

## Open Encounter on "Feminism to change course", 22 August 2018 in Irun, Spain, in the context of the G7 counter-summit

By Rosabel Agirregomezkorta

**WIDE+ was invited by Adéquations to join an open encounter in Irun (Basque Country) on 22 August of this year that was facilitated by a feminist partnership<sup>1</sup> led by Adéquations, ATTAC's gender group, Réseau féministe Ruptures and ActionAid together with Basque, Spanish and French feminist associations<sup>2</sup>. Rosabel Agirregomezkorta represented WIDE+ and reports.**

The event was aimed at discussing about women's struggles, exchanging feminist analysis and proposals, and strengthening international feminist mobilization in the framework of the G7 counter-summit that was held in Hendaye / Irun (the basque border between France and Spain) from 19 to 25 August 2019, bringing together about 15,000 people despite police and military control.

Although the G7 is fragmented and has lost part of its economic and geostrategic relevance, it is still a significant power that represents a symbol of the current patriarchal neoliberal model. It is worth to say that the organization of the G7 cost 36 million euros, while the annual budget of the French State Secretariat for Gender Equality amounts up to 30 million.

### **A feminist Agenda**

As the host organizations pointed out, the G7 itself considers its 2019 agenda to be feminist<sup>3</sup>, perhaps due to the current strength of feminist movement worldwide.

The great dynamism of Feminism as the main paradigm challenging the current hegemonic models and the proximity of the 25 years anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action conferred this event of great interest in the alliance building.

The debates, structured in two panel discussions and a workshop, were a success bringing together more than 150 feminist activists, unions and CSOs representatives along the day where the presence of young people from different backgrounds was also constant.

### **1) Panel on "Women fighting social and economic inequalities"**

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<sup>1</sup> See statement "Contribution for a feminist social ecological transition" at <http://www.adequations.org/spip.php?article2541> (in french).

<sup>2</sup> Bilgune Feminista; Bizi!; Emazteek Diote; Lurralde Askea; Osez le Féminisme; Marche Mondiale des Femmes; Nous Toutes; PAF - Pour une Alternative Féministe; Planning Familial 64-Pays Basque; ZUTIK-Emazteen aurkako bortizkeriaren kontrako kolektibo feminist; ActionAid.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.elysee.fr/es/g7/2019/01/01/combating-gender-inequality.en>

This round table discussed the conditions of women at work, taking into account paid, free, formal and informal work, with testimonials of unionists, 'yellow vest' activists and NGO's representatives from France, Spain and Kenya reflecting on their struggles and strategies.

*Mercedes Nortem Mohamed's* testimonial (on behalf "Las Kellys", a Spanish association of "cleaning ladies" in the hotel industry) denounced the exploitation they suffer linking it with growing "precarization" of working conditions and externalization of costs from mass tourism industry making visible the impact on their health and the state complicity in this industry.

*Nara Cladera (Yellow Vest & Union Syndicale Solidaires)* pointed out that the yellow vest movement in France is a spontaneous movement lead by the poor. It is a movement that takes place in the territories, not in Paris, in response to the dismantling of public services in the villages and territories. It is also related to the failure of union structures and the increase of poverty in these areas.

*"Fighting is the most emancipatory tool that exists for us, the women"*, she said.

*Mady Aspiazu* (representing the Basque union LAB) reflected on the limits of the classical vision of trade unionism in the current context, and its difficulties in placing people at the center and breaking the concept of classic "work" to include the reproduction and sustainability of life.

*Alix Bayle (Pour une parentalité féministe –PAF)* pointed out that one of the difficulties of reproductive work, in addition to its definition and measure, is to identify in a heterosexual relationship who is the exploiter: the husband or the boss. In other words, who benefits from the unpaid work: capital or patriarchy.

*Wangari Kinoti (ActionAid International)* focused on informal workers. In Africa where more than 85% of workers are informal and mostly women, women's informal work plays an important role in the economy. The informal economy takes place in public spaces (streets) and due to informality and precariousness, women are particularly vulnerable to harassment, mainly by government officials.



In general, the panelist and participants agreed to recognize care work as a wealth, and the importance of a non-sexist education in the school, the equal sharing of domestic tasks, a paternity leave (or co-parent) of the same duration, the need to promote alliances between trade unionism and feminism, and the implementation of the ILO's new international convention on violence and harassment at work as tools to fight inequalities.

## 2) Panel on “Feminism in response to the ecological and social crisis”

The moderator *Yveline Nicolas (Adéquations)* pointed out that the growing feminist self-reflection on institutions brings important challenges, questioning whether feminism is compatible with neoliberalism.

