on the feminist strike, which is meant to be a reinvention of the strike instrument beyond the trade union parameters.

The idea behind the feminist strike, also known as *Paro Internacional de Mujeres, Greve Feminista* or IWS, is a mass strike as the key instrument of a feminist revolution that puts an end to the capitalist and patriarchal system. A feminism for the 99%, as Angela Davis (et al. 2018), along with other feminist intellectuals such as Cinzia Arruzza and Nancy Fraser, declared in their call to strike on March 8, 2018. Or in the words of Gago (2020:22) herself:

[A strike that is] able to summon and speak with all of our voices: housewives, workers in the formal and informal economies, teachers, members of cooperatives, the unemployed, the part-time self-employed, full-time mothers, militants, domestic employees, students, journalists, unionists, retail workers, women organizing neighborhood soup kitchens, and retired women. (Gago 2020:22)

In Brazil, where informal labor affects more women; where the domestic sector is the second largest occupation sector for women (Brazil Institute 2021); and where already high femicide rates keep rising constantly (Brazil Institute & Waters 2021), one would assume that a feminist strike that interlinks the different struggles and forms of violence suffered would be met with strong support from the feminist movement, especially considering that since the election of Jair Bolsonaro as president in 2018, Brazilian women have been subjected to a government that is often described as “misogynistic, racist, homophobic, and militaristic” (Setzler 2021). However, in 2017, the proposal to follow the strike call in São Paulo was refused by feminist sectors linked to the labor union *Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT)* and the political party *Partido dos Trabalhadores*, also known as PT (Machado 2017). Furthermore, a glance at the numbers of women who took to the streets in São Paulo on March 8, 2017 indicates that the feminist mobilization was significantly smaller than in other Latin American cities such as Buenos Aires, Mexico City and Santiago de Chile, and this despite the fact that São Paulo is the most populated city in Latin America and is furthermore home to a traditional women’s labor movement that has been calling for strikes for over 100 years (Maciel & Souza 2020; Biondi & Toledo 2018). Finally, the comparatively low participation in the political acts on March 8 further contradicts a study by Ipsos (2017), which found that 66% of the Brazilian population actively supports women’s rights.
This raises many unanswered questions, such as why comparatively few Brazilian women have joined the IWS and whether the feminist strike is really the adequate instrument of resistance for the feminist movement in São Paulo in the current context. While considerable research attention has been paid to the mass feminist mobilizations that took place under the call for the IWS, no study has looked specifically at the reasons why São Paulo, despite its strong women’s movement, has shown reluctance in participating in the IWS. This study was conducted to investigate the low level of participation of São Paulo’s feminist movement in the IWS. Taking into consideration Avritzer’s (2017) thought that “[e]ach political era has a repertoire of collective action or protest that is related to many variables,” the present study aims to critically question the feasibility of a feminist strike in a culturally and socioeconomically divided context like the one of the city of São Paulo, considering the opinions, concerns, desires and needs of São Paulo’s feminist movement and exploring a range of factors that influence the feminist movement and their relation to the strike. Furthermore, this study seeks to examine the degree to which the women’s movement in São Paulo has resorted to the strike in the past to claim their rights. More precisely, the main research question to be explored in this study is as follows: How does the feminist movement in São Paulo relate to the strike as an instrument of feminist resistance?

The present study belongs to the research field of gender studies with a focus on Latin America and the theoretical framework underlying this study is the school of social movement theory with particular emphasis on direct action as a popular protest form of social movements and the institutionalization of social movements. For the conceptual understanding, the contemporary theory of feminist strike by Gago (2020) is also presented, which is inspired by the Marxist theory of mass strike by Rosa Luxemburg (1906). Finally, this study aims to highlight the two-sided nature of the feminist struggle in Brazil. It seeks to demonstrate, on the one hand, the achievements that the Brazilian women’s movement has made through the use of the strike, especially during the 20th century, and the way they continue to organize to the present despite the complicated political, social and economic situation they face today under a far-right and misogynistic government. On the other hand, this study sheds light on the failure of the feminist movement to overcome certain challenges that continue to have a negative impact on the organization of a unified mass feminist movement today. In a sense, this study

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2 This study distinguishes between the terms women's movement and feminist movement. Women's movements serve as an umbrella term and refer to social movements of women that mobilize on the basis of women's gendered experiences; feminist movements mobilize explicitly against patriarchal structures. For a more detailed distinction, see chapter 2.
serves to critically reflect on the conditions that must be met in order to put the theory of the feminist strike into practice in a divided society like São Paulo’s.

## 1.2 Structure and Hypotheses

To find answers to the research question put forward, the approach of this study is twofold. The 1\textsuperscript{st} approach consists in a qualitative analysis of the historical role that the strike has played in São Paulo’s women’s movement, with particular attention being paid to the women’s labor tradition and the general strike initiated by female factory workers in 1917. This part is dedicated to present the historical background of the development of the women's movement in São Paulo from the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century to the present, drawing mainly on secondary sources. The 2\textsuperscript{nd} approach focuses on the organization of the contemporary organized feminist movement in São Paulo, the structural challenges the feminist movement is facing both on the inside and on the outside, and the opinion of the members of the feminist movement on the strike as an instrument of feminist resistance. The aim here is to find out why the organized feminist movement did not embrace the feminist strike in the context of São Paulo. For this goal, the study draws on ethnographic fieldwork with ten representatives of different feminist organizations conducted during the months of March, April and May in 2022. Considering that large parts of the Brazilian feminist movement were institutionalized during the re-democratization in the 1990s (Munck 2020) and that the Brazilian women’s struggle often turned into a general struggle during times of political and economic turmoil (Souza Lobo 2021), two hypotheses are put forward as to why parts of the organized feminist movement were hesitant to call for a feminist strike. It must be emphasized, however, that it is not intended to answer whether the feminist strike could bring about social change, since this would be beyond the scope of possibilities and, moreover, would be based on speculation. As mentioned previously, the present study rather serves to critically reflect the viability of the feminist strike in the particular context of São Paulo.

1. The first hypothesis is that the institutionalization of feminism in Brazil has led to a fragmentation within the feminist movement, which severely hinders the organization of a feminist strike, since, according to Gago (2020), the feminist movement needs to be \textit{massive} and \textit{radical} to organize a feminist strike. In order to verify or discard this hypothesis, a special focus is put on the structural challenges of the feminist movement on the inside.
The second hypothesis is that in times of political and social setbacks and tremendous economic struggle, the Brazilian feminist struggle turns into a more general struggle, rendering the feminist strike secondary as a specifically feminist struggle. In order to verify or discard this hypothesis, a special focus is put on the resistance of Brazilian women in times of political and socioeconomic crises, in particular during the military dictatorship and the respective struggle for democracy and during the years after the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff. Here the structural challenges facing the women's movement from the outside are highlighted.

The second chapter presents the current state of research on the topic. In the course of this, literature is presented that explicitly deals with the women’s strike movement, also known as #8M, as well as literature on the role of women in historical strikes and on the relationship of gender, race, and class in Brazil. Then, in the third chapter, the theoretical framework of this study is presented, embedded in two lenses of the social movement school: direct action and institutionalization. Furthermore, for a terminological understanding, three different approaches to the definition of the strike are introduced: the simple labor strike, the mass strike according to Luxemburg (1906) and the feminist strike according to Gago (2020). The fourth chapter is dedicated to the presentation of the methodology of this study. This part includes a detailed description of the selection process of the feminist organizations and the representatives that were interviewed for this study during a research stay in the city of São Paulo, as well as information on the process and content of the interviews. The fifth chapter outlines a historical overview of the role of the strike in São Paulo’s women’s movement and its evolution since the beginning of the 20th century. This chapter draws mainly on secondary sources and serves as background information on São Paulo’s historical and political context for chapter six. The sixth chapter consists of an analysis of the interviews conducted with the representatives of São Paulo’s feminist movement. The focus is on their organizational structure, values, challenges, militancy, networking and, above all, their opinion of the strike as an instrument of feminist resistance. This chapter ultimately serves to verify or discard the two hypotheses put forward and concludes with a discussion of the findings to critically reflect on the feasibility of the feminist strike in the context of São Paulo. Finally, in the conclusion, the main findings are being presented including a return to the hypotheses and the answer of the research question.

Dilma Rousseff was Brazil’s first female president from 2011 to 2016, until she was ousted through impeachment proceedings. There is a general debate about whether the impeachment should be considered a coup d’état or not. The Brazilian feminist movement refers to the procedure as a coup d’état.
how the feminist movement in São Paulo relates to the strike as an instrument of feminist resistance. Moreover, the last chapter points out possible directions in terms of future research.

2. State of Art

A look at history illustrates the relevance of strikes in labor movements. In fact, many strikes have already gone down in history, sparking revolutions and bringing about social and political change, which also explains the thicket of scientific works on this phenomenon. Some of the most influential intellectuals, such as Karl Marx, Rosa Luxemburg and Friedrich Engels, devoted much time studying the strike as an instrument of resistance. Furthermore, the development of the academic field of gender studies since the 1960s and 1970s seems to have sparked a renewed interest on strikes, given the numerous studies analyzing the role of women in revolutionary strikes during the industrial revolution in order to understand the gender differences in status and power and the impact this had on strike moments (McDermid & Hillyar 1999; Smith 1994). Meanwhile, the strike has also regained interest from a theoretical point of view, as some feminists seek to reinvent the strike in order to transform one of the most powerful instruments of workers’ resistance into an instrument of feminist resistance (Arruzza, Bhattacharya & Fraser 2019; Draper & Mason-Deese 2018; Varela 2020). In the following pages, the literature of importance to this study will be presented.

Different fields of research are relevant to gain an understanding of the IWS movement, its roots and its motivation. Given that the theoretical framework of this study presents Luxemburg’s (1906) theory of the mass strike and Gago’s (2020) theory of the feminist strike in more detail, the first part the literature review deals with literature on the historical roots of the feminist strike and the IWD, which since 2017 is also the annual date on which feminist movements call for the IWS. The second part will focus on the literature on women's strikes that have taken place in Argentina and Poland since 2016, as these represent the beginning of the IWS movement. The third part of the state of art presents both literature on contemporaneous feminisms in Brazil and on women’s activism in earlier feminist waves. At this point it is important to mention that in this study, the women's movement is not seen as synonymous with the feminist movement. Rather, the women's movement is meant to be an umbrella term for sociopolitical movements that come together primarily because of women's gendered experiences. Feminist movements are thus part of the women's movement, but not
every women's movement is automatically feminist. In fact, according to Sarti (1989), an autonomous feminist movement did not emerge in Brazil until the late 1970s.

Since March 8, 2017, feminists around the world have been calling for an annual IWS. In fact, March 8 is considered by many to be the most important day in the feminist calendar, also in Brazil. For decades this date has been used to draw attention to the violence and discrimination that women face in a heteronormative and patriarchal world, especially since the International Women’s Year (IYW) in 1975, when the United Nations General Assembly officially declared March 8 as the IWD. However, despite the popularity of the date, there is still no consensus among academics as to the origin of this day. Much of the European and North American literature, such as the book Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women’s Movement by Rupp (1997) focus on the history of white bourgeois women who formed part of an international women’s suffrage movement in the late nineteenth century throughout the Second World War (see also Boxer 2009). Although it is undisputed that these women made an important contribution to the achievement of women’s rights, the present study sheds light on literature on the socialist and communist origins of IWD, as these also inspired Gago’s (2020) theory on the feminist strike and gave March 8 its radical meaning. Indeed, if one takes a closer look at the roots of the IWD, it becomes evident that this date cannot be separated from the instrument of the strike.

As mentioned above, March 8 was chosen by Ni Una Menos as the official date for the annual IWS by virtue of its history. In the article On the Socialist Origins of International Women’s Day, Temma Kaplan (1985) examines how March 8 became an internationally celebrated day for women’s rights. According to the author, on the last Sunday of February in 1909 American socialists called for the first National Women’s Day in New York city, paying homage to working-class women. Suffragettes also attended the celebration, however, according to Kaplan (1985) they were clearly outnumbered by the socialists. Angela Davis (1983), on the other hand, notes that the IWD dates back to a demonstration organized by socialist women in New York one year earlier, on March 8, 1908. While the exact origin of IWD remains a myth, historians seem to agree on the importance socialist women played in the formation of that date (Boxer 2009; Davis 1983; Kaplan 1985; Kandel and Picq 1982).

Furthermore, although the women’s day had been celebrated officially in the United States since 1909 and in Europe since 1911, scholars agree that the most memorable celebration did not occur until March 8, 1917, when Russian women left the fabrics in Petrograd to protest against the rising living prices during the war (Boxer 2009; Kandel and Picq 1982; Kaplan
The strike was not only the beginning of the February Revolution which eventually led to the end of tsarism, but it also “set the date for the celebration of International Women’s Day elsewhere in Europe beginning the following year” (Kaplan 1985:170). Eventually, Lenin announced the IWD as a communist holiday in 1922, which it stayed until around 1967. Shortly after, in 1975, the United Nations officially declared March 8 as IWD, and its socialist origins receded further into the background (Kaplan 1985). Nevertheless, a closer look at the literature sheds light on the socialist roots of the IWD and the numerous strikes, protests, and marches that women have organized every year on March 8 since 1908.

The day the Russian women put down their tools in 1917 to protest in the streets also served as an inspiration for the IWS. In fact, Gago (2020:28) remarks how “the strike of our revolutionary 2017 traces a serpentine line going back a century, echoing and connecting with the strike of March 8 in 1917.” Given the revolutionary nature and impact, considerable research has been done on the Russian strikes of 1917, even Luxemburg (1918) herself dedicated much time studying the strikes (see also Koenker & Rosenberg 1990; McDermid & Hillyar 1999; Smith 1994). The feminist strike as a tool of resistance, on the other hand, has received rather little scholarly attention until now, apart from Gago’s (2020) manifesto *The Feminist International - How to Change Everything* in which she provides a theoretical framework for the feminist strike and analyzes previous strikes, such as the very first IWS on March 8, 2017. In fact, one could say that Gago is the pioneer of the feminist strike theory, which will be introduced in more detail in the following chapter.

In addition to Gago’s work, another feminist manifesto worth mentioning when discussing the feminist strike is *Feminism for the 99% - A Manifesto*, written by Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser (2019). In their manifesto, first published in the United States and already translated into more than 20 languages, the three Marxist feminists criticize capitalist imperialism and explain why feminism today must fight not only the conservative far-right but also the “progressive” neoliberals who advocate a feminism that neglects women of color and immigrants. Inspired by the Polish and Argentine women who organized the first women strikes, the three authors also opt for the strike as an adequate instrument of their resistance to reach a feminism for 99%: “It is these strikes, and the increasingly coordinated movements that are developing around them, that first inspired – and now embody – a feminism for the 99 percent” (Arruzza, Bhattacharya & Fraser 2019:6). In particular, they credit the way feminist strikes democratize the traditional idea of the strike and the various forms of women strikes that combine workers’ withdrawal with marches, demonstrations, factory closures, blockades,
boycotts and other strike actions. Finally, they conclude that feminism promoted by the feminist strike “anticipates the possibility of a new, unprecedented phase of class struggle: feminist, internationalist, environmentalist, and anti-racist” (Arruzza, Bhattacharya & Fraser 2019:9).

Besides the two manifestos in which feminist academics and activists call for an IWS, there has also been an increase in articles that investigate the phenomenon from a more scientific perspective. Varela (2020), for instance, examines the IWS from a theoretical and practical perspective, analyzing the emergence of the IWS movement during the fourth wave of feminism. Varela concludes that the feminist strike became a central tradition of the new wave of feminism for three factors: The first factor is the context of the 2008 global financial crisis, the consequences of which disproportionately affected women in the popular sector. In this context, the feminist movements and the social movements joined forces to promote an intersectional feminism. The second factor is the crisis of social reproduction as a specific dimension of the capitalist crisis. The crisis of social reproduction puts both remunerated and non-remunerated labor at the center of the discussion, as the state’s neglect of its duties in terms of social services implies an increase of workload in particular for women. Through the strike, the relevance of women’s social, political and economic contribution to society is highlighted, following the motto: if we stop, the world stops. The third factor is the cross-cutting nature of women’s work and implies the question: who strikes? The author emphasizes the central role of women’s work in the formal sector, informal sector, and in the private sphere and how all of these types of labor are incorporated into the IWS, turning it into an inclusive instrument from a theoretical perspective. According to Varela, the IWS lays the foundation for an anti-capitalist class feminism. However, the author also points out that the IWS has so far had a largely symbolic significance and has thus been used more as a means of exerting pressure.

Another important study on the theoretical dimension of a feminist strike is the article by Kubisa and Rakowska (2018) on the Polish women’s strike. Together, they analyze the Polish feminist strike events in 2016, 2017 and 2018 from the perspective of a strike as a form of protest and critically question the framing of the mobilization as a “strike”. After comparing the Polish feminist strikes with characteristics of traditional labor strikes, they conclude that “it was a strike as an idea, but not as a tool,” due to legal aspects that were not met (Kubisa & Rakowska 2018:35). Nevertheless, like Varela (2020), they too recognize the symbolic

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4 Academics divide the history of feminism in waves, each one marking a specific cultural period of feminist activism. The fourth wave began around 2012 and is widely known for its’ characteristic of mobilization on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (Cochrane 2013).
significance of the strike from a feminist perspective, as it allows to critically question what is
considered “labor” in capitalist systems. Furthermore, Mason-Deese and Gago (2019) analyze
the Argentinian feminist strikes that took place in October 2016, and then in March 2017, 2018
and 2019 as an internationalist practice. In their article, the authors present how the feminist
strike, with its strong Argentine roots, became a global process involving over fifty countries
without becoming a homogeneous movement that loses sight of the particular struggles of
women in each country.

In general, the feminist strikes in Poland and the ones in Argentina that took place since
2016 are at the center of the research are. Within this research field the technological means
used by feminist organizations for inclusion and to mobilize citizens became an emerging
research area. Laudano and Kratje (2018), for example, created a mapping of audiovisual
productions that circulated on social media platforms around the first IWS. However, the vast
majority of academic work is focused on the particular demands of the strikes, the transnational
characteristic of the movement, and the topic of social reproduction, which is not exactly new
in gender studies, but has become a central debate within the IWS movement.

Finally, the lack of scholarly work on the theoretical dimension of the IWS can be explained
both by the fact that the more consistent use of the strike as an instrument of feminist resistance
with its focus on unpaid and unrecognized work is a relatively new phenomenon attributable
particularly to the fourth wave of feminism, and by the fact that the IWS movement was largely
stalled by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Another factor that may discourage researchers
from studying strikes as a feminist tool is the difficulty of measuring its impact, due to its rather
symbolic nature. However, even though there is no consensus on the real impact feminist strikes
have had so far, most scholars seem to agree on the symbolic significance and that the feminist
strike has become a main tool of resistance in the new wave of feminism.

