

A stylized world map composed of grey dots, with several dots highlighted in red to represent specific countries.

Austerity Policy from a Feminist Perspective

The Spanish Case

SONIA RUIZ GARCIA

April 2014

- Spain's ranking in the Global Gender Gap Index dropped 14 places this year: from place 12 to 26. This disheartening statistic indicates that the austerity policies implemented by the Spanish government not only have an economic impact on citizens' lives, but a gender and social one, too. In Spain, austerity policies have gone hand in hand with an erosion of democratic procedures and a return of women to »traditional female positions«.
- The conservative government has undertaken budget cuts and drastic policy reforms in areas such as the labour market, the welfare state and the public and judicial administration. These budget cuts have gone beyond the objectives of economic adjustment and intent, and are structurally changing the country's socioeconomic model as well as the gender model built over the last few decades. And so, as a result of the labour reform approved in February 2012, unemployment increased by 491,000 men and 235,400 women from 2012 to 2013.
- Regarding the resources allocated for gender policies, feminist and women's organisations denounced a reduction of 24 %. This cut only concerns specific gender measures, although the statistics only worsen when gender mainstreaming is taken into account and the welfare state is examined. This, in addition to the other dependency cuts, makes up a strategy to push women back into the home, promoting a reduction of their labour activity rate and generating more jobs available for men in the labour market.
- Feminist activists are demanding governmental action, but the changes not only need to take shape in legal and institutional form. More awareness-raising in gender equality is urged and policies should be accompanied by deep social transformation. The rise of progressive social movements in Spain makes space for new political agents to overcome the universal hegemonic ones and opens up new possibilities of interaction among movements and institutions.



Content

1. Context and aims	2
2. Austerity measures, social consequences and gender impacts	2
2.1 Welfare and social policies	4
2.2 Gender mainstreaming, laws and gender public bodies	4
2.3 Sexual and reproductive rights at stake	5
2.4 Violence against women	5
2.5 The labour market and domestic work	6
3. Wind of change	7
Bibliography	10

1. Context and aims

According to the World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Gap Report 2012*, Spain's ranking in the world gender equality index dropped 14 places, from place 12 to 26, in just one year. This disheartening statistic indicates that the austerity policies implemented by the Spanish government not only affect citizens' lives economically, but socially as well because the policies are gendered. Moreover, the economic contingency has to be considered in light of its links with the critical political situation that Spain and all of Europe are facing.

Recently, scholars and experts have expanded upon the economic and financial aspects of the crisis by integrating other topics and dimensions. The current situation has been referred to as a systemic and structural crisis (Gil Calvo, 2012) and a «multiple» crisis (Marquand, 2012). I would like to address the significance of these notions, the broad dynamics they cover, and the many interrelationships they express in terms of the economic, cultural and political systems. This broad perspective – combined with a vision that strengthens the intersections of gender inequality with other common forms of inequality, including social class and precarity, ethnicity and race, sexual orientation and identity, age, etc – allows us to present an approximation of the problems, the backlashes and the barriers, as well as some suggestions and proposals to overcome the crisis from a feminist perspective.

When the people of the *indignados* movement occupied the streets and squares of Spain in May 2011, they came together to forcibly denounce the market's dictatorship and the democratic crisis. The slogan «choose between the euro or life» echoed parallel to «they do not represent us». The political protests focused on the flaws of the party system, the poor participatory elements of the political order – i.e., the festive occasion of democracy every four years during elections and the «siesta» of democracy in the meantime – and, of course, the chronic corruption seeping into a large number of public institutions in Spain. In this sense, the people expressed political problems conjointly with concerns about the economic and the financial sphere. The *indignados* movement originally developed in social networks and comprises a wide variety of people, who all see themselves as citizens first and then as representatives of different groups facing inequalities, such as workers, ethnic minorities, migrant groups, young people, feminist assemblies,

LGTB groups, ecological and economy assemblies, etc. All participants tried to not compete with one another and instead worked together horizontally (Cruells & Ruiz, 2012).