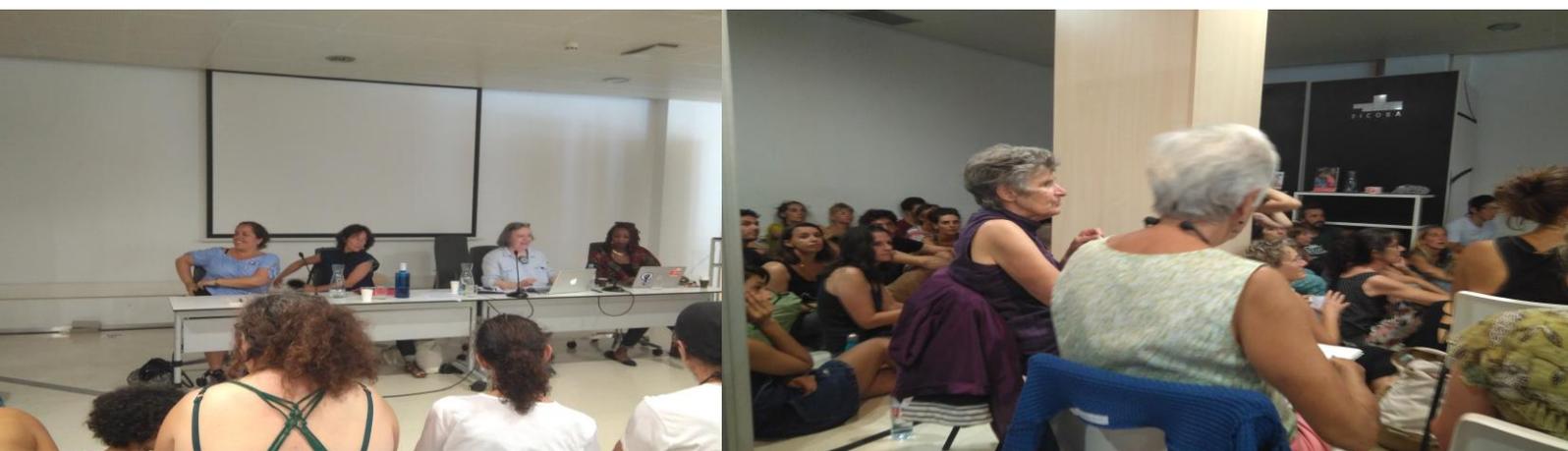
*Huayra Llanque (ATTAC)* discussed the current political-economic context in which public good and services are becoming less accessible, while inequalities and authoritarian regimes are growing. She claimed that it is key to get out from the market-economy mindset. We need a new model where public services are valued although not by proposing one mold for a public model but one that allows for developing diverse strategies for implementation: public services, organized by the community, etc.

*Wangari Kinoti (ActionAid International)* said that we need to resist the growing instrumentalisation of: “women’s economic empowerment” stating that: “we do not work for the economy. The economy must work for us”. Regarding macroeconomics and its impacts, she expressed with dismay that many young people in Africa never have experienced public services due to privatization, deregulation and austerity.

The Argentinean *Luciana Ghiotto (Argentina mejor sin TLC - Attack Argentina)* was asked about how feminist movements have contributed to alterglobalization movements. She pointed out 3 main impacts:

- in the feminist insistence on building bridges to connect themes;
- in the fact that it is the strongest and most dynamic internationalist movement today (to the detriment of the unions); and
- in the analysis and discourse: feminists have not only introduced new agendas and themes but new practices linked to everyday action (in neighborhoods, the local, etc.) seeking for transformation.

Ghiotto also said that need to take care of our discourses as the system appropriates part of the discourse and instrumentalizes it (as in the WTO trade declaration on “women’s economic empowerment”).



### 3) Workshop “*The feminist strike, a tool for fighting*”

Participants of this participatory space discussed and exchanged about the feminist strike process and the March 8 mobilizations in different contexts preparing a joint strategy for March 8, 2020.

Based on diverse experiences in France, Belgium, the Basque Country, and more broadly on international mobilizations and women's marches, it shows that the process of preparing feminist strikes is in itself an opportunity to empower, share and get wider especially with the inclusion of young people. The feminist strike is a sensitization and advocacy tool that can be adapted to many contexts: at local level, at work, in the domestic sphere...) and it has powerful political symbol.

Nevertheless, some relevant questions arose:

- how to make this movement as inclusive as possible (transgender, informal workers ...);
- 8M is not just a day of struggle so we need to maintain the process for feminism throughout the year;
- There are many young girls who want to organize things but who dare not approach feminist organizations ... what stops them?



The interesting and exciting day, full of debate and exchange, ended with a non-programmed march to Hendaia, prior to the great demonstration the following day.



Gara newspaper, 2019/08/25



La Opinion A Coruña newspaper, 24/08/2019

**Related material:**

Open event Program (in French, Basque and Spanish) at <http://www.adequations.org/spip.php?article2547>

Info related G7 countersummit at <https://alternativesg7.org/index.php/en/home-page/> (english)

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