Criticism of the feminist strike comes especially from the press in the United States:
Meghan Daum (2017), for instance, writes in the Los Angeles Times: “Make no mistake, March
8 will mostly be a day without women who can afford to skip work and shuffle childcare and
household duties to someone else.” Her criticism is similar to that of journalist Maureen Shaw,
who describes the idea of a women’s strike as a “noble idea” that in reality most likely only
serves “privileged” women. In particular, she questions the feasibility of the strike, as most
women cannot just walk away from either paid or unpaid work. Given that the organizers are
not providing the strikers any assurance that they will not lose their jobs as a result of the strike
action, Shaw (2017) characterizes the event as more of a “Women’s March than a coordinated
national strike”. American feminist Jude Doyle (2017) adds to Shaw’s and Daum’s critique that “women's work” could be anything today, which is why it is difficult to make universal demands in a women’s strike: “Before women can strike effectively, we need to redefine what female labor consists of, and what our refusal to perform it will really mean.” It comes as a surprise that there has been almost no criticism in the Latin American written press, considering that the continent has one of the highest rates of informality in the world, which gives reason to believe that a feminist strike would be difficult to implement in practice. There are however critical voices in this geographical context. For instance, Brazilian feminist Maria Fernanda Marcelino, who also participated as an interviewee in this study, made the following comment in an interview with the left-wing news agency Vermelho (2017):

> It is one thing to organize a strike in a country that has almost full employment; it is another thing for women here in Brazil, completely precarious - most of them employed in domestic service, self-employed, completely unprotected - to say that they will stop. (Vermelho 2017)

The skepticism can be primarily traced back to the nature of the strike, which, unlike other instruments of resistance, envisions a collective work stoppage that can be very effective when workers have labor rights, but is more of a threat to unprotected workers and self-employed who depend on their daily income. The critics argue that what Gago (2020) calls one of the greatest strengths of the feminist strike, namely its intersectionality and the inclusivity of subjects previously excluded from the strike, is in practice its greatest weakness, since it is precisely these women who most likely will face severe consequences for participating in a strike. In general, however, the negative criticism is very moderate. Indeed, most newspapers focus on the broad reach of the IWS and complement the internationalist character.

Several academic and journal articles on the IWS movement also mention the participation of Brazilian feminists (Gago 2020; Dias Fagundes 2021; Melo 2020; Maciel & Souza 2017; Jiménez & Alessi 2020). Gago (2020), for example, states that the feminist strike movement in Brazil took up the topic of the militarization of favelas, the radicalization of Brazil’s catholic church against struggles for bodily autonomy and the murder of Afro-Brazilian human rights activist Marielle Franco in Rio de Janeiro on March 14, 2018. She also highlights the mass demonstrations of thousands of women against the election of Jair Bolsonaro as president, known as #EleNão (#NotHim), which took place in September and October 2018. The Brazilian scholars Dias Fagundes (2021) and Melo (2020) too name the #EleNão demonstrations as a Brazilian expression of the feminist strike. Furthermore, the newspaper AgenciaBrasil reported that the 2017 act on the IWD in São Paulo was considered part of the IWS movement, as autonomous feminists and collectives called on social media platforms to join the strike.
movement (Maciel & Souza 2017). In another article published by *EL País Brasil*, the authors Jiménez and Alessi (2020) describe the feminist mobilizations on IWD in Brazil as less successful in terms of size than in other Latin American countries and question why Brazilian women do not take to the streets as much, despite the fact that they suffer one of the highest femicide rates worldwide. To date, however, no study has specifically addressed the element of strike action during the manifestations in Brazil, that is, whether there was in fact a form of work stoppage, or whether the manifestations simply occurred during the same time period as the IWS movement and were thus pictured as an expression of that movement.

In contrast to the literature dealing specifically with IWS in Brazil, there is a comparatively substantial amount of research on feminism in Brazil. Of particular relevance for this study is literature that explores the relationship of gender, race, and class. One of the classics of Brazilian gender studies that is still considered a pioneer today is the book *A mulher na sociedade de classes: mito e realidade* by sociologist Heleith Saffioti (1976). Indeed, Saffioti’s book is probably the first to critically challenge the homogeneous view of class that prevailed in Brazil until the late 1960s and to define the relations between women’s issues and the class struggle. Another woman who is considered one of the most influential Brazilian authors in this field is Elizabeth Souza Lobo (2011). Through her research on Brazilian women workers, the labor process, and the gendered division of labor in São Paulo’s industry, Souza Lobo also shows that the working class is not a homogeneous class, but that it is also divided by gender. Another book that is of interest in the area of gender and labor studies is the book *Feminismo e consciência de classe no Brasil* by Mirla Cisne (2015). Cisne writes about the new forms of autonomous feminism in Brazil and analyzes the formation of a feminist consciousness, forms of organization and political representation of five Brazilian national movements. She builds on the legacy of Saffioti and Souza Lobo, and further emphasizes that gender is not the only aspect that divides the Brazilian working class, but also ethnicity and sexual orientation.

As mentioned earlier, the development of gender studies has led to an interest in analyzing historical strikes from a gender perspective. In Brazil, too, researchers have dedicated their time to analyze the role of women in historical strikes, such as the Brazilian General Strike of 1917 (Wolfe 1991; Biondi & Toledo 2018; Fraccaro 2017; Telles 1994). Considering that the strike was originally used primarily by unions, strikes have long been associated with “white, male, waged, unionized workers” (Gago 2019:18). However, this is an outdated picture as several academics showed that women already played a central role during the Brazilian General Strike in 1917 (Wolfe 1991; Biondi & Toledo 2018). Accordingly, this study also considers literature
on the role of women in unions and the women’s labor movement in order to trace what role the strike has played in Brazil’s women’s movement in the past.

As can be seen from the state of art, there exists a variety of literature analyzing the events that occurred under the call of the IWS. In recent years, numerous scholars have recognized the importance feminist strikes have played in the fourth wave of feminism. However, the Brazilian feminist movement plays only a minor role in the field of research on the feminist strike in Latin America, which is to some extent contradictory considering the mass of literature on Brazilian feminism. Moreover, no study to date has analyzed the reasons why many countries have not responded to the IWS call. This study fills the gap of literature on the IWS movement in Brazil and investigates how the feminist movement in São Paulo relates to the strike as an instrument of feminist resistance. Thereby, it seeks to give room to feminist voices on the ground and to critically question the viability of a feminist strike in the context of São Paulo, weighing the strengths and weaknesses of the strike as an instrument of feminist resistance.

3. Theoretical Framework

“Theoretical frameworks can be enabling, or they can be straightjackets,” in order to prevent one's theoretical framework from becoming a straitjacket, it is important to recognize that knowledge is always embedded in socioeconomic, cultural, and political settings (Munck 2020:21). As Munck (2020) points out, the terrain of research is fluid, and sometimes the theoretical frameworks chosen do not correspond to reality. Nevertheless, as they can also be enabling, this chapter discusses different theoretical lenses. Given that this study examines both the women’s movement and the feminist movement in São Paulo, the next section introduces two schools of social movements relevant to the theoretical terrain of this study: direct action and institutionalization. Subsequently, in section 3.2, the theoretical distinction between three forms of direct action will be discussed: The traditional labor strike, the mass strike and the feminist strike.

3.1 Social Movements

Social movements are the heart of Latin America; they pump blood into the lungs and make the region breathe. Although this may be a very romanticized idea of social movements, there is no doubt about the importance they have had and continue to have in democratization processes, especially in socioeconomically and culturally divided societies like those of Latin America. In fact, the region is known for its revolutionary social movements, be it the Zapatistas, the
Piqueteros in Argentina, or the Movimento sem Terra (MST) movement in Brazil. Furthermore, in the field of women's movements, Latin America has also witnessed the emergence of various transnational movements in recent years, such as Ni Una Menos and the Marea Verde for the right to safe and legal abortion, and while abortion laws have only recently been severely restricted in the United States, in June 2022, Latin American feminists have successfully pushed for the legalization of abortion in Argentina in 2020, in Mexico in 2021, and in Colombia in February 2022 (Encarnación 2022). Finally, as a region on the threshold between the global North and South, Latin America has been considered a laboratory for the global study of social movements, which has led to numerous theoretical lenses being elaborated, including on the women’s movement (Munck 2020).

However, before presenting one of the most commonly used forms of resistance of social movements, direct action, the terminology of social movements should be clarified briefly. According to Mario Diani (1992:1), “[s]ocial movements are defined as networks of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in political or cultural conflicts, on the basis of shared collective identities”. In general, there exists a consensus among adherents of the social movements school that social movements contribute to democratization (Alvarez 2009; Avritzer 2019; Munck 2020).

### 3.1.1 Direct Action

A glance at the history of the most prominent social movements in Latin America indicates that they did not become popular through simple lobby work at the political level. Indeed, many social movements, such as MST and Zapatistas, gained international attention through direct actions, often carried outside of legality. But what exactly are “direct actions,” and why do many social movements resort to them as their form of resistance? According to Carter (2005:IX/1), direct action is “intrinsically linked to the idea of ‘people power’” and represents “essentially nonviolent methods of noncooperation, obstruction or defiance”. Hilson (2002), on the other hand, describes direct action as “the purposeful disruption of lawful social or economic activity [that] may be violent (more commonly to property rather than persons) or non-violent in nature”. Della Porta and Diani (2006:226) also consider violent action as direct action and assert that “violence has been a promising strategic choice at certain historical moments”. However, they emphasize that the use of force can also lead to an escalation of the conflict, since the state generally enjoys a monopoly on the legitimate use of force (Della Porta & Diani 2006). In addition, violent direct action can also lead to stigmatization by public opinion (Della Porta & Diani 2006).
In liberal democracies, legal direct action may involve strikes, slow-downs, boycotts and campaigns, for example, or more symbolic actions such as marches and rallies. Acts of physical obstruction or trespass that do not fall under legality are also often considered direct actions, as they are more likely to be classified as acts of civil disobedience or methods of dissent (Carter 2005). Furthermore, both Carter (2005) and Hilson (2002) emphasize the symbolic significance that direct action can have. Often the link between the direct action and the goal is very obvious, in other cases the direct action serves more of a symbolic purpose. Many direct actions serve not only to draw attention to the movement, but also to their cause. In this way, they seek sympathizers for their struggle in order to exert more pressure on the decision-makers. Furthermore, direct action also often serves to express certain identities and lifestyles (Hilson 2002). But why is it that many Latin American social movements resort to direct action in their resistance instead of conventional strategies such as lobbying or writing proposals?

According to Carter (2005:2), “[l]iberal democracy has historically favoured privileged social groups. Those excluded – the poor, women, ethnic or racial minorities, indigenous people, elderly, the disabled and migrants or refugees – have resorted to direct action to establish their rights”. Accordingly, direct action can be described as a form of democratic empowerment from below and as a response to a lack of political access or denial of rights.

The aspect of political access is also highlighted by Hilson (2002:241), who argues that in liberal democracies, political and legal opportunities often involve resources, not only financial but also in terms of professional personnel with educational backgrounds, which ultimately “leaves the professionally and financially poor with protest as their only realistic course of action”. As influencing policy through lobbying or legal means is often not a viable option for social movements, they rely on assets such as the power of numbers, their social capital and unity or try to find allies in positions of decision-making (Carter 2005; Hilson 2002). While in practice social movements can adopt both conventional strategies, such as lobbying and negotiation, and direct action, in the school of social movement theory the choice of form of resistance is often depicted as a binary: protest or proposal. This binary mode of representation of options can be traced back primarily to the question of autonomy, which is the topic of the following section.

3.1.2 Institutionalization of the Women’s Movement

One focus of the school of social movements is the relationship between social movements and the state, with the question of autonomy at the center of the discussion. In this regard, the
phenomenon of institutionalization of women’s movements has received great attention by social and political scientists (Alvarez 2009; Horton 2015; Munck 2020; Staggenborg 2013). In the process of creating transnational gender networks resulting from the 1975 United Nations Conference on Women in Mexico City, several women’s movements became institutionalized (Alvarez 2009; Munck 2020). In other words, activists from the women’s movements or entire movements became formalized and professionalized in order to incorporate women into spaces such as state institutions, NGOs, political parties or academia. The building of transnational gender networks was furthermore accompanied by the creation of new channels for political participation on national levels, such as women’s ministries and offices (Horton 2015). While Horton (2015:82) emphasizes that these processes provide key access “to international resources, expertise, and new spaces of participation,” which facilitate creating organizational capacities and holding national governments accountable, Staggenborg (2013:1) argues that the institutionalization of feminist movements can render feminist goals “conservative or mainstream”. Munck (2020:15) further describes the project of NGO-ization, which he believes was one of the most concise forms of institutionalization of Latin American women’s movements, as follows: “Behind the language of empowerment and professionalization lay the reality of de-politicization and an acceptance of the dominant order, albeit with local participatory initiatives”. In order to establish a connection with the previous section, it can be stated that institutionalization can lead to a limitation of the agency of social movements in terms of direct action.

One consequence of the institutionalization process that spread throughout the Latin American region in the post-transition period, that is, after the democratization of many authoritarian regimes in the 1980s, was the division of women's movements into what Horton (2015) and Munck (2020) refer to as autonomas and institutionalistas. The autonomas argue that the women's movement must be independent of the state, since institutionalization and the financial dependence it entails have implications for the ideational independence and the possibilities for mobilization. This statement is based on the common argument of the social movement school that democratization must be a bottom-up process, which is why autonomas also focus on the transformation of gender power relations and the reshaping of gendered values, mindsets, and roles in the grassroots of society (Horton 2015). The institutionalistas, on the other hand, tend to incorporate themselves into new institutional spaces in the belief that it would be more fruitful to
promote gender-sensitive public policies from within by advocating for women's issues (Horton 2015). While the *autonomas* would be assigned to the school of social movements, the *institutionalistas* would most likely be assigned to the opposing school of deliberative democracy, which preaches a “talk-centred” democracy (Harris & Farrell 2013:202).

However, while opinions about the institutionalization of social movements were often very divided at the beginning of the post-transition period, the fronts seem to be loosening today. Alvarez (1999:2009), for example, belonged together with Silliman (1999) to the most vocal denouncers of institutionalization, in particular of NGO-ization in the 1990s, claiming that the NGO boom would have three consequences: First, NGOs becoming *gender experts* for inter-governmental organizations instead of organizations advocating for women’s interests and rights. Second, NGOs being treated as “substitutes” for the civil society and as “intermediaries” between the state and the society. And third, the subcontracting of feminist NGOs to advice on or execute government programs for women (Alvarez 1999). According to Alvarez' article from 1999, these three factors resulted, on the one hand, in only certain actors and activities being supported and others being marginalized, and, on the other hand, in the women's movement neglecting its previously movement-oriented activities. In a more recent article, however, she reconsiders her own statement that “NGOs were veritable traitors to feminist ethical principles who depoliticized feminist agendas and collaborated with neo-liberal ones” (Alvarez 2009:175). Indeed, in her recent article, Alvarez (2009) argues for moving beyond the binary representation of the NGO-ization of social movements, as many NGOs are also committed to supporting movement fields, for example, by disseminating feminist discourses and producing feminist knowledge aimed at both policy makers and the movement. She further notes that many NGOs, after realizing the limitations of NGO-ization with their project-centered logic, are once again prioritizing movement work. Finally, she claims that new forms of “popular feminism” emerged under progressive left-wing governments (Alvarez 2009).

In conclusion, it can be summarized that even though institutionalization of social movements can have negative effects, such as "depoliticizing gender inequalities, obfuscating conflicts, and deradicalizing both the underlying analysis and proposed solutions to gender inequalities," as Horton (2015) points out, institutionalization does not directly mean the end stage of social movements. In fact, Staggenborg (2013) encourages to interpret institutionalization as a process that stimulates change and the mobilization of new campaigns.
After introducing direct action and institutionalization, the next section presents three forms of direct action: the strike, the general strike, and the feminist strike.

### 3.2 The Strike - An Instrument of Resistance

The strike as an instrument of resistance has evolved over the centuries and appeared in different forms and shapes. What used to be thought of as an exclusive tool of the masculine and unionized labor movement is now applied by multiple groups of different gender, race, age and class. Indeed, over the last few years the expression feminist strike has made it into the headlines of newspaper articles quite often. As the researcher Jonathan Smucker (2012) once said “finding the right floating signifier can make or break a social movement,” and in the case of the feminist strike, it seems as if the right one was found. It is therefore all the more important to define what exactly is meant when we speak of a strike, a general strike and a feminist strike. For the theoretical framework of this study the writings of Rosa Luxemburg (1906) and Veronica Gago (2020) are of particular importance, as they provide the definition of the general strike and the feminist strike. The present section is divided into three parts to trace the evolution of the strike as an instrument of resistance: from the simple labor strike to the Marxist idea of the general strike, also referred to as the mass strike, to the postcolonial idea of the feminist strike.

#### 3.2.1 The Labor Strike

Although the history of the strike dates back to the beginning of the industrial revolution, if not even longer, there is still no consensus on the definition of the strike. In fact, national legislations often differ with regard to the definition of the term strike and the right to strike. According to Waas (2012:1), who compared various legal systems of different countries, “strikes are mostly related to collective bargaining” and function as an instrument to balance the power between the employer and the employees. Watson (2008:332) defines a strike as “the collective withdrawal from work of a group of employees to exert pressure on the employer over any issue in which the two sides have a difference”. While Waas (2012) and Watson (2008) both emphasize the bargaining factor between workers and employers, Burns (2011) highlights the aspect of causing economic damage through work stoppages. Furthermore, all definitions state that strikes can only be carried out by a collective of workers.

In some countries, strikers must be unionized; in others, every worker has the right to strike regardless of whether he or she belongs to a union (Waas 2012). Another aspect is the industry in which the worker is employed, while private sector workers are generally allowed to strike,
public sector workers such as police, military and firefighters are denied the right to strike (Waas 2012). Finally, the legality of strikes often depends on the objective of the strike, whether they are strikes aimed at reaching a collective bargaining agreement, political strikes, sympathy strikes or strikes aimed at raising public awareness. For instance, the Committee on Freedom of Association states that strikes cannot be purely political, but must always include economic and social objectives as well in order to be considered legal (Gernigon, Odero & Guido 2000). The International Labor Organization (ILO) also comments on the length of the strike action and states that “any work stoppage, however brief and limited, may generally be considered as a strike” (Gernigon, Odero & Guido 2000:12).

Finally, even though the strike is a form of protest, it is important to underline that not every protest, demonstration or march is also a strike. The main difference lies in the element of work stoppage with the aim of harming production. This can take different forms beyond simply withdrawing work. Workers can do sit-downs and blockades to hinder other workers from working, and slow-down and work-to-rule strikes, which do not intend a complete work stoppage but a slowdown in production (Gernigon, Odero & Guido 2000:12).

In Brazil, the right to strike is regulated by Law Nr. 7.783 (1989) and Article 9 in the Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil (1988), which grants both unionized and not unionized citizens the right to collectively, temporarily and peacefully suspend, in whole or in part, the personal provision of services to an employer. As in other countries, however, the right to strike in Brazil is also restricted with certain sectors such as the military, for example, not being allowed to strike. Moreover, the Brazilian right to strike represents a social right, which is why the strike cannot be used as an instrument for purely political demands.