Two years have passed since the awakening of the Spanish people, but institutional action in response to these demands remains absent. Meanwhile, every day, the news is full of stories about illegal funding from political parties, governments and trade unions. Political resignations are rare and legal trials drag on for a long time. A 2013 barometer issued by the National Centre for Sociological Research states that the Spanish population's biggest concern is the blight of unemployment followed by political corruption. Spaniards are more confident in an economic recovery (20.7 %) than a political one (10.9 %), even if proposals are still under construction and pessimism is sometimes the prevailing feeling.

This article is divided into two parts: the first is devoted to the public austerity policies implemented in Spain and their impacts, and the subsequent section presents alternatives and possibilities for generating gender-sensitive proposals.

2. Austerity measures, social consequences and gender impacts

When the international financial system collapsed in 2008, feminist scholars pointed out the lack of democratic control over international monetary resources and the absence of women in top management positions (Walby, 2009). Since then, the neoliberal project seems to be as strong as ever, supported by world organisations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Union. By deregulating the labour market and promoting cuts to the welfare state – which has dreadful consequences for gender equality – their policy recommendations put business profits before the welfare of the people. These proposals have been obediently followed by the Spanish governments, particularly by the current one. In this country, austerity policies have gone hand in hand with an erosion of democratic procedures and a return of women to «traditionally female» positions. In Spain, that means imprisoning women in the domestic sphere. In fact, Spain's drop of 14 ranks in the *Global Gender Gap Report 2012* was mainly due to the decline in the amount of women in decision-making positions

with the shift from the socialist to the conservative administration.

The government denied the critical situation until 2009. The last years of Rodríguez Zapatero's era brought the first anti-crisis measures, which, at the beginning, had a local and Keynesian touch. However, these were gender-blind, focusing merely on male unemployment due to a decrease in the construction industry.¹ In 2010, the first prominent fiscal austerity measures were approved and the privatisation of public enterprises, such as the management of the Barcelona and Madrid airports and the national lotteries, began. The government also put a freeze on pensions, lowered civil servants' salaries and presented several austerity plans in order to contain the deficit by significantly reducing public investment. Under the Zapatero administration, the VAT (Impuesto al Valor Agregado, or IVA) hit the 18 % mark. And, since September 2012, the IVA has gone up to 21 % on most goods and services. Taxes on petrol, gas and electricity have been constantly on the rise since then. Finally, two more measures were taken that discouraged any citizens who still had confidence in the socialist government. One was the 2010 labour-reform package², which deepened market deregulation and favoured employers, and thus led to a general strike. The other great disappointment was the sudden constitutional reform, passed without consulting citizens or even the parliament beforehand, which established the concept of budget stability and introduced the payment of the debt as a priority.

Political ideology matters when it comes to implementing women's rights and gender equality, even if the EU-framed austerity measures have blurred the differences between socialists and conservatives in this context (Lombardo, 2013). It is well supported (Alonso y Paleo, 2013) that the radical changes in gender equality policies experienced in Spain in the last years cannot only be explained as a result of the austerity recipes. They are also a consequence of the Popular Party's assumption of office in the general elections of November 2011 and of the party's conservative and sexist programme. Rajoy's administration has undertaken budget cuts in all policy areas and has implemented – or is preparing to implement – drastic reforms in key institutions such as the labour market, the

welfare state, the public administration and the administration of justice. These have gone beyond the objectives of economic adjustment and intent, and are structurally changing both the socioeconomic model of the country (del Pozo & Martín, 2013) and the gender model built up over the course of the last few decades.