3.2.2 The Marxist Idea of the Mass Strike

A simple labor strike can resolve economic conflicts between the employee and the employer, however, it is not capable of changing the exploitative structure of the entire capitalist system. Many workers became aware of this during the industrial revolution, which is why they resorted to another means of struggle, the general strike. The general strike is considered a particular form of strike in which a great mass of workers from different industries join their forces in a work stoppage that can even bring an entire economy to a halt (Luxemburg 1906). Given the revolutionary general strikes that history has witnessed to date, it should come as no surprise that this phenomenon has been heavily debated among the most prominent adherents of the Marxist school (Marx, Engels & Lapides 1987; Luxemburg 1906;1918). Even Karl Marx
himself expressed his conviction as early as 1853, stating that the strike is a powerful instrument to unite the working class in its class struggle (Marx, Engels & Lapides 1987). Marx did not see the strike as a purely economic instrument, but was convinced that every strike also entailed a moral and political consequence. Although he did not use the term general strike directly, his epistemological project that workers must first come to the realization that they themselves are the bearers of production and that without them production cannot take place is also deeply rooted in Luxemburg’s (1906) theory of the mass strike. It is about understanding the hierarchical relationship in capitalism and the relationship between cause and effect, only then, according to Marx, can the members of the proletariat unite on common ground and demand not only particular legislative change or a raise in wages, but the change of the entire system and the creation of a new social order (Marx, Engels & Lapides 1987).

Although strikes already played an important role in Marx’s time, it was not until the turn of the millennium that general strikes spread like wildfire across Europe. Inspired by the revolutionary events that took place in Russia in 1905, Luxemburg wrote her famous pamphlet The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions, published in 1906. Luxemburg’s text was a sharp criticism of those who dismissed the mass strike as an anarchist instrument, and also of the union leaders who believed they could control the mass strike by calling it and ending it at their will. In fact, her analysis of the events of the Russian Revolution of 1905 was the deciding piece that finally sparked the first serious debate on the mass strike as an instrument of social revolution in Germany. Luxemburg believed that a purely formal democratic system within the context of a capitalist economy could not improve the proletariat’s living conditions. The only way to achieve a change in social relations would be for the majority of people to become actors themselves and the instrument for this would be the mass strike. Like Marxism itself, the mass strike was not a rigid product for Luxemburg (1906:32), but “such a changeable phenomenon that it reflects all the phases of the political and economic struggle, all stages and factors of the revolution”. For her, the mass strike was the key to civilizational progress; it meant not only a struggle against the political elite but also against capitalist exploitation.

According to Luxemburg (1906) and her analysis of the revolutionary events that took place in Russia in 1905, there are four elementary factors that constitute the mass strike. First, the mass strike is not an isolated event, a strike that takes place only one day and then ceases. As shown by the revolutionary events of 1905 in Russia, which are considered a precursor of the 1917 revolution, “the mass strike is rather the indication, the rallying idea, of a whole period of the class struggle lasting for years, perhaps for decades” (Luxemburg 1906:33). Second, the
economic element of the strike, as well as of the revolution itself, cannot be artificially separated from the political. A mass strike may have economic roots, but according to Luxemburg (1906) it will always lead to political demonstrations as well. However, this does not imply that the mass strike is a linear function leading from the economic to the political, since “every great political mass action, after it has attained its political highest point, breaks up into a mass of economic strikes” (Luxemburg 1906:35). The third factor is the profound connection of the mass strike with the revolution. In fact, Luxemburg (1906:37) claims that the revolution leads to the mass strike, and not the other way around: “The revolution thus first creates the social conditions in which this sudden change of the economic struggle into the political and of the political struggle into the economic is possible, a change which finds its expression in the mass strike”. The fourth factor is that the mass strike can only be brought about by the workers and not by a clever minority. Finally, it must be a socialist revolution from below, which “results from social conditions with historical inevitability” (Luxemburg 1906:10).

More than 100 years later, Luxemburg’s reflections still serve as inspiration for many of those who believe in the need for a social revolution. In a sense, her reflections are more important than ever as we face social and environmental challenges created by decades of capitalist exploitation under neoliberal politics. However, it should be emphasized that much has changed since the beginning of the 20th century in terms of the working class. The industrial proletariat, which Luxemburg assumed at the time to be the motor of the revolution, no longer exists in its size and form. In the context of globalization, most of production was exported to countries of the global South, where the labor force is cheaper. Thus, the interest of the working class in the industrialized countries has also shifted; one can no longer assume that all workers have the same interests, especially not the interest of industrial disarmament for the sake of the environment. Given that we can no longer speak of a homogeneous working class with the same interests, it is interesting to think about who could be the bearers of a revolution in our time.

3.2.3 The Feminist Strike
Inspired by Luxemburg, Gago (2020:23) put forward a new political theory of a mass strike – a feminist strike “led by subjects and experiences that do not fit into the traditional idea of labor”. Gago is an Argentinian researcher at the University of Buenos Aires and the National University of San Martín and in addition to her academic work, she is also an activist and co-founder of Ni Una Menos. Hence, she not only theorizes on the strike as an instrument of feminist resistance, but also participates in organizing feminist strikes as a member of Ni Una Menos. There are many parallels between Luxemburg’s (1906) and Gago’s (2020) work: both
wrote in the heat of the moment in which the movement was developing, both wrote from within the organizational dynamic, and both based their theories on real historical events. The mass protest on June 3, 2015, in response to the femicide of 15-year-old Chiara Páez, who was pregnant and beaten to death by her boyfriend, was the starting point of what Gago (2020) refers to as a revolution that led to the first feminist strike one year later. This day was also the birth of the feminist movement *Ni Una Menos*, which is considered one of the major contemporary feminist collectives calling for the IWS.

As the title of Gago’s book suggests, her desire is to change everything, and the feminist strike is supposed to be the key tool to reach this goal. Her manifesto puts forward an alternative theory of power – a feminist one. By analyzing the contemporary feminisms in Latin America, in particular the Argentinian movement, Gago addresses various forms of violence against women and feminized bodies and presents perspectives for encountering them. Among other topics, she addresses different types of sexist violence, the body-territory nexus, feminist economics, and feminist internationalism. The feminist strike as a concept and means of struggle to address the different forms of violence runs like a thread through Gago’s manifesto. For the author, the strike is “a new form of practical cartography of the feminist politics,” and the key element lies within the activism on the street (Gago 2020:23). The feminist strike can be described as a particular form of a mass strike. However, the key difference lies in the notion of *workers*. While the traditional labor strike is tied to specific professions, and the mass strike in Luxemburg’s theory is meant to be an instrument of resistance for the working class as a total, the feminist strike is directed at all women and feminized bodies who perform work, whether paid or unpaid, formal or informal, recognized or unrecognized. In theory, the strike intends to demonstrate, on the one hand, the amount of work that women do every day that goes unrecognized and uncompensated, and, on the other hand, the extent to which reproductive labor is feminized. The feminist strike therefore includes women whose labor has been historically rendered invisible, shedding light on the exploitation and economic violence women face because of gendered power relations and exploitative structures of capitalism. Thus, Gago also takes up the gendered division of labor and argues that a new organizational horizon is created by this shift in the subjects that the feminist strike identifies as strikers:

> This organizational horizon, submerged in that dynamic of open conflict, recenters the class, anti-colonial, and mass dimension of feminism, because the situations that revolutionize the tool of the strike from within are those that the strike would disregard if it were to apply solely to free, paid, unionized, masculine labor with defined limits to its tasks. (Gago 2020:26)

The aspect of reproductive work is of particular relevance here and must be further emphasized. The capitalist system not only uses the sexual division of labor to manifest gender
hierarchies, but it also depends on its structural logic on the female gender to perform reproductive work, such as domestic work, care work and community work, in an uncompensated way:

Domestic tasks are those that have to do with social reproduction in general and, therefore, with the very conditions of possibility of exploitation in capitalism. That they have been devalued time and time again - precisely so that they do not count, so that they are not remunerated, so that they are not recognized as immediately productive, and so that they are not politically vindicated in their centrality - is the effect of capitalist-patriarchal-colonial exploitation. (Gago 2020:41)

The feminist strike intends to demonstrate that the capitalist system is at the same time patriarchal and colonial, thus the feminist strike denounces not only the traditional employer, but also the state and its institutions, and society itself, as it reproduces oppressive structures. The feminist strike can be described as an expanded idea of the mass strike, as it brings together women from all sectors and connects the different forms of violence caused by a specific political nature that derives from forms of exploitation in the production and reproduction of life, broadening this way the notion of the working class. At the same time, the feminist strike promotes the politicization of reproductive labor by showing that the economic system cannot function without reproductive labor, according to the IWS motto of 2017: *Si nuestras vidas no valen, ¡produzcan sin nosotras!* (If our lives don’t matter, produce without us).

Another aspect in which the feminist strike differs from traditional mass strikes is its origin. While most traditional mass strikes originate in protest against the economic situation, the feminist strike arose from a protest against domestic violence - an issue that is too often disconnected from economic violence as it is mistakenly viewed as a moral issue. In practical terms, Gago (2020) argues that the strike allows women to transform their status of mourning into one of struggle through the politicization of violence, thus leaving the position of victimhood. In this aspect, Gago invokes the theory of Segato (2010), who sheds light on the direct link between capitalism and femicides. Segato identifies femicide and rape not as crimes in which hatred towards the victim is the dominant factor, but as crimes motivated by the obligation men perceive in the patriarchal system to dominate and exercise control over women’s bodies in order to belong to a masculine “brotherhood”. Furthermore, Segato (2010:84) argues that these femicides take place in a context of impunity which is established by “the extreme asymmetry that results from local elites’ unregulated extraction of wealth”.

In line with Segato’s theory, Gago (2020:202) puts forward the argument that the feminist strike creates a new conception of violence, as it sheds light on “the organic relationship between sexist and femicidal violence and the current form of capital accumulation”. Gago complements Segato’s argument by saying that the financial crisis, which has resulted in the
loss of jobs of many men, has simultaneously led to a loss of “masculinity” in a heteronormative understanding, as many men can no longer secure the income of the family. To compensate for this deficit of “masculinity”, some men seek physical superiority. By linking gender-based violence to the multiple forms of violence that enable it, whether economic, institutional, labor, colonial or other violence, the strike serves as a unique lens for examining the intersectionality of violence (Gago 2020:60). In other words, the feminist strike is supposed to function as both a practical horizon and an analytical perspective, constructing a popular and anti-neoliberal feminism that allows to show the link between the violence of capitalism and other types of sexist violence.

Another interesting aspect of the feminist strike is the body-territory nexus. Gago (2020) explains that within the neoliberal heteropatriarchal system, women’s bodies have become the battleground of a variety of struggles, whether in the domestic sphere, at work, in the rural, urban, and so on. The feminism that the feminist strike advocates is rooted in all of these different struggles, that are often falsely perceived as struggles by “minorities”. The strike as an instrument of resistance serves thus as an organizational foundation to link these struggles and create a mass movement without homogenizing them. It is precisely in this aspect that the feminist strike with its anti-neoliberal character differs from the general strike, since it embodies realities that are usually positioned outside the “general” interest. In fact, Gago (2020:170) argues that “the general strike becomes truly general when it becomes feminist—because, for the first time, it reaches all spaces, tasks, and forms of work”.

Finally, what has been explained so far can be summarized in three dimensions expressed by the feminist strike: first, the strike is a process that requires organization, communication, building a common network and coordination in assembly. Similar to Luxemburg, Gago argues that the feminist strike is more than just a single event with an end - it is a process which unites people from all backgrounds in a common struggle without hegemonizing it. Second, the strike brings together disparate struggles and establishes cross-national ties by “involving a class dimension, linking violence against women and feminized bodies to forms of labor exploitation, police and state violence, and corporate offensives against common resources” (Gago 2020:27). Third, the strike turns mourning and fear into strategic capacity and thereby fosters new ways of thinking about territory, especially the body as territory. According to the author, these three dimensions give the feminist strike its special potential as an instrument of feminist resistance, as it brings together heterogenous groups of people who suffer from a wide range of
discrimination. From a feminist perspective, the strike becomes, in a sense, both a labor strike and an existential strike to overthrow the capitalist system.

Drawing from the above, the strike as an instrument of resistance can be used in different ways, depending on the objective to be achieved. While a traditional labor strike holds great promise for solving selective problems within a workplace, it is unlikely to change the roots of those problems, which lie in the exploitative nature of capitalism. A feminist strike, on the other hand, as a “true” general strike as Gago would say, promises to change the entire system. In a sense, Gago built on the legacy of Luxemburg, as her definition of the feminist strike includes subjects who have been historically excluded from the notion “worker”. Furthermore, she sheds light on the revolutionary potential that the contemporary feminisms hold today. However, what is promising in theory still seems difficult to implement in practice, especially in countries that do not have the same organizational spaces as Argentina. The purpose of this study is therefore to critically reflect on the social, political and economic context of São Paulo to understand why the feminist strike has not been applied as a tool of feminist resistance by São Paulo’s organized feminist movement.

4. Methodology

The present work constitutes a qualitative case study for which a literature review was carried out on the historical background of the role of the strike in Brazil’s women’s movement and a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of the women’s movement in São Paulo, Brazil\(^5\). The city of São Paulo was chosen for the field study for three reasons: First, São Paulo is home to a traditional women’s workers’ movement that has relied on the instrument of the strike since the beginning of the 20\(^{th}\) century. Secondly, many feminist organizations have their headquarters or an office in São Paulo, and third, the city is the economic center of Brazil, which is why a majority of the mass protests and strikes take place in São Paulo. These reasons suggest that if the IWS movement would find an echo in Brazil, it would most likely be in São Paulo.

The interviews were conducted in the months of March, April and May of 2022 and thus under the sanitary restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, which partly affected interactions and exchanges with the feminist organizations. The national language, Portuguese, was the

\(^5\) For a detailed list of the organizations, including their visions and forms of activism, see appendix 1.
spoken language in the interviews. For the comprehensibility and consistency of the study, the statements of the interviewees were translated into English. The semi-structured interview form was chosen for the methodology of this study as it allows for deviation from the protocol and leaves space for the discovery of other important, maybe even sensitive topics that unfold during the interview. However, semi-structured interviews can be very time consuming and also require the interviewer to be extremely well prepared in terms of resources in order to be able to pick up on relevant topics.

4.1 Data Collection

In order to test the two hypotheses, both primary and secondary data were collected for this study. For the primary data, direct contact with critical voices from feminist movements was indispensable, since only through the consideration of the experiences and impressions of feminist organizations was it possible to draw an appropriate conclusion about how São Paulo’s organized feminist movement relates to the strike as an instrument of feminist resistance. The first task was to create a map of the most active feminist organizations in São Paulo. Therefore, I consulted search engines such as Google, as well as the social media platforms Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. I also attended the IWD act on March 8, 2022, which took place at 4 p.m. on one of the city’s most important streets, Avenida Paulista. In order to be able to establish contact with some of the members of São Paulo’s organized feminist movement, I went to the official meeting point two hours before the start of the manifestation. This allowed me to arrive together with the feminist organizations and to identify which organizations were involved, what actions they took and what messages they promoted.

In order to present a selection of organizations as variable and representative of the feminist movement as possible, the search included feminist marches, collectives, NGOs, feminist organizations from political parties, the National Secretariats of Women from trade unions, and feminist university groups. Another criterion was the age of these movements and the time the representatives formed part of the movement, since in order to answer some of the interview questions the organizations had to exist before 2017, when the first call for an IWS was made. In addition, I considered it relevant that the interviewees were of different ages and identified as belonging to different ethno-racial categories in order to be able to carry out an analysis as inclusive as possible that considers different realities. At least one movement or organization should specifically represent black women, as they make up the largest single group of the total population (27%) yet are the most underrepresented in politics. They are also the ones who are most likely to be killed by femicides and who earn the least (Villalobos & Manson 2018).
Particular attention was also paid to the form of activism, targeting primarily movements whose activism consisted of protests and street actions and who participated in the organization of the official act of March 8. In this sense, preference was given to interviewing women who represented their organization in the joint meeting which São Paulo’s feminist movement holds every year prior to the IWD, to decide on a common motto and protest form. After successfully creating a map of the organizations relevant to this study, I contacted a total of 15 organizations, which led to ten interviews being conducted. One interviewee represented both the social movement Marcha Mundial das Mulheres (MMM) and the NGO Sempreviva Organização Feminista (SOF).

The interviews included a total of nine questions that addressed the activism carried out by the organizations, the role of the feminist strike in Brazil, their opinion of the strike as an instrument of resistance in a more general sense, the relationship between the feminist organizations on a national and international level, and the specific social, political and economic context in which the feminist movement operates. The latter was considered of importance given that Brazil was disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought most of public life to a standstill, but also because Brazilian history differs from the rest of Latin America, since the Portuguese colonization built its economy largely on the labor of imported enslaved people from Africa. As a consequence, black women have established a strong black feminist movement in Brazil, which is not present to the same extent in other Latin American countries. The questions thus aimed not only to consider the contemporary situation and the feminist strike, but also the historical complexity of Brazil.

In advance to the interview, the participants received an information and consent sheet that needed to be signed and an overview of the questions that were planned for the interview. The information sheet contained all the relevant information about participating in the study, the possibility of using pseudonyms and how they can access the study afterwards. Six of the interviews were conducted in March shortly after the IWD, two in April and two in May. The interviews were intentionally planned for after March 8, on the one hand because the feminist organizations were particularly occupied with the preparations for the IWD, and on the other hand because this allowed the impressions of the recent IWD to be included in the analysis.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, participants were given the choice of doing the interview in person or online. Four of the ten interviews were conducted in person, three of

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6 For a detailed list of the questions, see appendix 2.
them at the respective localities where the organizations are based and one in a café in the city. Another five interviews were conducted online at the request of the interviewees, via the platform Zoom. Furthermore, in addition to the nine interviews, a voice message exchange via the messenger WhatsApp took place with Sâmia Bomfim who is the most voted federal deputy of the PSOL party and eight most voted deputy in the state of São Paulo. Sâmia Bomfim is also a feminist activist, a co-founder of the feminist collective Juntas! and participated in the 2017 IWS in Buenos Aires, for which reason her insights were considerably relevant to this study. When representatives had to decline a request for an interview due to lack of time, they were generally offered other opportunities to participate in the study, for example, by exchanging voice messages answering only to a selected set of questions. After the participants had given their consent, all interviews were recorded so that I could refer back to the conversations afterwards. One advantage of the face-to-face interviews was that, in addition to the detailed qualitative data from the interview, I also had direct access to the information material produced by the organizations.

In addition to the information collected in the interviews, further data was needed to respond to the research question. Therefore, prior to the interviews, the organizations’ activities on their respective websites and on the largest social networks, namely Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, were examined. A special focus was placed on the yearly publications around the IWD on March 8 since 2017, in order to trace back which organizations mentioned the feminist strike or possibly used common hashtags that were trending in the IWS movement, such as #ParoInternacionalDeMujeres, #GreveFeminista, #IfWomenStopTheWorldStops and #NiUnaMenos. Accompanying these movements in their preparation for IWD on March 8 through tracing their social media accounts allowed me to observe more closely how the organizations prepared, how they distributed their message, who exactly they tried to approach and what instruments of resistance they used. Moreover, the main local, national and international newspapers, such as Jornal da Globo, Folha, ElPaís Brasil, Veja and Estadão were also studied for articles that reported on the feminist strike in Brazil since 2017.

For chapter 5, which presents the historical background of the women's movement in Brazil, the search for secondary data was required. This consisted mainly of scholarly articles and books on the development of the women's movement in Brazil, but also on the labor movement and the use of the strike. Special attention was given to literature dealing with the women's labor movement and the use of the strike. However, literature in this area is limited, especially regarding the period from 1900 to the end of the military dictatorship in 1985.
4.2 Data Analysis

After conducting the interviews, I transcribed the key statements for each question separately for each interview. I then created an Excel spreadsheet in which I inserted the questions and the respective answers from each representative. This allowed a clearer comparison of the individual answers of the interviewees and facilitated the identification of commonalities and differences between the statements. As the form of the interview was semi-structural, there were occasional deviations from the planned questions during the interviews. Accordingly, there was some information that was relevant but could not be assigned to a specific question, which is why I created an extra row in the Excel table for this purpose. Finally, I translated the quotes into English.

Once I had transcribed, translated, and inserted all relevant statements into the Excel table, I divided chapter 6, the analysis of the interviews, into two sections. The first section is dedicated to a more general introduction into the organizational structure of the feminist movement in São Paulo, its struggles and its network both nationally and internationally and the second section provides insight on how the feminist movement relates to the feminist strike. A distinction was made between how the feminist organizations relate to the feminist strike from a theoretical perspective, and what they believe has led in practice to the feminist strike finding few supporters in the context of São Paulo. This ultimately served to identify the key factors that the feminist movement believes pose the greatest challenges to the implementation of a feminist strike.

5. São Paulo, Strikes and the Women’s Movement

This chapter provides a brief overview of the development of the contemporary feminist movement in São Paulo and its relationship to the strike as an instrument of resistance in a more general sense. It is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis or review, as an in-depth discussion is beyond the scope of this study. It also does not claim to grasp the diversity, let alone the complexity, of the history of feminism in Brazil. Rather, this chapter aims to lay the groundwork for a more comprehensive understanding of the development of the feminist movement in São Paulo, the difference between the women's movement and the feminist movement, and the socioeconomic and political context in which the women’s movement and feminist movement emerged. The first section deals with São Paulo’s women’s labor tradition,
with a special focus on the instrument of the strike, which Brazilian women have resorted to especially since the beginning of the 20th century to challenge economic and physical exploitation. The second section examines the relationship between women and the Communist Party, and the strike culture from the Vargas Era\(^7\) up to the beginning of the military dictatorship (1930-1964). Subsequently, in section 5.3, the forms of resistance by women in the period of the military dictatorship (1964-1985) are being discussed. Finally, the fourth section sheds light on the development of the feminist movement in the period from the IWY in 1975, which is generally considered the beginning of the transition to democracy in Brazil, to the present day.

In order to provide the most insightful overview possible, this chapter draws predominantly on secondary sources on the history of the women’s movement in São Paulo, but also on primary sources that emerged from the interviews conducted for this study. Indeed, it became clear during the interviews that a description of the current economic, social and political situation is not sufficient to analyze the respective responses of the interviewees, since the heterogenous composition of the today’s feminist movement in Brazil stems directly from the historical context in which it developed. Before delving deeper into the matter, it is also important to emphasize that for the longest time the history of Brazil was not only written predominantly by men, but also by white men. This led, on the one hand, to the role of women in Brazilian history being repressed, and on the other hand, to many struggles of women not being recorded at all and thus remaining unknown until today. Since the end of the Brazilian military dictatorship, however, many scholars have devoted themselves to the task of filling these gaps in Brazilian historiography, paying homage to the numerous women who have fought for gender equality and democracy (Souza Lobo 2021; Cisne 2015; Saffioti 1976; Sarti 1989, 2004). Each of these struggles is unique in that it always occurs in the context of class, race and time, and all are significant as they paved the way for Brazil’s plurality of feminisms today. Given that this study is concerned with the strike as a tool of resistance, the following section begins with a period in Brazilian history, in which an increasing number of women began to seek out the strike: The First Brazilian Republic from 1889 to 1930.

### 5.1 The first Brazilian Republic and the General Strike of 1917

As the Industrial Revolution took its course in Brazil, many Europeans either emigrated directly from Europe or fled the precarious working conditions on Brazilian coffee plantations to São

\(^7\) The Vargas Era describes the period between 1930 and 1945, when Gêutlio Vargas was president.
Paulo in search of employment in the growing industries. The majority of the workforce at that time was informally employed in the textile industry and agriculture sector, working for miserable wages under dangerous conditions (Biondi & Toledo 2018). However, the precarious working conditions in the factories did not impede the immigration and urbanization process, as São Paulo grew from 50,000 inhabitants in 1890 to 500,000 in 1917 (Biondi & Toledo 2018:19). In just a short time, São Paulo became Brazil’s most important and dynamic economic center, which it remains to this day. The immigration of Europeans also had a strong impact on the racial composition of the labor market. In spite of the fact that slavery had been abolished in 1888, only few former enslaved people obtained salaried labor in the city, since industrial labor was considered work for European immigrants under the new policy of branqueamento, also known as “whitening” (Telles 1994; Santos 2002, Rago 2001). As a result, many people of African descent, who had been brought to Brazil as enslaved persons and became the engine of the Brazilian economy during colonial times, were either displaced by low-skilled Europeans and found themselves unemployed or remained employed in the domestic sector under the most precarious working conditions. In fact, it was not until 1930, when European immigrants began to rise in the professional ranks, that more Afro-Brazilians were welcomed into the labor market for predominantly blue-collar positions (Telles 1994).

In contrast, the European-descended working class, which suffered from poverty and yet was privileged by virtue of its origin under the “whitening” policies, began to revolt in strikes against the financial and physical exploitation in the factories (Biondi & Toledo 2018). Working class women, who were not only doubly exploited because they did both reproductive and factory work, but also earned less than their male counterparts and worked longer hours, were at the forefront of the various strikes against the capitalist system and fought next to the men for higher salaries and safer working conditions (Fraccaro 2017, Rago 2001). However, women were generally given fewer concessions, despite their political commitment and the fact that they constituted about 34% of the labor force in 1917, and as much as 70% in some sectors such as the textile industry (Fraccaro 2017:78). This is due in part to the fact that the labor movement sought to portray itself as a homogeneous class subjected to the same injustices, which often led to a denial of gender discrimination women faced. In fact, Cisne (2015) argues that until the end of the 1960s, the working class was viewed as homogeneous disregarding its gender composition. Moreover, Rago (2001) argues that women’s primary social role continued to be that of the mother or wife, thus industrial work was seen as something temporary for women, which hence did not need to be changed urgently.
Several reasons can be named why Brazilian women workers in industrial regions chose the strike as the appropriate tool of their resistance at that time, despite the fact that participating in a strike could result in unemployment or other penalties, since the political right to strike did not exist at that time in Brazil. First, the majority of the industrial workforce had come to Brazil from Europe, therefore they already had strike experience from revolts in European industries. Second, at the beginning of the 20th century, information about the revolutionary Russian strikes of 1905 and 1917 began to spread, raising hope for social transformation among the Brazilian working class (Biondi & Toledo 2018). Third, the few workers’ organizations that had been formed by then were mainly directed by and focused on men, prompting women to organize in other ways, including resorting to direct actions such as strikes to make their demands heard (Fraccaro 2017). Simultaneously, the ideologies of anarchism, socialism and revolutionary syndicalism spread as the main political currents in the labor world, which strongly supported the process of organizing the Brazilian working class (Biondi & Toledo 2018; Rago 2001).

Given that the majority of workers in the textile industries were of the female sex, women took an essential role in the struggle of the proletariat for fairer wages and safer working conditions (Biondi & Toledo 2018; Fraccaro 2017; Rago 2001). However, the strikes in the first decade of the 20th century occurred predominantly within the framework of individual industries, that is, as traditional labor strikes and not as general strikes in the Marxist sense (CPDOC n.d.). As explained in section 3.2.1, traditional strikes help workers negotiate certain concessions with employers, such as a wage increase. However, since they are limited to individual industries or companies, they are unlikely to have a significant impact on the overall exploitative structure of the capitalist system and this was also the case in São Paulo.

In July 1917, the strike culture in the city of São Paulo was to evolve from traditional workers’ strikes confined to specific sectors to a general strike that even gained support outside the factory. In fact, in one interview conducted for this study, Isabela Benassi, a member of Mulheres do PT, refers to 1917 as the beginning of a strong women’s movement:

We have a tradition of working women, a women’s movement that has existed since 1917. The women workers in Brazil organized and went on strike in the factories. (Isabela, Mulheres do PT)

According to Fraccaro (2017), the strike movement that strongly influenced public life in São Paulo from 1917 to 1919 and shaped the history of the Brazilian labor movement was, among other things, the result of years of politicization of the working class of São Paulo. However, the general strike was also a reaction to a variety of developments faced by the working class as a consequence of the war in Europe. Confronted with a sharp decline in the import of finished products from Europe due to the First World War, Brazilian factories tried...
to substitute the imported products by producing themselves. One industry that was particularly affected by this change in production was the textile industry, which employed primarily migrant women. To compensate for the import deficit, employers reintroduced night shifts in addition to the already long workdays of up to 13 hours, which had a disproportionate impact on women, who were more vulnerable to sexual violence during the night shift (Biondi & Toledo 2018; Fraccaro 2017). Another factor that mobilized women to organize and participate in the 1917 revolt was the increase in food prices by an average of more than 50% in just one year, while already low wages stagnated, which in turn disproportionately affected women, who were generally responsible for managing the family economy (Biondi & Toledo 2018:46).

Considering that women workers suffered disproportionately under the economic circumstances of that time, it should come as no surprise that the strikes were characterized by massive female participation. In fact, the general strike of 1917 originated from a traditional labor strike organized by roughly 400 workers, predominantly female, who laid down their labor at the Crespi textile factory in São Paulo on June 8, 1917. Together they protested against the long working hours and child labor and demanded the abolition of the night shift, the regulation of food prices and wage increases of 15 to 20% (Biondi & Toledo:53). Another issue that gained momentum in the women’s agenda was the dismissal and punishment of superiors who sexually assaulted female workers (Fraccaro 2017; Rago 2001). As their demands were not met, the entire workforce of the factory went on strike at the end of June, eventually joined by children, women and men from other factories. In less than a month, the number of strikers grew from 400 to over 40 thousand people laying down their work, organizing marches through the city and protesting in public places (Biondi & Toledo 2018:54). Although many employers made concessions and strikers were subjected to extreme police violence, the number of strikers did not decrease, in solidarity with workers who did not achieve results and those who were arrested during the protest (Biondi & Toledo 2018).

As Luxemburg (1906) foresaw in her theory of mass political strikes, the 1917 São Paulo general strike sparked thousands of smaller strikes and eventually ignited an entire strike movement in Brazil’s industrial cities that lasted until 1919. On Marxist terms, one could argue that the general strike of 1917 created “the spirit of the laboring classes” in Brazil, as the strike sparked an entire strike movement in the country (Marx, Engels & Lapides 1987:43).

What was particularly remarkable about this period was the ability of the workers to create organizational structures within a very short time in order to be able to confront the employers and the state in a united manner. Trade unions, leagues and other organizational structures were
created in a period of a few weeks and anarchist and socialist militants joined the strikers in their struggle (Fraccaro 2017). In addition, the strike movement also counted with great support from the press. Eventually, the strikers’ demands were no longer directed only against the employers, but also against the state, turning a traditional labor strike into a general strike that paralyzed the entire city. Meanwhile, many women who were largely excluded from the male-dominated union world began to form leagues to represent their interests and discuss ways to change the system. The women also referred to neighborhood networks to find comrades outside the factory and in other factories to join their struggle (Fraccaro 2017). In this way, they carried the strike from the industrial sector to other sectors of society and expanded the idea of the traditional strike, as Gago (2020) also envisions in her theory on the feminist strike.

The list of the strikers’ demands was presented by the Proletarian Defense Committee, a unified group made up of anarchist and socialist militants as well as trade unionists. One demand was to restrict the hiring of women and children, which implied a call for a ban on night work for women and children. However, the women’s demand to punish and dismiss the perpetrators of sexual assault was not addressed (Biondi & Toledo 2018). An analysis of the demands demonstrates that, despite the protagonist role that women played, the movement represented a labor movement with workers’ interests and not a feminist movement. Moreover, considering that the uprising of the movement itself was revolutionary, it must be noted that the demands were comparatively modest. In the end, however, the movement had a more profound purpose, as Biondi and Toledo (2018) emphasize: the struggle was about the public recognition of the working class as a social and political subject.

Although the interests of women workers were only realized to a limited extent, Joel Wolfe (1991) argues that the general strike of 1917 was of great importance for the women’s workers movement, as the interests of working-class women became a central component of the anarchist and labor press in the aftermath of the strike. This development represented a great step forward, considering that before the strike, women who advocated for women’s rights were, in a sense, considered by the anarchists as enemies who divided the labor movement. Wolfe (1991:845) goes on to argue that the general strike was not the result of anarchists organizing, but the product of “the city’s largely female industrial labor force, few of whom even identified themselves as anarchists”. In conclusion, a general consensus exists among researchers that the general strike of 1917 would not have occurred without the massive organization of women, and that the strikes between 1917 and 1919 significantly impacted the Brazilian labor and women’s movement (Biondi & Toledo 2018; Fraccaro 2017; Wolfe 1991).
While working-class women at the time struggled against sexual violence and precarious working conditions in factories (Biondi & Toledo 2018), among other things, and black women struggled for employment in the labor market under the policy of “whitening” (Telles 1994, Rago 2001), the struggle for women’s empowerment through women’s suffrage, political equality, and access to higher education gained prominence among the middle and upper classes of society (Sarti 1989). However, in contrast to the women’s labor movement, which relied on direct actions such as strikes and mass demonstrations due to lack of political access, the resistance of suffragists consisted mainly of lobbying, as they had access to the political elite (Alves & Pitanguy 1991). An examination of the struggle women waged during the first Brazilian Republic illustrates that each struggle was embedded in a different context, and accordingly resorted to different means of struggle. As Carter (2005) and Hilson (2002) point out regarding direct action, it is primarily the excluded groups that resort to it. Therefore, it is only logical that working-class women, who had no or very limited access to political participation because of their gender and class, ultimately relied on their numerical strength and unity in their resistance. For them, the strike was the appropriate instrument for exerting pressure on employers and the state, for without their labor the Brazilian economy would have suffered severe losses during that time. Middle- and upper-class women, on the other hand, were still largely confined to the private sphere, their labor was almost insignificant for the economy, rendering the strike irrelevant in their struggle for women’s rights.

5.2 Women, the Communist Party and the Vargas Era
The first 30 years of the 20th century witnessed the establishment of a vibrant proletariat, mass mobilizations became standard repertoire of Brazilian urban workers after the general strike of 1917, and the government increasingly recognized the labor movement as a threatening danger. Furthermore, after the general strike, in which the anarchists took the lead, a competing movement emerged that also gained strength in the labor movement: communism. Under these circumstances, the political situation changed drastically in the Vargas era, the period from 1930 to 1945 (Dulles 1973). With the coup d’état of 1937, which manifested the power of Getúlio Vargas as president and marked the beginning of a “new state” with strong dictatorial tendencies, the worker class women’s struggle transformed even more into a general struggle for all the people to prevent the establishment of a dictatorship (Souza Lobo 2021). However, Wolfe (2010) also highlights the populist character of the Vargas government, which sought to include new groups of social and urban workers, including women workers, in its policies. Even if this inclusion remained mostly at the rhetorical level, it nevertheless led to support for the
Vargas government, including from the proletariat. Eventually, after intensive lobbying by the suffragists, Vargas also officially granted women the right to vote in 1932 (Wolfe 2010).

According to Souza Lobo (2021), women were integrated into party struggles during this period, although this integration was intended to promote general party issues rather than issues specifically related to discrimination against women. As in other countries as well, the term feminism generally carried an elitist and negative connotation for working-class women active in leftist parties, such as the Communist Party, hereafter PCB, who saw the key to emancipation in the transition from capitalism to socialism (da Cruz Alves 2017). In fact, it was not until at least the 1960s, that women close to the left began to question the homogeneous class view of the communist movement. In addition, given the structural struggles the working class faced, such as food insecurity, inflation, and exploitation of the proletariat, the particular gender struggle was largely found to be secondary in the working class (da Cruz Alves 2017). Nevertheless, the PCB was attractive to many women from the working-class, as their discourse cherished women in their struggle. For example, in the 5th Communist Congress organized in 1954 in São Paulo, one member emphasized that the revolution they sought was not only impossible without the participation of women, but would also serve women’s rights:

The Party teaches us that the united and organized action of the great masses of women is indispensable to assure women a free and happy life. The emancipation of women would only be definitively achieved with the defeat of the regime of landowners and big capitalists servile to U.S. imperialism. For this goal, the Communist Party, the most ardent and consequent defender of women’s rights and interests, fights. (Maranhão 1954)

The PCB considered the organization of large mass actions a key element in enabling women to live “free and happy lives,” and pointed to the importance of events like the Latin American Women’s Conference from 1954 (Maranhão 1954). Accordingly, the PCB became an essential platform for women’s rights activists, however, the extreme hostility the party faced from the Brazilian state during the Vargas era and with the start of the Cold War in 1947 made it challenging for them to convince people to join their struggle (da Cruz Alves 2017). Furthermore, French and Pedersen Cluff (2010) point out that neither the PCB nor the labor movement affiliated to it really pursued a conscious policy to include women in leadership positions. In addition, Amelinha Teles, who participated as an interviewee for this study, remembers her time in the PCB and sheds light on a different angle of the party and its relation to women. Despite the concessions the Party gave to women in its discourse, Amelinha argues that the PCB was also an obstacle to the development of feminist movements in Brazil:

Our struggle here is a constant difficulty, every moment is a difficulty. For example, we belonged to the Communist Party, but the communists did not want women to organize, this was the first clash we had. The feminist movement comes from the left and it’s funny in a way that the left criticizes us, the men
from the left and the parties, that’s always been the case, that they criticize us because they think we divide the working class. (Amelinha, União das Mulheres São Paulo)

Since the PCB had made it its mission to represent the proletariat, the party suffered strong oppression by the state, which also affected the women’s labor movement. Although the right to strike did not officially exist at the time, the 1937 Constitution officially considered strikes an antisocial act and explicitly prohibited them, providing for the legal punishment of strikers. Accordingly, the strike movement disarticulated significantly during the Vargas era and did not resume until 1945, when Vargas was deposed in a military coup (CPDOC 2009).