June 2012 represented a milestone for Spanish austerity measures. The government accepted the conditions from the EU, the IMF and the Central European Bank (CEB) for a package to rescue the financial system. The 100 billion euro bailout to recapitalise the banking sector limited fiscal sovereignty and increased Spain's already enormous public debt. And, of course, since money has been going towards paying for the bailout, it has not been used to implement other policies, thus causing a rise of poverty in Spain. If austerity measures continue, in 2022, 38 per cent of the population – i.e., 18 million people – will be poor and at risk of social exclusion (Oxfam Intermón, 2012). People have been forced to defray the huge banks' private debt and the costs of these policies cannot be expressed in statistics alone: it can also be expressed by the constantly collapsing salaries, the shrinking buying power, and the increasing number of evictions (from 2008 until 2012, 362,776 families were evacuated from their homes, which means that, on average, one eviction was carried out every 15 minutes).³ Recently, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe (CE) Nils Muižnieks released a report on how the cuts in Spain have led to an increase in family poverty. The report warns that the austerity programme is breaching human rights: the growing child malnutrition and poverty rates as well as the housing situation are issues with potentially devastating long-term impacts on children. Commissioner Muižnieks stated that migrant families are particularly at risk of falling into poverty, and that schooling for children with special needs has also been deteriorating since the beginning of the crisis. In addition, the report expresses concern about the behaviour of security forces in handling social opposition. The Spanish government has intensified its use of repressive measures – i.e., the police, fines and new laws – against demonstrators and democratic participatory expressions. Rajoy's administration puts individual rights and freedoms at risk. Lives in crisis have to be made visible, too. There is a common

1. Plan E: Fondo Estatal de Inversión Local and Fondo Estatal para el Empleo y la Sostenibilidad Local.

2. Real Decreto 10/2010 de 16 de junio, de medidas urgentes para la reforma del mercado de trabajo.

3. *El País*, article available at: http://economia.elpais.com/economia/2013/04/11/actualidad/1365664722_029246.html

feeling of discouragement and the number of suicides is rising. Nevertheless, citizens are as politically active as ever, with participation levels comparable to those during the transition period from Franco's regime. Later in this paper, I will discuss the civil society proposals aimed at overcoming this multiple crisis.

Reviewing how the Popular Party's austerity measures are affecting fundamental social and labour policies from a gender perspective helps to paint an appropriate picture of the Spanish situation. The trend has a common pattern: the cutting or elimination of these policies combined with the implementation of measures and laws that target the imposition of an ancient gender order. Feminist and women's organisations have recently denounced a 24 % cut to gender-equality policies in the 2013 Budget Law. If the amount is related to 2011, the reduction rises to 27 %. And this cut only concerns specific gender measures: the picture grows even grimmer when gender mainstreaming is taken into account and the welfare state is examined (Marea Violeta, 2012). In the following, I would like to take a closer look at these policy fields.

2.1 Welfare and social policies

The welfare state regime, especially in southern European countries, is facing a crucial challenge. For years, the common good has been confronted with a neoliberal trend looking to create space for profitable privatisation and progressively minimize the state (Ruiz, 2013). As women tend to rely more heavily on welfare benefits, public services and social care, the governmental cuts affect them disproportionately (Peterson, 2011).

In Spain, cuts to the Dependency Law have meant a dismantling of services: economic resources have decreased by more than 14 % and benefits for people whom the state considered ›moderately dependent‹ have been eliminated, affecting hundreds of thousands in disadvantaged situations (Marea Violeta, 2012). In addition, subsidies for professional caregivers, and nursing and old people's homes have been suppressed (Lombardo, 2013). The social protection for non-professional caregivers named in the Dependency Law has disappeared. These and other dependency cuts are part of a strategy to push women back into the home, promoting a reduction of their labour activity rate and generating more

jobs available to men in the labour market. In 2011, 160,000 people were registered as non-professional caregivers in the social security system: more than 90 % of them were women and a majority of them were over the age of 45. After the 2012 reform, only 24,000 of them were still registered (Requena, 2012).