The new constitution of 1946 finally provided for the right to strike for certain categories that were not considered essential, which accordingly led to a great increase in strikes. However, the largest strike mobilization was not to take place until 1953, when the largely female textile industry initiated the so-called Three Hundred Thousand Strike, which eventually paralyzed some 276 industrial plants (CPDOC 2009). The majority of the strikers’ demands were met, which caused the following period until the beginning of the military dictatorship in 1964 to be strongly characterized by strike movements and mass mobilizations against inflation (Bandeira 2022; Souza Lelles & de Carvalho 2018). Nevertheless, in particular the mobilizations against inflation continued to focus on the very structural problems that women disproportionately faced, since the primary social role imposed on women by a patriarchal society was the role of the mother and wife (French & Pedersen Cluff 2010). Issues that went beyond the question of inflation or workers’ rights topics, such as women’s liberation, birth control, abortion, and sexuality were not given space in the women’s movement agenda (Saffioti 1976). Saffioti considers this and the fact that the struggle of the leftist women’s movements developed primarily around political events and against the rising cost of living, as one of the main reasons why most women’s associations had only an ephemeral existence.

5.3 Women in Resistance Against the Dictatorship

In April 1964, the political situation in Brazil changed dramatically when the Brazilian President João Goulart, who was in power at that time, was overthrown in a civil-military coup and a military dictatorship was established that lasted until 1985. The time under the military dictatorship that followed the coup was marked by “kidnappings, exile, disappearances and torture, in which the delegates from the Censor’s Office and the agents of the secret services haunted us daily, and every citizen was, in principle, suspected of some crime against national security” (Sarti 1989:79). Strikes became illegal again under the new law until 1978, when the law was redefined to prohibit only strikes in public service and essential activities in the interest
of national security (CPDOC 2009). As for women’s organizations, the establishment of the dictatorship led to their almost complete disappearance from public life until the IWY in 1975, as many stopped organizing out of fear or fled into exile (Sardenberg & Alcantara Costa 2014).

The first years of the military dictatorship were marked by extraordinary economic growth, also known as the “economic miracle”. This contributed greatly to urbanization and led to the displacement of working-class women to the periphery of São Paulo in the 1970s. (Napolitano 2018). There, they faced additional problems on top of the low wages, as the commute to work became much longer and there were no childcare centers where mothers could take their children for the time they were at work. Eventually, women began to form leagues in peripheral areas, discussing low wages, the high costs of living, and the lack of childcare facilities (Sardenberg & Alcantara Costa 2014; Souza Lelles & de Carvalho 2018). In times where any type of resistance was oppressed by the authorities, these women found a way to slowly build spaces for political participation and even carried out peaceful mass mobilizations. Together with sectors of the church, they founded the movement against the inflation of the prices called Movimento do Custo de Vida (MCV) and the Movimento de luta por Creches, a movement for day care centers for their children (Sardenberg & Alcantara Costa 2014; Giulani 2001).

As the MCV gained a voice, especially among the working class, leftist groups and trade unionists became interested in the Mothers’ Leagues and eventually took the lead. Declared feminists, who were mostly educated women from the middle class, also increasingly tried to connect with the leagues, meeting with mothers and talking about women’s rights. Together they built a feminism that was connected to popular interests, in particular the interests of the working-class. In fact, according to Sarti (1989:77), the feminists “influenced and were influenced by the demands of the popular classes, which were also related to changes in the sexual behaviour and patterns of fertility and reproduction”. Given that feminists and the Church had the same adversary, the feminist movement decided to ally with women’s movements from the peripheries, and thus also with the Church, in the struggle against the military dictatorship, despite the Church’s conservative value system (Sardenberg & Alcantara Costa 2014). This alliance with the church for a greater cause meant the removal of conflictual topics such as abortion, sexuality or family planning from the public debate (Sarti 1989).

Since the repression and control by the military dictatorship made it almost impossible for citizens to engage in legal resistance for democracy through direct action or political lobbying from 1964 until 1985, leftist activists of the Communist movement began an armed struggle for the freedom of the people. However, also in the guerrilla struggle women faced sexism and
discrimination from leftist men, despite the Communist Party emphasizing the importance of women in the revolution (Sardenberg & Alcantara Costa 2014). Given that these organizations belonged to the underground, there exists no official data on the number of women who participated in the armed struggle for re-democratization. However, the representative of União das Mulheres de São Paulo, Amelinha Teles, participated in the guerrilla struggle of the Communist Party during the military dictatorship. During the interview Amelinha remembers her feminist fellows: “My generation died in the struggle, was shot at, was raped, how many companheiras from my time were tortured, I myself was raped by the police agents”.

In the context of authoritarianism, the persecuted labor movement continued to call for strikes, however, most direct action was brutally suppressed by the military dictatorship. As the "economic miracle" came to an end, society's pressure on the military regime increased. Eventually, the regime felt pressured to adopt a policy of political opening, which opened space for organization (Napolitano 2018). Finally, it can be concluded that the struggle of Brazilian women in this period was primarily characterized by the general problems of society. Nevertheless, scholars agree on the important role that women, especially those in urban women's movements, played in the struggle against the military dictatorship (Sarti 1989; Sardenberg & Alcantara Costa 2014; Souza Lelles & de Carvalho 2018).

5.4 Democracy and Feminism on the Rise

The year 1975 was to have a worldwide impact on the struggle of the women’s movement, as the United Nations declared it to be the IWY. Although the Brazilian military dictatorship had not yet ended at that time, the official recognition of women’s issues as a social problem opened doors to women's organizations in Brazil that had been organizing clandestinely. While resistance in the form of direct actions still bore great risks of violent repression by the state, the IWY “served as a pretext for women to discuss and organize” (Sarti 1989:80). Shortly after, various women's organizations and journals were either founded or began to act more openly in São Paulo, such as Brasil Mulher, Nós Mulheres and Movimento Feminino pela Anistia (Sarti 1989). In light of the close collaboration of feminists with the popular women's movements of the peripheries in the early 1970s, and thus to some extent also with the church, public activism was largely restricted to more general issues related to the traditional role of women as mothers. However, this changed with the new spaces created as a result of the IWY, which the feminists used to articulate topics that in a patriarchal society were viewed as critical, such as sexuality, reproductive rights and gender-based violence (Souza Lobo 2021; Sarti 1989). Eventually, the
new possibilities for mobilization led to the emergence of an autonomous feminist movement in late 1970s that acted in the struggle against authoritarianism together with various other "new" social movements, such as the black, rural, and what is today known as the LGBTQIA+ movement (Sarti 1989).

In the process of political opening, more women also demanded their rightful place in unions. In just 8 years, the number of unionized women increased by 176%. It should be noted, however, that in 1978 women still made up only 20.5% of unionized workers, despite representing 36.1% of the labor force (Sarti 1989). Furthermore, the growth in women's participation in unions was not reflected in union meetings. Souza Lobo (2021) explains the low participation of women in union meetings by the fact that the meetings were particularly masculine spaces and held outside working hours, which made it difficult for women to participate, as working-mothers and wives carried the burden of the double shift. Strikes that took place during working hours, by contrast, were an accessible means of resistance for women, which is why they attracted strong female participation in the working-class. According to the study by Souza Lobo (2021), this phenomenon was particularly well observable during a series of historical metallurgical strikes that took place from 1978 until 1980 in São Paulo.

The 1980s are generally conceived as a time of consolidation of the Brazilian feminist movement (Munck 2020; Sardenberg & Alcantara Costa 2014; Sarti 1989; Souza Lobo 2021). However, the end of the military dictatorship in 1985 also led to a fragmentation of the women's movement, as the numerous social heterogeneous struggles that were united within it began to demand recognition and autonomy. The disappearance of the common adversary with the end of the military dictatorship finally revealed the weaknesses of the women's movement, whose mobilization was mainly limited to the restoration of democracy: “Unity had been established in a vacuum and could not be sustained when the mere fact of being an opposition no longer sufficed to bond the movement together” (Sarti 1989:84).

Parallel to the fragmentation of the women's movement into several individual struggles, the institutionalization of the women's movement also progressed, which, as explained in section 3.1.2, can lead to further fragmentation. According to Munck (2020:65), the wave of institutionalization of the Brazilian women’s movement in the 1980s and 1990s in Brazil caused “a shift in the priorities and modus operandi of the dominant women’s movements.” In the process of re-democratization, several state institutions were established, such as the National Council for the Defense of Women’s Rights (CNDM – Conselho Nacional de Defesa dos Direitos das Mulheres) and women’s police stations specialized in crimes against women.
Furthermore, feminism began to be institutionalized at the academic level through the promotion of centers for women's studies at universities (Cisne 2015). The most striking development, however, was the implementation of numerous national and international NGOs. In addition to acting as expert advisors to the state on women's issues, many NGOs also began to perform a large share of the social services for women that were cut by the state under neoliberal policies (Sardenberg & Alcantara Costa 2014; Munck 2020).

All these new spaces created in the process of re-democratization depended on the professionalization of the feminist movement. As a result of this, the feminist movement not only suffered a strong fragmentation as it separated into autonas and institutionalistas, but, according to Munck (2020:65), it also became more and more de-radicalized “under cover of improving effectiveness”. Finally, in spite of the fact that institutionalization also had many positive effects on the promotion of women’s rights as many feminists from the CNDM successfully lobbied decision-makers and achieved the incorporation of around 80% of feminist demands into the 1988 Constitution, several researchers argue that this process also signified losing ground as a social movement on the Brazilian civil society level, since movement activities such as political education and popular mobilization were neglected (Cisne 2015; Munck 2020; Sarti 1989; Medeiros & Fanti 2019).

In Brazil, the 2000s were marked by two trends: first, the decline of NGO-ization and second, the strengthening of what Sardenberg and Alcantara (2014:63) refer to as “state feminism”. While Cisne (2015) links the decline of feminist NGOs to the withdrawal of international agencies from Brazil, Sardenberg and Alcantara Costa (2014) argue that many institutionalized feminists recognized the limits imposed by institutionalization in terms of autonomy, which encouraged them to return to a social movement approach. The second trend that shaped the 2000s, state feminism, can be described as “the institutionalization of the female presence in state structure” to promote the “formulation, the adoption and, more importantly, the implementation of public policies that effectively redress women’s unequal status in society” (Bohn 2009:2). It refers to both state participation within the framework of political parties and state institutions created for the inclusion of women. Cisne (2015) remarks that while feminist discourse increased within some political parties through state feminism, other autonomous feminist practices further decreased. The project of state feminism only really gained momentum when the leftist politician Luiz Inácio (Lula) da Silva of the PT assumed presidency in 2003. Under the leftist government, various institutions were created to strengthen the dialogue between feminists and the state. Given the political orientation of PT, many
feminists hoped this would greatly advance the political feminist struggle (Sardenberg & Alcantara Costa 2014). However, as Bohn (2009:12) points out, these institutions can have a great impact on policy-making, nevertheless, they also “depend upon a well-intentioned head of state for their power and even survival”. Under the advance of neo-conservatism in politics, the space for meaningful political participation for feminists within the state eventually began to shrink again.

After 10 years of state feminism, which produced numerous women's rights on paper but did little to change the conservatism and gender violence in society, a transnational movement from Canada known as SlutWalk spread in Brazil in 2011 (Medeiros & Fanti 2019; Santini, Terra & Duarte de Almeida 2016). In conformity with Medeiros and Fanti (2019), this movement of predominantly young women, organizing primarily on social media platforms, brought feminism back to the streets in Brazil to sharply criticize the advancing conservatism in politics and society. In general, the time between 2011 and 2016 was a time of massive street mobilization which reached its high in the so-called June protests in 2013. In 2015, the so-called “Feminist Spring” began to blossom in Brazil in response to political intentions to further restrict already strict abortion laws. During this period, it was again mainly young Brazilian women who organized both online and in the streets, in response to the advance of conservatism and the lack of autonomous feminist practices, since much of the feminist movement had been institutionalized. In fact, this time was marked by a sharp increase of direct actions, since “in a context of conservative advance, the feminists were forced from an offensive to a defensive position - that is, fighting against the suppression of rights” (Medeiros & Fanti 2019). According to Medeiros and Fanti (2019), the emergence of new collective actors was also a response to the limited capacities of the PT to advance sexual and reproductive rights. Nevertheless, the authors also stress that this "new" feminism was strongly favored by the previous political gains that the feminist movement had made through its participation within the state and cooperation with the Lula government, which in many ways also strengthened feminism.

The 2010s marked a significant shift in the form of mobilization, especially on the part of young feminists, who until then had been mostly unorganized, but also on the part of the institutionalized feminist movement. Growing conservatism in the political arena drew many people back to the streets to put pressure on politicians through direct action, as they felt that "business as usual," that is, political participation by civil society from within the state structures, did not live up to their expectations of democracy. As conservative powers continued
to gain power at the political level, which eventually culminated in an impeachment process of then-President Dilma Rousseff in 2016, the autonomous feminist movement joined forces with the institutionalized feminist movement and other popular movements from the leftist camp. This, once again, meant a de-radicalization of specific feminist demands in exchange for general political demands by the left (Medeiros & Fanti 2019). The post-impeachment context is eventually described as a “paradoxical situation” by Medeiros and Fanti (2019:236), as the “new” feminism is thriving but at the same time “social and political processes have been set up to silence women and control their bodies”.

Finally, even though Brazilian women have made important strikes in terms of women’s rights, they continue to face structural violence at the societal, political and economic level. From a labor perspective, the sexual and racial division of work is apparent in all the socioeconomic classes. Women in Brazil earn about 20.5% less than men, and non-black women earn on average almost twice as much as black women (Lima 2019). Furthermore, women carry a majority of the burden of domestic and care work, spending on average 21.3 hours on it each week, in comparison to men who spend only 10.9 hours per week (Lima 2019). The unemployment rate among women increased proportionally faster than that of men during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the domestic sector was the most affected by the economy. According to a study from DIEESE (2021), 92% of the employed in the domestic sector are women and 65% of them are black women. The number of employed domestic workers went from 6.4 million in 2019 to 4.9 million in 2020 and only 25% of the domestic workers are formally employed. Furthermore, the average income for domestic workers in the southern-east region of Brazil is 973 R$ for informally employed and 1052 R$ for the formally employed. The minimum salary necessary to maintain a family of four in the city of São Paulo in 2022, on the other hand, is estimated to be 6.527 R$ in 2022 (DIEESE 2022). Furthermore, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO), in 2016, only 4% of the domestic workers formed part of a union, which further impedes the representation of domestic workers in the political arena.

In general, political representation of women continues to be a contemporary challenge in Brazil. Despite the process of institutionalization of feminist movements and the fact that women make up more than half of the Brazilian population, they still make up only 15% of parliamentarians and 11% of ministers. Black women are even less represented in the national congress with only 2% (Tavares 2022). In addition, even though the country possesses pioneering laws in the fight against gender-based violence and femicide, “Brazil continues to
be one of the most dangerous countries for women and there is still much to be done, particularly at the sub-national level” (Brazil Institute & Waters 2021).

All things considered, it can be said that throughout history, Brazilian women have occupied key positions in various struggles, and although these struggles have not always been explicitly feminist, they have aimed at forming a democracy in which a feminist struggle could then be carried out. What instruments of resistance were used for these struggles depended in particular on class, ethnicity and the form of the political system. Given the limited political options available to women before the institutionalization process began in the 1980s, at least those who were not of a class with a socioeconomic higher status, direct action almost universally represented one of the best options, if not the best option, to express political demands. However, ever since great parts of the feminist movement have been institutionalized, the resort to direct action, in particular strikes and demonstrations, has significantly decreased, at least up until 2011. Finally, considering the numerous feminist demonstrations that have characterized Brazil in the last decade, it seems even more surprising that the feminist strike has found little support, at least in the organized feminist movement. Accordingly, the following section is dedicated to figuring out why this has been the case.

6. São Paulo and the Feminist Strike

When it comes to who participated in the feminist strike in São Paulo, the lines could not be more blurred. Ever since feminists called for the first IWS in 2017, the terms “Greve Feminista”, “Greve de Mulheres”, and “Paralisação Internacional de Mulheres” have appeared on websites of feminist organizations, on social media platforms or in newspaper articles in Brazil. In addition, in a group on the social media platform Facebook, in which autonomous Brazilian feminists called to participate in the IWS in São Paulo on March 8, 2017, almost 20,000 people expressed their interest in attending the IWS event8. However, these figures are at odds with the statements of the representatives of feminist organizations interviewed for this study, all of whom state that no such event as a feminist strike took place since the first IWS call. Finally, the question of how many women actually responded to the international call for the IWS and laid down both paid and unpaid labor on March 8 seems impossible to answer.

There are two main reasons that render measuring the extent of the IWS in São Paulo a difficult task: first, the IWS overlaps with the IWD - a day that since the beginning of the 20th

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8 See Facebook group: https://www.facebook.com/events/1872567573029232/ (accessed on 01.07.2022)
century has drawn women all over the world to the streets to demonstrate for their rights. Thus, the distinction between the IWS strikers and the other demonstrators proves particularly difficult, especially considering that in the case of São Paulo the IWS event, promoted in the Facebook group in 2017, coincided in time and place with the general act that has been taking place every year since 1975. Second, as pointed out by Varela (2020), the very nature of the feminist strike is rather symbolical. Although there is no doubt that women, as the most powerful consumers in the world, could inflict great economic damage on the capitalist system if they were to combine the feminist strike with a consumer strike, the experience of the last five years shows that the feminist strike is still primarily a symbolic direct action.

However, even though it appears unfeasible to measure the extent of the IWS in São Paulo, it is of relevance for this study to make a broad classification of the positions of the organizations interviewed in relation to the IWS. The call by *Ni Una Menos* and other feminist icons, such as Angela Davis and Nancy Frazer, also sparked a great debate in the feminist arena of São Paulo. Even though all the organizations interviewed for this study expressed solidarity with the strike movement, opinions differed on the question of whether it would have been possible to carry out a feminist strike in the Brazilian context. The positions of the organized feminist movement to the IWS call can be divided into three categories: first, organizations that wanted to organize a feminist strike in São Paulo and believed in its possibility; second, organizations that supported the strike but did not classify it as their main action; and third, organizations that supported the IWS, but believed the implementation was impossible in the context of São Paulo at this time and therefore opposed the proposition of striking on March 8.

The first category includes the organizations *Movimento Mulheres em Luta* (MML), *Juntas!* and *União de Mulheres de São Paulo* (UMSP). To the second belongs the *União Brasileira de Mulheres* (UBM) and to the third category belong *Mulheres do PT*, *Secretaria da Mulher Trabalhadora da CUT*, *Coletivo Yabá*, *Sempreviva Organização Feminista* (SOF), *Marcha das Mulheres Negras* (MMN) and *Marcha Mundial das Mulheres* (MMM).

As a result of the disagreements, there was no joint call to strike from the organized feminist movement in 2017. Furthermore, the IWD demonstration was divided into two acts: one began at 4 p.m. on *Avenida Paulista* and focused on the issues of gender-based violence, legalization of abortion, and the welfare reform (Reforma da Previdência) in Brazil; the other began at the same time on *Praça da Sé* and centered specifically on the welfare reform. Eventually, the two acts merged in front of the town hall to conclude the act of March 8 together (Maciel & Souza 2017). Parallel to the act, various smaller strikes and paralysis took place in certain categories,
such as a strike by municipal and state teachers against the welfare reform. Nevertheless, a mass feminist strike in the sense of Gago's (2020) theory, in which both paid and unpaid work was laid down, did not take place, according to the interviewees. Furthermore, drawing from the interviews, the Brazilian movement in favor of implementing an IWS decreased sharply after 2017, for which reason there was no further discussion after 2018 to participate in the IWS.