Cuts to health services have also been dramatic, with a 23 % decrease in comparison to the previous budget. As these policies are regional, the final objectives depend on each autonomous community. For example, in Madrid, the complete privatisation of the health-care system has been prevented thanks to the huge efforts – in the courts and in the streets – of the ›white wave‹, a group made up of doctors, nurses and health-care staff. Nevertheless, 30,000 preventive mammographies have not taken place in the last seven months in the Madrid region because of budget cuts.⁴ In Catalonia, two separate procedures – one for public health-care users and one for those who pay for private health insurance – are being established, there is a flagrant lack of hospital beds, and waiting lists are growing longer. Since September 2012, the Spanish health-care system has no longer provided universal medical coverage. People without a residency permit are excluded from these services and a large number of vital medications formerly subsidised by the state now have to be paid for by everybody, regardless of their situation or income level. The national plan against HIV has also been cut, and the employees in the Women's Health Observatory, which is dependent on the Ministry of Health, have been dismissed (Marea Lila, 2012). Austerity has also dealt a drastic blow to education policies. Public expenses in this field were reduced by 31 % in 2013. This has meant the closing of rural schools, the elimination of subsidies for meals, and cuts to school transportation, which has translated into more domestic and care work for women (Marea Lila, 2012).

2.2 Gender mainstreaming, laws and gender public bodies

Under the guise of austerity, cuts to the policy field of gender equality have been some of the most drastic in Spain. Moreover, the EU's responses to the crisis have subordinated the equality between women and men

4. *El País*, Madrid deja temporalmente a 30.000 mujeres sin mamografía preventiva; available online at: http://ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2013/10/09/madrid/1381310483_066233.html

to ›more urgent‹ economic priorities in line with the neoliberal agenda (Lombardo, 2013). Gender equality and gender mainstreaming need constant public support in order to be successful, yet the approval of major gender-equality laws has been stopped in Spain in recent years. In Galicia (2009), Catalonia (2010) and Cantabria (2011), the projects for regional equality laws were paralysed and have not been voted on yet (Alonso and Paleo, 2013). Besides, the arrival of the conservative party in the Spanish government caused the suspension of an anti-discrimination and equal treatment law in accordance with the EU directives. This law not only highlighted discrimination based on gender, but also other dimensions of inequality, such as ethnicity, race, class, age and sexual identity or orientation.

Spain has had no strategic plan of action for gender equality since 2011.⁵ In addition, the expansion of equality bodies, which has been found on all levels of the Spanish government since the creation of the *Instituto de la Mujer* in 1983, has been stopped. The year 2010 was an *annus horribilis* for these institutions: the Ministry of Equality was removed, as were the equality services in Galicia, the Women's Institute in Murcia and the Women's Council of Madrid, a regional women's NGO created in 1993 (Alonso and Paleo, 2013).

2.3 Sexual and reproductive rights at stake

As stated above, this neoliberal trend favours structural changes in the established gender-equality model in Spain. Economic cuts, or ›conventional‹ austerity measures, are also tinged in a sexist, Catholic and conservative tone in that they promote the traditional idea of a woman whose only role in life is to be a good mother and wife. In this sense, this political project aims at dismantling additional women's and human rights that have been achieved after decades of feminist struggle. One example of this backlash is the dangerous situation in which the Popular Party has put sexual and reproductive rights. In March 2010, still under the socialist government, a new law on sexual and reproductive health was passed that regulated abortion conditions according to the criteria established by the World Health Organisation and in line with the majority of the EU legislation. Recently, the

Minister of Justice announced a new piece of legislation on the voluntary interruption of pregnancy. Although the draft of the law has not been made public yet, according to the minister's threatening statements, it is expected that women's rights will be set back a good 30 years.