Finally, rather than trying to examine the actual extent of the feminist strike in São Paulo, it seems more fruitful to concentrate on how the feminist organizations relate to the strike as an instrument of feminist resistance and why many believed that the execution would not have been feasible in the context of São Paulo. Furthermore, apart from the strike element, it is also interesting to examine why the IWD mobilizations in São Paulo have counted comparatively with little participation since 2017, while other Latin American cities such as Buenos Aires, Mexico City and Santiago de Chile achieved unprecedented mobilization on March 8. Thus, the following section deals with the presentation of the feminist movement, how they organize and how they are networked at national and international levels. This part highlights the structural challenges that the feminist movement is facing from the inside. Subsequently, section 6.2 addresses the structural challenges from the outside, in other words, the reasons why the organizations interviewed considered the execution of an IWS either possible or impossible in the context of São Paulo. Both chapters are dedicated to testing the hypotheses put forward at the beginning of this study. Finally, section 6.3 is dedicated to a discussion of whether or not the feminist strike is an inclusive instrument of resistance. Here we will consider under what conditions the implementation of an inclusive feminist strike in São Paulo would be possible, taking into consideration the possibilities and constraints.

6.1 São Paulo’s Feminist Movement

In the past, Brazil’s feminist movement has been described as “perhaps the largest, most radical, most diverse, and most politically influential of Latin America’s feminist movements” (Sternbach, Navarro-Aranguren & Chuchryk 1992:414). It is certainly true that the Brazilian feminist movement is extremely diverse and has been very influential at the federal level through lobbying and litigation strategies, pushing for groundbreaking legislations on gender-based violence and other forms of violence against women. The passage of Federal Law 11340 in 2006, more commonly known as the Maria da Penha Law, is just one of many examples of the achievements that women’s movements have accomplished in the past (Piovesan 2007). However, the labeling as "the largest" and "most radical" deserves to be revisited 30 years after
the statement of Sternbach, Navarro-Aranguren and Chuchryk (1992). Therefore, this section shall examine how the interviewees experience the situation of the Brazilian feminist movement, how the individual movements collaborate on national and international levels, and what type of activism they primarily pursue, that is, whether they focus on mobilizing citizens around a feminist cause or rather on influencing decision-making processes, for example, through state feminism. Finally, the aim of this section is to verify or reject the first hypothesis of this study, namely that institutionalization has led to fragmentation within the feminist movement, which represents an obstacle to building a mass feminist mobilization such as the feminist strike.

A glance at the interests, values and visions of the organizations selected for this case study suggests that they are very similar in these terms. All organizations engaged with topics such as violence against women, legalization of abortion, sexual division of work, gender pay gap and the lack of feminist representatives in political positions. In addition, all of the representatives mentioned topics of interest that are not specifically feminist, such as food security, job security and the welfare reform, which is most likely to have a disproportionate effect on women. Furthermore, all representatives emphasized the anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, democratic, anti-racist, and anti-LGBTQIA+ phobic character of the feminist movement. In terms of activities, all representatives indicated that street mobilizations constitute a basic component of their activism. First and foremost, this includes mobilizing the population for international and national women's struggle days, such as the IWD on March 8, the Day of Afro-Latin and Afro-Caribbean Women on July 25, and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on November 25. In addition, most organizations offer professional training for women, discussion groups on feminist issues, political education through feminist campaigns on social media, and feminist lobbying at the political level.

Despite the fact that the organizations interviewed share similar interests and values, as well as similar patterns of mobilization and activism, eight among the ten interviewees state that they encounter difficulties in building a united movement between the different feminist organizations that exist in Brazil: “We have several national organizations, but what is interesting is the difficulty of linking one with the other,” says Amelinha from União de Mulheres de São Paulo (UMSP). Furthermore, Isabela from Mulheres do PT and Maria Fernanda from MMM and SOF explain that the fragmentation of the political left in Brazil is also reflected in the feminist movement. Lucia from the União Brasileira de Mulheres (UBM),

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9 For a detailed list of the organizations, including their visions and forms of activism, see appendix 1.
on the other hand, believes that the situation has improved as a result of the state feminism project:

I think that the relationship between feminist organizations is more mature today, mainly due to the creation of institutions such as the National Council for Women's Rights and the National Health Council. There, the organizations had to get to know each other and articulate, which is why today there is already a less competitive coexistence. (Lucia, UBM)

One reason that was cited repeatedly for the fragmentation of the feminist movement was the close connection that many organizations had with the political party PT. In fact, Marcela from MML, recounts how MML was founded in search of autonomy from the government:

We emerged in 2008 because at that time we had a PT government and most of the women's movements in the country were tied to the government, which meant a paralysis in the women's struggle, or in other words, it meant a lack of criticism of government policies that affected women, such as the issue of legalizing abortion, which the PT refused to change the legislation and made an agreement with the conservative sector, which today supports Bolsonaro, and we did not see any criticism in this regard. That is why we felt that it was necessary to organize an independent women's movement, in order to make the necessary criticism. (Marcela, MML)

At this stage of the analysis, a connection can be made to the fragmentation of the feminist movement into autonomoas and institutionalistas, which Munck (2020) considers a consequence of the institutionalization of the Brazilian feminist movement. It should be noted, however, that a classification cannot be done in a strict binary way. In the case of São Paulo, many institutionalized feminists nevertheless openly criticize the state and also regularly call for direct action, for instance Juntas!, which is affiliated with the leftist PSOL party.

In line with the theoretical framework of this study, the institutionalization of feminist movements can also lead to a de-radicalization of feminist demands, as feminist movements tend to lose autonomy in exchange for access to political decision-making or financial support (Staggenborg 2013). Amelinha from UMSP explains how this phenomenon is particularly noticeable in the front for the legalization of abortion:

The other problem is that the political parties have claimed March 8 for themselves. The women's movement is taking to the streets, the social movements are taking to the streets, we are a street movement, but we have taken the position that we are not going to get into a fight with the political parties. March 8 is no longer our date, in that political sense. We go there, we take our flags, and the parties usually suppress our demands because they don't want to talk about abortion in light of the upcoming elections. There are always alliances, and if you talk about abortion you lose votes, they say, so they talk about what is more presentable for Brazilian politics, and that is bad for the feminist struggle. (Amelinha, UMSP)

In view of the mass mobilizations for the legalization of abortion that are currently sweeping the Latin American continent, the issue of reproductive rights was addressed in each of the interviews. Furthermore, it is also a key demand in Gago’s (2020) theory of the feminist strike, which is why it deserves more attention. The legalization of abortion is perhaps the most controversial topic in the feminist movement in Brazil and serves as an example of the de-radicalization of feminist demands through institutionalization. In fact, even though all the
representatives interviewed state that their organizations strongly support the legalization of abortion, there still seems to be little united action to advance the struggle, apart from the National Front for the End of the Criminalization of Women and for the Legalization of Abortion. In total, five interviewees stated that the lack of action and discourse on the topic is connected to the relationship between the feminist movement and the left-wing political parties.

As explained in section 5.4, many feminists and feminist movements began their militancy not only with but also within political parties as part of the institutionalization and re-democratization process. According to two interviewees, the alliances of feminists with the PT have had and continue to have a negative impact on the radicality of the movement, since issues considered socially controversial are not discussed in public in order not to cause unrest in society before the upcoming presidential elections in October 2022. The reluctance of many political parties to address the issue is also reflected in a comment by PSOL Congresswoman Sâmia Bomfim, who is also a co-founder of Juntas!:

From the point of view of political parties that defend this [legalization of abortion] as a program, or at least vocalize it, that act in the parliaments to defend it today, PSOL is the only party that has this as an agenda, as a flag, and this shows the size of our challenge in Brazil, because PSOL is not a massive, rooted or nation-wide party with a lot of power. (Sâmia Bomfim, Juntas!)

Isabela from Mulheres do PT also admits that there have been shortcomings in the public debate on the legalization of abortion in the past, assuring that Mulheres do PT will actively address the issue if Lula, who is currently running for president in the October 2022 election, wins. However, she also explains that during the Dilma administration the struggle to legalize abortion became primarily a struggle within political institutions, as many women accessed influential political positions at that time:

I think that even the defense of abortion for a long time became a lobby defense, we thought let's do advocacy, we already have a woman as president, we have a secretary of policies for women, we have women in positions of power, so we are going to have this discussion in the Chamber to be able to approve it and we are not going to prioritize a women's struggle in the street because society is conservative, roughly speaking. I think that this is why abortion has not become an issue that is in the street on a daily basis because we, in fact, the leftist camp that came to power managed to have this dispute in our heads, but then we lost, we lost the power of the government. (Isabela, Mulheres do PT)

Isabela’s statement reflects how particular fronts of the feminist struggle were shifted mainly to the political level as a result of institutionalization, in particular in the period of state feminism under the PT government. However, the PT militant also explained that feminist activism must be adapted to the specific context and needs of the population, which currently leads to the issue of legalizing abortion being relegated to the background:

I think we also have to look at where the population stands right now, we can't talk about abortion when people don't have enough to eat, there are also limits. Of course, the point is not not to talk about abortion, but not to use abortion as an argument of our time for the general debates, even if it is a main debate in the women's movement. (Isabela, Mulheres do PT)
The fact that the legalization of abortion is not seen as an argument of this time can also be explained by the change in ideology in the executive branch. As explained in 5.4, state feminism is ultimately dependent on a benevolent executive, which is why less controversial issues are currently being prioritized, especially by the institutionalized feminist movement, as the chances of an issue such as the legalization of abortion finding support in a conservative and right-wing government are considered extremely low. Accordingly, both Junéia from CUT and Isabela from PT assured that their respective organizations will actively address the issue in case Lula is re-elected, as they believe that the feminist movement will regain more influence on policy-making under a left-leaning government:

I think that during the campaign he [Lula] won't be able to speak [about the legalization of abortion], but we women, when he takes office, we will call a women's conference with him where one of the main points besides the issue of equal salary will be the issue of legalizing abortion. (Junéia, Secretaria da Mulher Trabalhadora da CUT)

In line with the theoretical perspective of institutionalism, and considering that conservative and Catholic values still rank high in Brazilian society, as several interviewees pointed out, it seems logical that, especially before the election, there is a tendency in the feminist movement to favor socially less controversial issues for direct action, since a mass protest for the legalization of abortion could have a negative impact on Lula's poll ratings, given the close collaboration between the PT and the feminist movement. Finally, the issue of legalizing abortion highlights the complexity of creating a unified movement, because despite the fact that all organizations agree on the importance of this issue, they ultimately differ in their approach to resistance, meaning whether the issue should be addressed through direct action, such as the demonstrations on March 8, or whether it rather should be addressed through state feminism.

Drawing from the interviews, another reason that complicates the formation of a national, unified feminist movement is the lack of auto-organized spaces to meet and develop a common feminist agenda, as Argentine feminists do in the assemblies. One cause mentioned for this lack is the geographical size of the country, which has led to the emergence of multiple feminisms with different priorities, as they are shaped by different realities. Furthermore, organizing and attending a national meeting in person would involve many costs and therefore become unaffordable for women with lower socioeconomic status, especially if they live in rural areas. Eventually, because of these structural difficulties, the establishment of a national assembly, as exists in Argentina, still seems a long way off in Brazil.

However, what does exist are local meetings and articulations, such as the meetings for the organization of March 8 in São Paulo, which bring together different organized feminist
movements, women from popular social movements and non-organized feminists. These meetings are open to the public and their main objective is to plan the official act of March 8 and agree on a central theme. In theory, these meetings offer a great possibility to plan the execution of feminist strike. However, Isabel from PT pointed out the punctual nature of the meeting, since after March 8, participants return to their individual movements to organize their respective struggles: “It's very difficult to think about the continuity of the organization of the IWD itself, because women are anxious to build their own movements after March 8”. In addition, Marcela from MML mentioned the difficulty of recruiting younger and autonomous feminists for these meetings:

National articulations are not permanent because each organization is very different from the other, they have a different conception and way of acting, so each one maintains its autonomy most of the time and then, when it is necessary to act together, this articulation happens. But, in my opinion, it is still very marked by those organizations that have existed for a long time, the younger collectives and feminist girls are not integrated into these spaces as much. (Marcela, MML)

According to Isabel from PT, the difficulty of building a mass feminist movement that goes beyond the act of the IWD lies mainly in the structure of the feminist movement, which acts closely together with political parties, labor unions and other popular social movements such as MST, Movimento Trabalhadores sem Teto and Marcha das Margaridas. Hence, for many of the women who are primarily involved in popular social movements, the feminist struggle is only secondary. The particular relationship between the feminist movement and other popular social movements was also emphasized by Marcela from MML:

Brazil has a history of women's organization that is a little different from the other Latin American countries. Here in Brazil women's organization emerges very close to the unions and social movements, so this gives the movement another character, not a feminist character like in Argentina, for example, which tries to separate women's fight from the workers' fight. But here the great majority of actions happen combining the social movements, labor unions and the women's movement. (Marcela, MML)

In fact, Cinthia from MMN and Amelmhina from UMSP explained that the Marcha Mundial das Mulheres is the only larger movement that unites women from different organizations and political parties. Eventually, the close connection between the feminist movement and other organizations can be interpreted as a double-edged sword, since on the one hand it contributes to a pluralistic and intersectional feminism that includes many struggles, but at the same time it weakens the particular feminist character of the movement, since many activists do not consider feminism a priority.

According to the interviewee from Mulheres do PT, another difficulty that impedes the construction of a feminist mass movement lies in the identification as a feminist, as many women in the popular social movements participate in the feminist struggle but do not yet consider themselves feminists. Cinthia from MMN explained how this applies to many Black
women’s movements, as some regard the feminist movement as hegemonic, white and uncritical about racism. At the same time, the interviewee challenges this assertion, pointing to the intersectionality of today’s feminist movement. As explained in chapter 5, already in the women’s labor movement at the beginning of the 20th century and also in the women’s movements in the peripheries of São Paulo, women mobilized around feminist issues, but did not identify as feminists. This leads to particular feminist mobilizations often having a toned down feminist character or not having a large turnout at all:

For a mass feminist movement to happen here in Brazil, we need these women from the popular movements who have become part of the struggle, but do not yet identify as feminists, even though they are feminists in their very essence. (Isabela, Mulheres do PT)

Junéia from CUT further mentioned the difficulty of including women with lower socioeconomic status in the struggle, which she attributes to a lack of discourse that attracts the female masses that are not part of any popular movement yet:

We have remarkable feminists in Brazil and we also manage to include the women interested in feminism in the struggle, but we don’t have a discourse that reaches the masses, the grassroots, the people who are at the bottom of the pyramid (Junéia, Secretaria da Mulher Trabalhadora da CUT)

Next to Junéia, three other interviewees reported that the organized feminist movement experiences particular difficulty building a common struggle that includes young, low-income, peripheral and rural women who are not yet organized in social movements or political parties. As explained chapter 3, the shift in activism from movement work to advocacy work can lead to the loss of support and connection with people on the ground. Eventually, the fact that feminist movements collaborated closely with women in the periphery during the dictatorship suggests that the loss of connection they experience today is a consequence of the change in activism under institutionalization, which distances organizations from women on the ground.

Another aspect that should be discussed, considering that the IWS is a transnational action, is the international networking of the Brazilian feminist movement. All of the organizations, except the university collective Yabá, reported to be networked at the international level. The feminist organizations directly linked to political parties or unions, such as Mulheres do PT and Secretaria da Mulher Trabalhadora da CUT, stated being networked with parties or movements in other countries through their umbrella organization. These organizations are not explicitly feminist, but they consider the feminist struggle to be part of their struggle. Since MMM is an international movement, its international network is comparatively the largest and the movement is also directly connected with Ni Una Menos in Argentina.

Although the majority of the interviewees indicate that their organizations are internationally networked, they also report barriers to networking, especially with Latin
American partners. These hurdles lie partly in the Portuguese language, which often hinders direct communication with Spanish-speaking movements, but also in the attempt by a political elite to separate Brazil from the rest of Latin America, as Amelinha from UMSP explained:

There is a strategy of the ruling class, of the elite to separate Brazil from the others, which weakens us tremendously, it keeps us in ignorance of what happens in the other neighboring countries, which is even reflected in the feminist movement, even though we are trying to break with this oppressive strategy. (Amelinha, UMSP)

In addition, four of the ten interviewees also explicitly mention the colonial history of Brazil, which differs from the Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America and to some extent separates Brazil from the rest. Isabela from PT, for example, explained that the lack of mobilization of women is connected to Brazil’s history of slavery:

In fact, there is no denying that in Brazil we have difficulty organizing women, because it was a country that had slavery. So, there is an exploitation of race and gender that is introjected in the foundation of Brazil, this is very different from the other Latin American countries that were colonized. (Isabela, Mulheres do PT)

According to Cinthia from MMN, the history of slavery also affects the work structure: “Labor, the way labor has developed in Brazil, is based on the slave system because we were colonized by the Portuguese, right?” At the same time, the interviewee explained that many Brazilian black feminists identify more strongly with the black feminist movement in the United States, as they share a similar history of slavery. In fact, the autonomous feminists who created the Facebook group mentioned earlier to call for the IWS in São Paulo in 2017, primarily cited the call by Angela Davis (et al. 2018) and not the one by Ni Una Menos.

Drawing from the interviews, it can be summarized that the feminist movement in São Paulo is facing various challenges in building a self-organized feminist mass movement. As in previous studies, the results of this analysis confirm that the Brazilian feminist movement is fragmented, and that the institutionalization of great parts of the feminist movement is a main reason for that. Moreover, on the issue of legalizing abortion, the data revealed a significant correlation between the institutionalization of the feminist movement and the de-radicalization of feminist demands during direct actions in the public sphere. An interesting side-finding was that the feminist struggle is not yet a priority for many women, as many are primarily active in other popular social movements, unions or political parties. The general picture emerging from the analysis is that the organized feminist movement in São Paulo is very self-critical and aware of the challenges they have to face in order to construct a united, massified feminist movement. At the same time, however, these challenges seem to be rooted deeply in the structure of the feminist movement itself.
Overall, the findings provide support for the validity of the first hypothesis that institutionalization has led to fragmentation within the feminist movement, which represents an obstacle to building a mass feminist mobilization such as the feminist strike. However, as explained in section 5.4, even before the institutionalization process began, conflicts of interest caused a split in the feminist movement, suggesting that institutionalization is not the only reason for the fragmentation the feminist movement experiences up until today. Furthermore, institutionalization not only led to a fragmentation within the feminist movement, but also caused a shift in activism from mobilizing in the streets to lobbying the institutions. This seems to have led to the feminist movement losing touch with society, which furthermore complicates the building of a massive feminist movement. Nevertheless, especially the last decade has been marked by a de-institutionalization of the feminist movement in light of the increasing neoconservative and right-wing forces in the political arena. Accordingly, many institutionalized movements have once again prioritized popular mobilization, even though reclaiming the streets is still an ongoing process that appears to be in its early stages.