This seems to be in line with a dominant stream of gender regression targeting women's freedoms and the control over their bodies. Since 2008, laws on the protection of pregnant women have been approved in six regions (i.e., Castilla la Mancha, Castilla León, Murcia, Galicia, Madrid and La Rioja). The majority believes that women in vulnerable situations should continue their pregnancies; some of these norms even stress the ›tragedy of abortion‹ in their texts (Alonso y Paleo, 2013). Once again, this general objective reinforces the traditional role of women as mothers, promoting them as the main people responsible for care and domestic work – without state help or social services – and keeping them stuck in the home, out of the public sphere.

2.4 Violence against women

Preventative measures against gender-based violence are another policy area suffering from economic cuts and conservative attacks. The Minister of Health, Social Services and Equality announced in July 2013 that statistics on gender-based violence would only take into account women who were hospitalised for at least 24 hours. This declaration provokes great consternation in a country where nearly 50 women were killed in 2012 at the hands of their (ex-)partners. When not enough resources are allocated to fight against such blight, the most efficient option is to make up statistics and reality. Although policies on gender-based violence in Spain have brought about alliances among ideologically different parties, including between the feminist movement and femocrats from the late 1990s (Lombardo, 2013), austerity and the new conservative wave in Spain might put these policies at risk for the first time in decades. Feminist groups claim that austerity policies promote inequality, which, in turn, fosters violence against women (Marugán, 2013). Women's organisations focusing on violence against women are denouncing state repression and economic suffocation. Women's shelters have closed down; the local safety net for assistance and protection is being dismantled. From 2011 to 2014, the budget set aside for the fight against gender-based violence was reduced by

5. The most recent one was approved during the last PSOE (socialist) administration (2008); available at: www.csd.gob.es/csd/estaticos/myd/PlanEstrategico2008-2011.pdf

28 %.⁶ Last but not least, the new compulsory nature of the Catholic religion in public schools is being denounced as something that will increase inequality and violence. It should thus come as no surprise that the bishop of Granada said that if a woman has had an abortion, it gives men the right to abuse her.

2.5 The labour market and domestic work

To conclude this section, I would like to address the impact that the neoliberal and austerity measures have had on women's work. It is important to note that unemployment is growing worldwide, especially among women. On an international level, salaries are being drastically reduced and employers are losing negotiation power (Benería & Sarasúa, 2009). This favours a turn towards work of subsistence and domestic production, which is also promoted by the global food crisis and the limited access to credit and microcredit (Walby, 2009). Furthermore, from a gender and a holistic perspective, the labour market can no longer be talked about without taking into account the total workload and the distribution of time. This total workload should integrate the time dedicated to the labour market (i.e., the paid activity), caregiving and domestic tasks, as well as time allocated for political and social participation (Ruiz, 2013). Women in Spain dedicate an average of four hours and four minutes per day to domestic work – two and a half hours more than the male's contribution, which has increased by only 45 minutes in the last seven years.⁷ The people voice that »it is not a problem of the crisis but of the system«. That is, the economic and financial crisis is emphasising endemic gender problems, such as the situation of women belonging to the global care chain and the so-called »care crisis«. Migrants are dealing with hard times, as not even their basic health rights are guaranteed, and household workers have seen their situation worsen since the Popular Party took office.⁸ On top of that, the social organisation of caregiving is still a woman's obligation with an absent state, i.e., a state

that is not taking responsibility for the care needs of its society, the reduction of family economic resources, and the number of men not taking responsibility for it (Ezquerro, 2011).

In the first months of the crisis, the biggest blow to employment was the crash of the construction sector, a male-dominated area. This entailed that women's increasing unemployment was not perceptible and job destruction was understood as being gender-neutral by the government (Ruiz, 2013). And so, as a result of the labour reform approved in February 2012 – the Real Decreto 3/2012, de Medidas urgentes para la reforma del mercado laboral – unemployment increased by 491,000 men and 235,400 women from 2012 to 2013 (Rodríguez, 2013).⁹ The privatisation of public services has caused increasing unemployment in a sector where there are more women than in the private one. Parallel to the outsourcing process, the labour fights in the garbage and trash service in Madrid have been paradigmatic. As tourism is still the main »productive« sector of the country, during the summer of 2013, Spain could briefly move away from the 6 million unemployed people: in the first months of the year, the unemployment rate was more than 27 %. Youth unemployment has reached 56.1 % (Eurostat, June 2013). Since 2008, nearly 400,000 Spaniards have left the country. A new economic migration composed by people between 25 and 35 years old¹⁰ is also taking place. This process, combined with a brain drain of researchers due to research and development budget cuts, endangers the future of Spain's economic and social recovery. There are nearly 2 million households in which all inhabitants are unemployed. This fact paired with the expected 30 % loss of buying power from pensions will put family solidarity, which is constantly attempting to make up for the chronic weakness of the Spanish welfare state, at risk.

Facing this situation, and in the light of the final erosion of the male bread-winner model, women stay actively seeking jobs in an environment that is not particularly women-friendly. Precarity has been the leading characteristic of the Spanish labour market for decades and the employment structure promotes a high deregulation of labour relations. Nowadays, a great portion of jobs

6. A Socialist Member of Parliament provides data available here: <http://www.psoe.es/canarias/news/703702/page/dolores-padronlos-presupuestos-2014-son-reflejo-los-retrocesos-igualdad-impuestos-por.html>

7. Survey on time use: Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Encuesta de Empleo del Tiempo 2009–2010; available at: www.ine.es

8. Real Decreto-ley 29/2012, de 28 de diciembre, de mejora de gestión y protección social en el Sistema Especial para Empleados de Hogar y otras medidas de carácter económico y social (BOE de 31 de diciembre de 2012)

9. From summer 2012 to summer 2013

10. www.nonosvamosnosechan.net. Is a webpage created by Juventud Sin Futuro (Youth without Future), a very active organisation that participated in the first mobilisations of the *indignados* movement.

can be understood as ›atypical‹, taking into account that what is atypical today is to find employment with decent working conditions (Ruiz, 2013). It is not only unpaid domestic work that remains invisible to productivity statistics. At the margins of official data, there are many other (non-formal) jobs that define the Spanish labour market: at least a 20 % of the employed population is working an illegal job (Ruiz, 2013) and there is also a high percentage of non-formal housework, domestic services¹¹, internships¹², sexual work and prostitution, and other precarious categories. The majority of the people working these jobs are women. Casual employment accounts for the greater number of jobs created in 2013. In addition, 62 % of new contracts are part-time jobs (Rodríguez, 2013). This implies a reduction of the average salary. Since part-time employment was established in 1984 as work that allows the combination of labour activity with domestic tasks, it has been a female-dominated field. In 2012, women made up 74 % of people with this type of contract. Vertical and horizontal discrimination is still an issue in the Spanish labour market. There is a 20 % gender pay gap, and it increases according to the level of responsibilities and the age of the female worker. In management positions, it is 33.2 %; in the lower-ranking jobs, it is 11.9 % (Ruiz, 2013). In fact, women work 82 days more each year in order to earn the same salary performing a similar job (UGT, 2013).

The labour market measures implemented by the current conservative government are deepening the gender inequalities that already exist. The governmental crisis management in Spain has increased flexibility and precarity, which has caused an increase of gender-based violence and mobbing against women in the labour market (Gálvez & Torres, 2009). Austerity measures have put the brake on what would have been one of the most effective co-responsibility policies: the non-transferrable parental leave for childbirth established on a basis of equal rights for women and men – in terms of both time and remuneration. Both the debate and implementation of the reform have been stopped in Spain. This is also a European trend: the economic benefit of parental leave