6.2 The Viability of a Feminist Strike in São Paulo

In a moment of crisis, strike means starvation, because people have no rights, so they have to work to have something to eat. (Isabela Benassi, Mulheres do PT)

To carry out a strike is not an easy task, it needs preparation, organization and mobilization. After all, Gago (2020) dedicated an entire chapter to the what she calls the "kitchen" of the strike, the Argentinian assembly, which held 18 preparatory sessions prior to the first IWS in 2017. In the previous section, multiple structural issues inside the movement were presented as to why the formation of a unified feminist movement that mobilizes society around feminist issues presents a challenge to the feminist movement in Brazil that has not yet been overcome. The present section shall now focus on the instrument of the strike from a feminist perspective to identify the structural problems surging from the outside. First and foremost, the opinion of the interviewees on the strike as an instrument of feminist resistance will be presented. In this context, it will be examined whether, and if so how, the economic and political conditions affect the feasibility of a feminist strike. The aim of the present section is to confirm or disprove the second hypothesis of this study, namely that the feminist struggle for women’s rights has become a general struggle for democracy under the current political and economic crisis, rendering the feminist strike secondary as a specifically feminist struggle.
In accordance with chapter 5, the strike as an instrument of resistance has already produced major workers’ mobilizations in Brazil. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that all interviewees express a favorable view of the instrument and its possibilities to challenge power structures. As Amelinha from UMSP put it: “A strike is a struggle, it is existence, it is protest, it is a strong manifestation. The strike means to say: we are strong, we are needed in society, our work is important.” However, precisely because of the potency of this tool, Maria Fernanda from MMM and SOF warned that the word must not become a floating signifier:

A strike is a very powerful, very strong instrument, and that is why it cannot be used in a trivial way. A strike must be articulated in advance, it must provide for impact, it must provide for dialogue with the population, and I imagine it also has to foresee losses to capital. (Maria Fernanda, MMM/SOF)

Drawing from the interviews, the choice of the term strike provoked much discussion within the Brazilian feminist arena, as many feminists feared that the term would be misused for something that was not, in fact, a strike:

When we brought the discussion of the women’s strike into the meeting to organize March 8, there was a lot of resistance because people were debating whether we had the strength to actually build a strike in its literal sense, or whether we were not using the term strike for something that we could not do. (Marcela, MML)

Because of the fact that the term strike has been used to name many feminist demonstrations, three interviewees suggest that the act of March 8 in São Paulo could actually be described as a strike as well, since it is a paralysis of women taking to the streets, which occurs during working hours. However, while Isabela from PT and Maria Fernanda from MMM and SOF use this argument more as a criticism, pointing out the vagueness of the concept of a feminist strike, Amelinha emphasizes the rather symbolical power of the feminist strike:

We believe that we could have supported the strike while we were at the rally, because at this particular moment we were not working. It could have been a short strike, of 2 or 3 hours. The most important thing is that we position ourselves as strikers, especially because March 8 arose from a women’s strike. (Amelinha, UMSP)

Isabela from Mulheres do PT further explained that the difference between São Paulo and many other Latin American cities is that the feminist movement in São Paulo has not adopted the discourse of the feminist strike, not least because the word “strike” in Brazil is often associated with job loss, causing many to be afraid to use the term.

According to the interviewees, the reasons for refusing to implement the strike were primarily related to the political and economic situation that society was facing under the interim government of Michel Temer. Confronted with austerity measures and political setbacks, many feminist organizations did not see themselves with the capacities to organize a strike in which women in a vulnerable situation professionally could participate as well:
At that time, in Brazil, we were in the midst of very structural struggles that greatly threatened the quality of life and survival of poor women in Brazil. Therefore, the international strike did not have much appeal at that time, because a strike is led by those who have work, and here in Brazil, paid work for women is very precarious. (Maria Fernanda, MMM/SOF)

Amelinha from UMSP, who advocated for the implementation of a feminist strike in 2017, also cited the economic crisis as the greatest weakness of the instrument:

We are in an economic conjuncture, a very big crisis, which is the biggest weakness of the strike: unemployment, job insecurity, reduced wages, increased hours. And the situation has only worsened with Bolsonaro, we are being outsourced, we are being extremely exploited, we always have been, but now much more. (Amelinha, UMSP)

Overall, the argument that a strike is led by those who have a formal job was applied by several interviewees. As explained in the theoretical framework, the feminist strike is meant to include in particular those who have been excluded from the instrument in its traditional sense, namely, women employed in the popular economy and women working at home. However, drawing from the interviews, several fear that the strike would be exclusive in practice, as especially women who are employed informally could not afford to miss a day of work under the current economic conditions. Moreover, this group of women working in the informal sector does not benefit from the constitutional right to strike, making them disproportionately vulnerable. At this point, the sexual and racial division of labor comes into focus, which, as explained in section 5.4, is particularly visible both in Brazil’s labor market and in Brazilian homes. The labor market situation for women in Brazil is particularly precarious, which means that women in the informal sector would run a very high risk of losing their jobs if they went on strike. Furthermore, since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the situation has steadily worsened. Accordingly, the very women the feminist strike is supposed to include and embrace face particular structural challenges in terms of participating in the strike, as the interviewee from MMM and SOF pointed out:

How does a housemaid who is a daily wage laborer and has no formal employment relationship go on strike? If she stops working that day, she doesn't make any money. Or a street worker who sells goods on the street, how can she stop working one day? (Maria Fernanda, MMM/SOF)

In addition, Isabela from PT explained that these women do not perceive the strike as a potential tool since they are not officially recognized as workers by society:

But there is also another part of women in our society (...), they are not officially recognized as workers because they come from a process of marginalization through the domestication of our society (...). These women do not necessarily manage to organize a feminist strike, even if they are feminists and participate in the feminist struggle, but they are not recognized as “official” workers. (Isabela, Mulheres do PT)

Another aspect raised by Cinthia from MMN is that a feminist strike in the context of São Paulo could even reinforce racial inequality: “A Black woman gives her child to a daycare center to care for other white women's children so they can go on strike.” In addition, in light
of the sexual division of work and considering that women are responsible for a great majority of domestic and care work, Maria Fernanda commented that women who participate in the strike and stop both paid and unpaid labor, run the risk of being confronted with twice the amount of labor the next day:

In this worker format, a strike means losses for a company. When we think about the volume of work that women do, which has to do with the sustainability of life, with their own well-being and that of their family, which has to do with the exploitation of their labor power, when they stop working this often means that they accumulate tasks for the next day. (Maria Fernanda, MMM/SOF)

Finally, the precarious labor market situation for women marked by informality seems to be a key reason to why many feminist movements showed reluctance in calling for a strike. However, although there is no doubt that the socioeconomic situation of women in Brazil is particularly precarious at this moment, it would be biased to assume this is reason enough to not embrace the IWS, considering that the strike met with strong support in other countries with a similarly complicated labor market situation.

Another aspect raised by Marcela from MML, Júlia from Yabá and Junéia from CUT is the strike culture in Brazil. It is indeed the case that the strike is a popular instrument of Brazilian workers that is also used regularly. In fact, Brazil has recorded an increase in strikes in recent years. Nevertheless, these strikes mainly took place in specific categories, since there is no general strike culture in Brazil, as Marcela, who is also a member of the CSP Conlutas labor union, explains:

I think the women’s strike had little audience because there is no tradition in the Brazilian movement for general strikes as a common instrument. We had a general strike in 1917 and then only again in 2017 with great difficulties to build it, I think that says a lot. (Marcela, MML)

Nevertheless, the fact that the largest mass strike in Brazil's history took place shortly after the first IWS indicates that it is not the fear of striking or the economic situation that is the primary problem, but perhaps more the feminist dimension of the feminist strike. In fact, all of the interviewees emphasized the particularity of this period, as the IWS took place only a few months after the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, which the interviewees clearly denounce as a coup d'état. Furthermore, the majority of the interviewees explicitly pointed out that it was not only a coup against the first Brazilian female president and the PT, but also against the entire women’s movement. Junéia from CUT described the situation in 2017 as follows:

At that time, we women were in a climate of social, political and economic instability here in Brazil. So, we got caught in the difficult political situation of the country that we have been experiencing since the coup against President Dilma Rousseff in 2016, and ever since it seems as if we were in the middle of a

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10 On April 28 in 2017, 100 years after the first general strike of 1917, trade unions called for a general strike to protest against the reform of labor laws under the government of Temer.
nightmare, but we keep waking up and try to save what we have. (Junêia, Secretaria da Mulher Trabalhadora da CUT)

As discussed in chapter 5, the Brazilian women’s movement played a key role in the struggle for democracy, and it was not until the military dictatorship began its opening policies in the late 1970s that an autonomous feminist movement consolidated and began to explicitly push for the adoption and expansion of women’s rights in line with a feminist agenda. Particularly through lobbying and litigation strategies, feminists have promoted the democratization of the country, changed national law, and hold governments accountable in Brazil. However, ever since the PT government came to an end in August 2016, the situation for feminist organizations has drastically changed. In fact, six of the 10 interviewees stated that instead of promoting the expansion of women’s rights, they have shifted their militancy to protect the rights and services they have gained in the past, in particular on a municipal and state level:

It is very difficult to build a struggle against patriarchy and violence, when here in São Paulo we have to wage a great struggle to prevent the destruction of the system of assistance to women who are victims of violence. (Maria Fernanda, MMM/SOF)

Drawing from the interviews, activism of the feminist movement has changed in two ways. Isabela from PT explained, for example, that in the case of Mulheres do PT, the parliamentary struggle gained importance after the impeachment, also at the expense of the feminist struggle:

Because it was a parliamentary coup, the popular struggle of women, the struggle for real rights, fell somewhat by the wayside. I would say that within this distinction of feminism, the struggle for institutional rights and the election of more women as a political struggle is in the foreground and the legalization of abortion, the struggle against femicides, the everyday struggles, have fallen a little behind. (Isabela, Mulheres do PT)

However, despite the fact that the struggle at the political level, that is, within the political institutions, gained more relevance for many feminist movements, an increase in direct actions on the street could also be observed after the impeachment and particularly prior to Bolsonaro’s election. As explained in section 5.4, the movement, #EleNã, led to various street mobilizations in which the organized feminist movement also became deeply involved:

The debate about Bolsonaro became a priority in recent years. There has been an incessant calendar of demonstrations against Bolsonaro. Last year there were moments when we had four actions per month, so every week there was an action against Bolsonaro. Women were involved in these actions, they stopped work, they demonstrated against the government and they also pointed out the violation of rights. (Isabela, Mulheres do PT)

As explained in section 3.1.1, citizens often refer to direct actions as a response to a lack of political access or denial of rights, but also to seek sympathizers for their struggle. In the case of Brazil, a rise in direct action was particularly noticeable during and after the impeachment in 2016. Considering the anti-democratic attitude that has characterized Brazilian politics since the impeachment trial, it seems logical that feminist activists seek direct action rather than other
forms of influencing politics. In fact, Rebeca from Juntas! explained that the struggle in the streets has become extremely important again, as popular pressure is an important tool against the neoconservative and right-wing forces in politics. However, even though the demonstrations against Bolsonaro have a feminist character, given the strong participation by women and denunciation of the misogynist character of Bolsonaro’s government, the primary focus has been the struggle against neo-fascism and for democracy. In this respect, the demonstrations against Bolsonaro are similar to the direct actions led by women at the end of the military dictatorship, as their primary goal is the restoration or protection of democracy. This is also reflected in a statement by Lucia from UBM, who states that “the feminist struggle in Brazil is also very much linked to the people's struggle.” Finally, one particular point of view that emerged in several interviews is that the feminist struggle is built on democracy, which means that a democratic base must first exist in order to fight for women's rights. This becomes particularly evident in another comment by Lucia from UBM:

> What is important to us in the first place is democracy, even if we recognize that it is a bourgeois democracy, fragile, but it is the best that humanity has built so far. So, in order for us to organize ourselves, to manifest ourselves, to conquer, to confront inequalities of class, gender, and race, we need a democracy. (Lucia, UBM)

Against the backdrop of the crisis of democracy, Isabela of Mulheres do PT further explains that even in strictly feminist spaces such as the assemblies that organize March 8, specifically feminist issues play a subordinate role:

> This discussion about the specificity of the feminist movement remains on a secondary level in comparison to discussion by the left of the general difficulties and inequalities, even in the organizational meetings of March 8. (Isabela, Mulheres do PT)

Furthermore, in light of the structural difficulties that severely affect daily life and the government's failure to respond to them, women's solidarity has also increased to combat the direct impact of the crisis on the population. In fact, the struggle for human rights became particularly evident when the COVID-19 pandemic began to spread in Brazil in 2020:

> During the pandemic all the solidarity actions against hunger, against starvation, the fight for vaccines, the denunciation against Bolsonaro's misogynistic machismo actions, they always had a very strong presence of women, organized women and women who identify with feminism. These are the same women who are extremely overworked because the cuts that the state is making are being carried out on the backs of women. (Maria Fernanda, MMM/SOF)

While many women are involved in the struggle against Bolsonaro and dedicate their time to assist those most affected by the economic situation, Isabela from PT also explains that many women with a lower socioeconomic status have left the struggle, as activism requires time that they need to carry out additional jobs to ensure their survival: “I am part of a mass movement,
a mass party that is really experiencing people leaving the struggle, the militancy, because they are starving” (Isabela, *Mulheres do PT*).

Finally, the results suggest that the impeachment of Dilma in 2016 and the election of the far-right politician Bolsonaro as president have shifted the focus of the feminist movement in São Paulo from promoting women's rights to protecting the current state of rights and restoring the democratic system, leaving no space for the organization of a feminist strike primarily aimed at public policies promoting gender equality. This does not imply that the feminist movement has been inactive or that they no longer act on behalf of feminist interests, but that the democratic backlash has raised other issues whose resolution became the current priority of the feminist movement, turning the feminist struggle for women’s rights into a more general struggle for democracy and human rights. Given the particular political and economic situation that the feminist movement has been facing since 2016, and the fact that the feminist movement has been engaged in preventing the dismantling of women's rights since then, it does not seem surprising that the feminist strike, which has an explicitly feminist focus and seeks to expand women's rights, was met with reluctance in the feminist movement. Therefore, taken altogether, the findings provide support for the validity of the second hypothesis that the feminist struggle has turned into a general struggle, rendering the feminist strike as a tool for an explicitly feminist struggle secondary in the current reality of the Brazilian feminist movement.

### 6.3 The Feminist Strike – The Key to a Revolution or an Instrument of the Privileged?

I see no other meaning in life than to fight, I see no other meaning in life than to create a reality in which everyone has the same freedom in life. I strongly believe that there will be a gigantic feminist strike, not only in Brazil but in the whole world, and that the feminist strike will bring down capitalism.

(Rebeca, *Juntas!*)

Whether or not the feminist strike can lead to a social revolution that brings down capitalism is a question that remains yet to be answered. However, the experience of recent years at least suggests that if a feminist strike is carried out properly, it is most likely to be both inclusive and have a great symbolic, if not even economic impact (Mason-Deese & Gago 2019; Kubisa & Rakowska 2018; Varela 2020). The emphasis here is on the proper execution of the strike, which means intensive preparation and also aftercare if one wants it to become a process, rather than a single event. At the beginning of this study, the claim was made that the feasibility of a feminist strike depends on various factors, such as the political, social and economic situation. While these factors certainly have an impact, the analysis of the interviews suggests that the feasibility depends primarily on feminist movement’s capacity to organize, articulate and
consolidate feminist mobilization. To put it in other words, in order to carry out a feminist strike in a socioeconomically divided society like Brazil's, one needs a massive and popular feminist movement that is deeply rooted in all social classes.

This also represents the opinion of the interviewees, who doubt that a feminist strike will take place in the near future in Brazil under the current circumstances, but nevertheless are convinced that a well-executed feminist strike could have a strong impact on society. Now the question arises, how can a feminist movement that has been closely associated with political institutions for almost 40 years carry out a massive and intersectional feminist strike in the midst of an economic and political crisis? While there certainly exists no recipe for a feminist strike that leads to revolution, it is nevertheless valuable to explore what preconditions would be necessary in São Paulo to facilitate the organization of a mass feminist action such as a feminist strike and, furthermore, what kind of revolution would be desired in the first place?

As several interviewees emphasized, in order to build a massive feminist strike, the feminist movement needs the support of the women organized in popular social movements, but also of the new independent actors, who took feminism back to the streets in 2011 and have been important actors in the street mobilizations since. If the various actors were to cooperate on a regular basis, the chances would increase that they would also find more support among society, given that most popular social movements are deeply rooted at the grassroots level of society. In addition, women organized in mixed-gender social movements such as the MST or trade unions could use these spaces to find allies in men, who could primarily take on the reproductive tasks, so that women could not only participate in a strike but also not have to deal with twice the amount of labor the next day. Needless to say, however, that the fundamental goal is to eliminate the sexual division of reproductive labor not only on the day of the strike, but as a matter of principle. Finally, if there is no such cooperation in the process of building the strike, then the probability is high that in a socioeconomically divided society like Brazil's, a feminist strike will become a strike of the privileged, like critics (Daum 2017; Shaw 2017) argue.

Moreover, communication is a key element in mobilizing the masses for the feminist struggle. As mentioned in the beginning, 66% of the Brazilians actively supports women's rights. Yet participation in feminist mobilizations is comparatively low. This points to a deficit in the communication of the feminist movement, which, according to Junêia from CUT and Isabela from Mulheres do PT, does not yet appeal to the broad mass of society. If Brazilian feminism were properly communicated, chances are high that large parts of society would mobilize for feminist actions such as the feminist strike. The main reason for this assumption
is the fact that feminism in Brazil is extremely diverse: there is black feminism, indigenous feminism, labor feminism, urban feminism, rural feminism, and so on. However, as explained in section 6.1, there are still many women in Brazil who are committed to feminist interests but do not identify as feminists yet. This is to some extent attributable to the fact that today’s feminism is often still associated with the first waves of feminism, that is, feminism of predominantly white women with higher socioeconomic status. The so-called feminist spring that occurred in Brazil in 2015, however, suggests that the fourth wave of feminism with its intersectional character has also arrived in Brazil. Therefore, a feminist discourse for the masses that also redefines the term "workers" from a feminist perspective and does not ignore the particular struggles that are integral to the feminist struggle could ultimately convince people to identify as feminists and participate in a feminist strike.

Drawing from the interviews, another key hurdle to the building of a feminist strike is the lack of spaces to organize. The preparatory meetings for March 8 could be a possible starting point to expand the still very limited places in which different organizations and autonomous feminists meet. In order to enable as many women as possible to participate in the process, it could be beneficial to multiply the number of meetings and to vary between their places and times, because for a strike to be able to accommodate heterogeneous realities, it must include them in the preparation process. Meetings that take place more on the periphery, for instance, would facilitate access for women who otherwise cannot attend meetings in the city center due to logistical or security barriers. Hybrid meeting formats are another way to facilitate access, though it would be necessary to confirm beforehand whether all women have access to the necessary technical resources to participate in such a meeting. Recognizing that activism is very time-consuming, ways must be found to enable women with little free time to engage in struggle. Moreover, in order to create a process of social transformation in the sense of Gago's (2020) theory that goes beyond the single strike, assemblies would have to continue to be organized in the aftermath of the strike.