has been reduced in Estonia, Slovenia, Portugal and Germany (Castro, 2013). Lately, in governmental and political debates, pensions seem to have lost their value as a right and be merely regarded from a technical perspective rather than a human one. The Spanish pension system has suffered diverse changes in the recent years, most recently in November 2013. It has been shown that these reforms are worsening female poverty. Given that women are over-represented in the informal economy and more frequently interrupt their professional career than men to look after children or relatives, women often meet with difficulties in reaching the minimum requirements for a decent pension (Ezquerro, 2011). And the 2012 labour reform has had dreadful consequences for gender equality in the workplace. To start with, tax discounts for employing women disappeared. In addition, the reform boycotts reconciliation rights by limiting workers' power to negotiate a ›shorter working day‹, reduces the right to breastfeed, and eliminates state financial incentives when women are reincorporated in their former jobs after childcare leave. With this reform, part-time jobs are allowed to add overtime (extra time) and the privatisation of the labour market continues by promoting temporary work agencies. It also increases unilateral opportunities for employers to introduce more flexible labour conditions without having to respect collective agreements, thus making it easier and cheaper for them to fire employees, including pregnant women (Lombardo, 2013; Ruiz & Porta, 2012; Ruiz, 2013; Ezquerro, 2011).

3. Wind of change

Feminist and gender projects that counter the neoliberal and sexist way of dealing with the crisis are found in the streets, civil society structures, new and traditional organisations, and academia, where people are devoting more and more attention to the theoretical production of alternatives. Suggestions are at a boiling point. Since the beginning of the multiple crisis, women's and feminist organisations, experts and scholars have stood for vindications and public policy proposals that promote parity democracy, i.e., women's equal participation in the financial and economic decision-making positions (Walby, 2009). On the one hand, feminists voiced that the government obediently followed the will of business and the market. On the other, they asked for more state intervention and the implementation of existent gender

11. The situation of the women working in domestic services is paradigmatic and exploitative. These workers are not included in the general workers regime, they do not have the right to unemployment benefits and make up a big part of the illegal jobs in Spain.

12. The European Commission recently denounced the situation of interns in Spain as their labour conditions are oppressive and irregular (2012). They are mostly young people replacing jobs for little to no money, sometimes over the course of years.

tools on the labour market and the social security system, highlighting the bonds between employment and domestic work (IGCE, 2009; Benería & Sarasúa, 2011). There is a demand for governmental action, but the changes should not only be shaped in a legal and institutional form. More awareness-raising in gender equality is urged and policies should be accompanied by deep social transformation. In the manifesto ›Gender Equality to fight the crisis‹¹³ produced in 2009, the activists asked for a ›feminist New Deal‹. They demanded a general reduction of time dedicated to the labour market; the sharing of domestic work and caregiving tasks among the members of a household; universal public coverage of education for children from zero years; public services for dependent people; the increase of women's activity rate, as the suppression of care leave measures discourages women from returning to their jobs; the establishment of an equal and non-transferrable paternal and maternal leave; the inclusion of domestic employees in the workers general regime of the social security system; an updated widow's pension and the progressive equality of status for the non-contributory pensions.

Four years later, not one of these demands has been fulfilled. At the beginning of October 2013, many scholars and activists gathered at the fourth Congress on Feminist Economy at the Pablo Olavide University in Seville. Participants of the congress encouraged the recovery of the state as the guarantor of public services. The belief that it is not possible to invest in these services was proven wrong: to dismantle the welfare state and privatise public services would be stealing citizens' contributions and enriching owners of the new businesses (Varela, 2013). Lina Gálvez, professor of history and one of the congress's organisers, expressed that one of the gathering's main accomplishments was the development of welfare indicators other than the GDP (Requena, 2013). Public policy tools and methods are at stake. How can we tell what is valuable on the market (or convertible into money) from what is indispensable for maintaining humanity and the planet and for leading a good life?