Another argument raised by several interviewees is the difficulty of including women in the strike who are employed informally and depend on their daily income for survival. This refers to what Gago (2020:46) calls “the supposed impossibility of the feminist strike”. When imagining a feminist strike, it is important to think about the different forms the strike can take. Just as the mass strike was not a rigid product for Rosa Luxemburg, the feminist strike should not be a rigid product for feminists. Indeed, feminist strikes have taken on many different forms and as explained in section 3.2, “any work stoppage, however brief and limited, may generally
be considered as a strike” (Gernigon, Odero & Guido 2000:12). In Argentina, for instance, the first strike included a withdrawal from work for only one hour and people could do it from anywhere. Furthermore, it foresaw the withdrawal from reproductive labor (Gago 2020). In Spain, feminists called not only for a paid and unpaid labor strike, but also for a consumer strike and to wear the color purple throughout the day to identify themselves as strikers (Coordinadora Feminista 2017). As noted earlier, women are the most powerful consumers, not least because of the gendered division of reproductive labor. This position gives women great power, because they would not even have to stop production to cause harm to the capitalist system, as a consumer strike already implies great losses to capital. In Mexico, feminist movements called for a “A Day Without Us” (#UnDiaSinNosotras), where women stayed home on March 9 after the IWD rallies to demonstrate what public life would be like if all women were dead, referring to the high number of femicides in the country. In 2020, the strike even had an economic impact of 37 billion Mexican pesos (Ayala 2020). Finally, a feminist strike can take many different forms and be adapted to the reality in which it is exercised, which is why the preparatory assemblies are of extreme importance as these are the spaces where strikers can find solutions for the supposed impossibility of the feminist strike. At this point, however, it must also be recalled to mind that several interviewees criticized precisely the flexible concept of the feminist strike, which suggests that the Brazilian feminist movement would only call for a strike if they considered it possible to actually stop production.

A greater obstacle in Brazil is the different demands of the feminist organizations, which often lead to conflict of interests. In Brazil, the feminist struggle was born in the general struggle for democracy and around 30 years later, the feminist struggle has turned into a general struggle again. In fact, ever since Bolsonaro took office as head of state, there has been a polarization of demands in the feminist movement. While putting an end to Bolsonaro's government became the main goal of the feminist movement, specific feminist demands such as legalizing abortion and eliminating violence against women faded into the background. This was also an observation I made when I attended the official manifestation on March 8, 2022, at the Avenida Paulista in São Paulo, whose main theme was Pela Vida das Mulheres - Bolsonaro Nunca Mais (for the life of women - Bolsonaro never again). Considering that the feminist strike in other Latin American countries prioritizes specifically feminist demands such as the legalization of abortion, the elimination of gender-based violence, and the abolition of the sexual division of labor, the feminist strike in its advertised form has found few supporters in São Paulo’s organized feminist movement, given the current prioritization of general issues in Brazil.
However, this does not imply that feminist organizations no longer address these issues; on the contrary, they still represent core themes of their activism. Nevertheless, several organizations understand that it is not possible to mobilize for these rights until democracy is fully restored.

Ultimately, conflicts of interest will likely continue to be a burden to the formation of a massive and unified feminist movement, nonetheless the interviews suggest that feminist issues will be re-prioritized once democracy is fully restored. Furthermore, the statements of PT-affiliated organizations indicate that in the future they will publicly address issues that are considered more controversial in conservative societies like Brazil’s, also because they consider that a struggle on a purely political level is not enough to promote women’s rights. This supports the argument of Sardenberg and Alcantara Costa (2014), who state that many institutionalized feminists have become more critical of their relationship with the state, longing for more autonomy again. However, what kind of resistance feminist organizations will eventually choose if Lula wins the elections, and whether the project of state feminism will then be resumed, is a question for the future.

Finally, it can be concluded that if a feminist strike is well communicated, planned and executed, then the probability is low that only privileged women can take part in it. After all, direct actions, such as the feminist strike, are meant to be a way to give excluded subjects a political platform. However, the starting point for the execution of a feminist strike is a deeply rooted, massive and popular feminist movement and the current task in Brazil seems to be to build such a movement before a feminist strike can take place.

7. Concluding Remarks

Because being Brazilian means never giving up.

(Amelinha, UMSP)

In Latin America, feminist movements have developed a range of strategies to influence public policies, achieve the recognition of women’s rights and dismantle patriarchal structures in society. From lobbying, to litigation strategies, to collective actions - the repertoire of instruments to influence policy-making is large. However, their impact has often been limited and further unequal. For example, while Argentinian feminists celebrated the legalization of abortion in 2020, feminists in Brazil have been fighting not only the dismantling of women’s rights but also of democracy itself since the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff. Finally, in view of the current advance of neoconservative and right-wing forces in society and politics, the
study of instruments of resistance applied by minorities is once again gaining momentum. In this context, the feminist strike has gained increasing attention in recent years as an instrument of feminist resistance aimed at ending patriarchal and capitalist power structures. Considering that different sectors of the feminist movement in Brazil have opposed the execution of a feminist strike, the present study had as its objective to investigate how the organized feminist movement in São Paulo relates to the strike as an instrument of feminist resistance.

After analyzing the interviews with the representatives of a total of ten feminist organizations active in the context of São Paulo, the answer to the research question of how the feminist movement relates to the strike as an instrument of feminist resistance can be answered as follows: overall, São Paulo’s feminist movement agrees on the importance and potency of the strike as an instrument of popular resistance. In its feminist form, however, several organizations question the inclusiveness of the instrument in a socioeconomically divided society such as Brazil’s, as women in particularly precarious labor situations face severe structural barriers to participation in strikes. Furthermore, the Brazilian organized feminist movement understands, that before calling for a feminist strike, they must first build a massive and united feminist movement. Eventually, because of these challenges, the organized feminist movement decided to not join the IWS since its first call in 2017, believing that the feminist strike is not the appropriate tool for their struggle in the current reality.

The initial hypotheses that the institutionalization of the feminist movement has led to its fragmentation and that the feminist struggle has become a general struggle under the current economic and political situation, which are ultimately reasons that impede the feasibility of a feminist strike, have been largely confirmed. As emerged from the analysis, São Paulo’s feminist movement is facing several challenges, which come both from the inside, meaning structural difficulties within the movement itself, and from the outside, that is, the social, political, and economic circumstances in which the feminist movement operates. While the latter can undoubtedly either favor or hinder the execution of strikes, history has proven that even in situations where a particular class was given no rights and economic conditions were extremely precarious, massive strikes have been carried out. The analysis of the role of strikes in São Paulo’s women’s labor movement since the beginning of the 20th century provided several examples for this, such as the General Strike of 1917. Eventually, this suggests that the most compelling explanation for the reluctance of the feminist movement to call for a strike lies in the internal challenges the movement is facing related to organizational capacities and the lack of alliances both with the broad mass of society and within the arena of feminism.
As many researchers before this study have argued, the democratization process in Brazil was accompanied by an institutionalization of the feminist movement. This institutionalization found expression at various levels, whether in political parties, state institutions, NGOs, or in academia. Women, who had been excluded from political decision-making for centuries, finally had the opportunity through institutionalization to co-shape a new system that would not discriminate against people based on their gender, ethnicity, social class, or sexuality. However, this opportunity also came with a certain price: first, the fragmentation of the feminist movement into many individual struggles; second, the reduction of autonomy, which led to the de-radicalization of certain feminist demands; and third, the partial loss of the social movement character and the connection to the broad mass of society. Finally, the analysis of the interviews demonstrates how the consequences of institutionalization continue to have a negative impact on the construction of a massive and united feminist movement in São Paulo, which ultimately impedes the construction of a mass direct action, such as the feminist strike.

Nevertheless, the analysis of the interviews also demonstrated that not every direct action is automatically inclusive and conducive to democracy. Especially in socioeconomically divided societies like Brazil’s, caution is required when calling for a feminist strike, as the risk is great that such an action will become exclusive if it is not properly planned and organized. In this regard, it would be valuable to reconsider the theory of the feminist strike and elaborate precise practical guidelines to ensure that the theoretical intersectionality of the feminist strike is put into practice.

In general, it is important to reflect on the practical intersectionality of feminist direct actions, since many institutionalized feminist organizations have returned to favoring direct action such as mass mobilizations as their form of resistance. Given that the institutional space for meaningful feminist participation has been severely limited by the rise of neoconservative and right-wing forces in Brazil, state feminism has ultimately been a less lucrative method of advancing the struggle for women's rights, at least for the time being. However, in the particular case of São Paulo, the organized feminist movement faces many obstacles that affect its ability to organize and recruit people for its struggle after years of demobilization in the form of direct actions. The current economic and political situation further complicates addressing the structural problems of the feminist movement, as women disproportionally carry the burden of the economic and political crisis. Indeed, one could say that in Brazil the crisis carries the face of a woman.
On a positive note, the fragmented feminist movement has in some ways reunited in the face of current challenges and, together with other social movements and independent actors, is mobilizing society in a common struggle for democracy in Brazil. The current situation is indeed reminiscent of the struggle of the women's movement during the dictatorship, in which many different social movements joined with the feminist movement in the fight against the common adversary. While the struggle for democracy is likely to be the primary struggle of the feminist movement for the time being, at least until the presidential elections in October 2022, there is a strong likelihood that if Lula returns as president, specifically feminist issues will once again be prioritized in the feminist arena. In this regard, the current struggle against Bolsonaro could be used as a platform to mobilize people who support women's rights but do not yet identify as feminists to join the specifically feminist struggle. Finally, the question of whether the feminist strike will play a role in the resistance of the feminist movement in São Paulo and whether it will then also spark a feminist revolution is a question for the future and cannot be answered within the scope of this study.

Eventually, it remains to be said that the findings of this study are not generalizable beyond the study sample of São Paulo, given that every feminist resistance happens in a particular context, which shapes, changes and influences the struggle. Considering that the data set of this study was limited to São Paulo’s organized feminist movement, future research should explore other voices, for instance, those of the independent feminist actors who called for a feminist strike in 2017 in a Facebook group and also of the subjects originally excluded from the strike, namely women employed in the popular economy and women doing unpaid reproductive labor at home. Moreover, one aspect that received far too little attention in this study, and yet is of great relevance, is the question of the desired change of a feminist strike in Brazil. In other words, what kind of structural reform would be desired, for example in terms of rethinking labor, and how can this change be discussed in the feminist movement, but also in society? Furthermore, considering that the movement #EleNão (NotHim) was named as a Brazilian expression of the feminist strike by several researchers (Dias Fagundes 2021; Gago 2020; Melo 2020), it would be interesting to explore the particular factor of the strike in these mobilizations, that is, did the participants identify as strikers, was there a work stoppage with the intention of stopping production? Eventually, the possibilities for future research on the feminist strike are far-reaching, and the fact that countries still choose the strike as an instrument of feminist resistance today, five years after the first call for IWS, indicates that the feminist strike will continue to play a role in the struggle against capitalism and patriarchy in the future.
Finally, with the crisis of neoliberalism and the COVID-19 pandemic, power structures have been shaken up, making space for change and creating new opportunities to rewrite relations of power. Feminist movements in Latin America are in the forefront when it comes to rewriting those power relations, and although it is uncertain whether the feminist strike will be the key to a social revolution, it is definitely certain that Brazilian women will continue to mobilize for equality and against oppression until they achieve the reality they long for, because being Brazilian means never giving up.
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## Appendix

1. Feminist organizations and Representatives (In alphabetic order)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Vision</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coletivo Juntas!</strong></td>
<td><strong>Vision:</strong> Building a Marxist and intersectional feminist alternative that can overcome social, racial and gender inequalities.</td>
<td>Participation in and construction of acts and demonstrations for women's rights; promotion of debates and spaces for women’s self-organization in schools, universities, workplaces, and neighborhoods; feminist reading clubs; urban and artistic interventions in cities across the country; feminist communication on social networks (Instagram, Facebook, and Youtube); representation in the parliament.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Organizational Form:</strong> Collective</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Founded in:</strong> 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Website:</strong> <a href="https://coletivojuntas.com.br/">https://coletivojuntas.com.br/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Represented by:</strong> Sâmia Bomfim and Rebeca Meyer Isler</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Coletivo Yabá</strong></td>
<td><strong>Vision:</strong> The combat of patriarchy, racism, LBTphobia and class society.</td>
<td>Participation in acts and demonstrations for women's rights; study groups; reading and discussion of relevant feminist readings; monthly reunions; feminist communication on social networks (Instagram, Facebook).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Organizational Form:</strong> Collective from the PUC Law School</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Founded in:</strong> 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Website:</strong> <a href="https://coletivoyaba.wordpress.com/">https://coletivoyaba.wordpress.com/</a></td>
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<td><strong>Represented by:</strong> Júlia Piccoli Silva</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Marcha Mundial das Mulheres (MMM)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Vision:</strong> To build a strong grassroot, popular, rural and urban feminist movement.</td>
<td>Participation in acts and demonstrations for women's rights; organization of women’s marches (street activism); strengthening of women's collective spaces that are popular, autonomous, and diverse; creative actions to confront patriarchal, racist, and lesbo/biphobic capitalism; building alliances with social movements; linking ongoing work at</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Organizational Form:</strong> Movement</td>
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<td><strong>Founded in:</strong> 2000</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Website:</strong> <a href="https://www.marchamundialdasmulheres.org.br/">https://www.marchamundialdasmulheres.org.br/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Represented by:</strong> Maria Fernanda Pereira Marcelino and Cinthia Abreu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>Activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marcha das Mulheres Negras (MMN)</td>
<td>The combat of racism, gender-based violence and for the good living (o Bem Viver).</td>
<td>Participation in acts and demonstrations for women's rights; women’s marches on national and international days: IWD on March 8, Day of Afro-Latin and Afro-Caribbean Women on July 25, National Black Women's Day on July 25; samba rounds for women; feminist communication on social networks (Facebook).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Movimento Mulheres em Luta (MML)</td>
<td>The combat of all forms of exploitation and oppression, always with the perspective of a socialist society, governed by the workers themselves.</td>
<td>Participation in acts and demonstrations for women's rights; organizing and mobilizing female workers always in the sense of defending their rights, interests and prerogatives and against machismo and exploitation suffered by working class women; feminist communication on social networks (Instagram, Facebook).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mulheres do Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT)</td>
<td>Building the largest leftist party in Latin America with more women in politics.</td>
<td>Participation in acts and demonstrations for women's rights; promotion, creation, and implementation of public policies aimed at protecting and valuing women; discussions and actions of women in the party from a feminist and socialist perspective; participation in</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Vision</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Secretaria da Mulher Trabalhadora da CUT</strong></td>
<td><strong>Vision:</strong> The combat of discrimination with the aim to achieve equal opportunities and equal treatment between men and women, in the world of work, in life and in the union movement.</td>
<td><strong>Activities:</strong> Participation in acts and demonstrations for women's rights; elaborating, coordinating and developing policies within CUT for the promotion of female workers from the perspective of social relations of gender, race and class, providing subsidies to affiliated entities; Organizing female workers to intervene in the labor and union world about issues that interfere in the lives of women as workers.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Organizational Form:</strong> National Women’s Secretariat</td>
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<td><strong>Founded in:</strong> 2003</td>
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<td><strong>Website:</strong> <a href="https://www.cut.org.br/secretarias/mulher-trabalhadora-b18a">https://www.cut.org.br/secretarias/mulher-trabalhadora-b18a</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Represented by:</strong> Junéia Batista</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sempreviva Organização Feminista (SOF)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Vision:</strong> The strengthening of women's autonomy and their presence as political subjects in the projection of new models of society</td>
<td><strong>Activities:</strong> popular education and advisory actions to women's organizations and mixed organizations, social movements, and governmental organs; work with formation to strengthen social groups and leaders, and participation in social movements based on feminism; construction of Marcha Mundial das Mulheres; feminist communication on social networks (Facebook, Twitter).</td>
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<td><strong>Organizational Form:</strong> NGO</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Founded in:</strong> 1963</td>
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<td><strong>Website:</strong> <a href="https://www.sof.org.br">https://www.sof.org.br</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Represented by:</strong> Maria Fernanda Pereira Marcelino</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>União Brasileira de Mulheres (UBM)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Vision:</strong> To bring together women who fight for socialism, emancipation, social justice, equal rights, and against every form of discrimination and oppression.</td>
<td><strong>Activities:</strong> Participation in public acts and demonstrations for women's rights;</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Organizational Form:</strong> Entity</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Founded in:</strong> 1988</td>
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2. Interview questions divided into categories

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<tr>
<th>Presentation</th>
<th>1. Can you introduce yourself and the organization? Why did you start getting involved with feminism? How long has the organization been in existence and how long have you been active there? What are the values of the organization, what are the daily tasks. How does your activism manifest itself?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The feminist strike and its scope in Brazil</td>
<td>2. Have you heard about the feminist strike, also known as Paro internacional de las mujeres/ huelga feminista general / International Women's Strike that takes place on March 8 since 2017 in several countries around the world? How do you think it was here in Brazil, do</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
You know of any similar strikes that took place? Did your organization participate in the feminist strike movement?

- Why did the organization choose the strike as an instrument of resistance rather than other instruments, such as marches or protests?
- How exactly did your organization participate in the International Women’s Strike? How was the strike organized in terms of time and place and who was called to the strike? What was the purpose of the strike, what was attention to be drawn to?
- Did the strike include a work stoppage of both paid and unpaid work? If so, which women do you think particularly participated in the strike, which were perhaps underrepresented?
- Was there a reason the organization did not participate in the strike, if so, what was it?
- What other actions were taken on March 8 and why were they chosen over the strike?

3. This year several calls for an International Women’s Strike were made for March 8. Were there discussions in the feminist movement here in Brazil to also go on strike?

4. In recent years, there have been several general strikes called in Brazil, for example the strike against the pension reform in the year 2019, which indicates that the strike as an instrument of resistance plays an important role in the Brazilian workforce. Why do you think feminist strikes have received little attention from the feminist movement here in Brazil?

5. What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the strike as an instrument of resistance? What exactly does a strike mean to you? What is your opinion on the viability of the feminist strike: considering the situation of the labor market and the COVID-19 pandemic?

6. How would you describe the relationship between feminist movements in Brazil? Is there a national network in which movements meet and exchange ideas or in which a feminist strike could have been organized?

7. To what extent is your organization connected to other feminist movements in Latin America, for example Ni Una Menos? Is there a strong international connection with other feminist movements? For example, has your organization been called upon to join others in other countries?

8. In your opinion, to what extent has the political situation with the impeachment of Dilma and the election of Bolsonaro as president impacted feminist activism? What issues were in the foreground of the national and international networking?
| Future prospects | 9. Do you think the feminist strike will play an important role in feminist resistance in Brazil in the future? |