As the feminist economy not only pays attention to paid work, experts, activists and groups also seek solutions based on what is not shown. While economic and labour situations are clearly perceived, feminists also ask what happens to the invisible crisis of caregiving in the current

context. In this sense, ›market fundamentalism has to be changed, as transforming the economy can transform life‹ (Varela, 2013). The central idea here is to put the sustainability of life in the centre of theoretical reflections and social practices: what does it take to promote a life that is worth living? One path is to focus on care without exalting a heteronormative or biologist approach, but instead making efforts to redefine the concepts of human needs, dependency and independence (Pérez Orozco, 2009; Carrasco, 2009). Capitalism disregards life and only pays attention to remunerated work, although other activities are needed in order to enjoy full lives. In this sense, the strategy is to value other human tasks beyond employment, caregiving and domestic work, and thus skipping this feminist dichotomy. The total workload has to be rebalanced in order to gain time for oneself and also participate in the formation of the common good. It is necessary for personal and public development to achieve a fuller experience of living. The counterbalance of responsibilities is an important issue here, too. The demand of action against a strong state has to be combined with a request to lighten households' duties in the maintenance of life, which usually means women's work. Business and corporate social responsibility should be increased and the progressive commodification of life itself has to be denounced. In this sense, the proposals to increase the responsibilities of social movements and participatory citizenship in the management of services and common goods, a communitarian self-management in the face of state intervention and market privatisation, gains acceptance.

So what are the articulations and possibilities of establishing a fair political, cultural and economic system? What are the capacities of social movements, parties, trade unions and institutions to generate gender-sensitive alternatives? One of the main organisational challenges is how to handle the emergence of multiple mobilisation identities. In a context where the fixed and universal subjects are rare, how is it possible to gather them in a non-competitive way for an effective political practice? The *indignados* movement mobilised a great amount of people under the ›person‹ slogan: the so-called 99 %. Among them were women who claimed to be migrants and lesbians, and housewives, interns, and people in illegal or precarious jobs who expressed their economic precarity but did not want to be subsumed in the traditional workers bloc. Still, an inclusive identity for a general mobilisation has to be shaped. Different subjects

13. Available in English at: <http://feminismoantelacrisis.wordpress.com/2009/02/26/gender-equality-to-fight-the-crisis/>

are ruled by different dimensions of inequality, which influences their political activity and transforms the premises of collective action. The obstacle of identity clashes between social movements can be partly removed if it is combined with a more structural perspective emphasising the interaction among systems of domination. Facing a multiple crisis means confronting a wide variety of structural inequalities based on complex relations of cultural, political and economic elements – namely, those generated by capitalism, patriarchy, racism, colonialism, gender, heteronormativity, precarity, etc.

Nevertheless, innovative proposals encounter a context ruled by neoliberal and sexist assumptions. The Popular Party is not only refusing gender-equality demands but also, as noted, allowing the dismantling of many of its recent conquests. The government is keen on promoting the role of pro-life groups and, particularly, the Catholic Church and its views, which are not precisely women-friendly. In addition, the conservative and patriarchal frame is also defended by a good amount of Spain's mass media (TV and press), which is not especially fond of women's mobilisation. When FEMEN protested in the Spanish Congress in October 2013, the activists were treated without respect on many TV channels and in many journals. In order to have an impact, feminist strategies in Spain have to overcome two classical problems. In the institutional sphere, gender-sensitive policies have to overthrow the classic »urgent/important matrix«, wherein the economic crisis is approached gender-neutrally and women's issues are always treated as second best. The other barrier for the gender perspective in Spain is social mistreatment: feminists and their proposals are too often put down, laughed about or harassed.

An additional obstacle preventing a broad articulation of alternative voices is the way the institutions and traditional organisations function as well as the low confidence they generate. The Spanish Centre for Sociological Research stated that political parties, trade unions and employers' organisations were the most unreliable institutions. The worst were political parties – with a mark of 1.83 – followed by trade unions (2.45) and employers (2.87). This underlines the structural problem of the Spanish democratic system nowadays, as well as the special problems of the labour market and its current stakeholders. This lack of reliability is undermining traditional politics, and the concept and practice of representation are at stake. The democratic representation system can be stated as a

failure when it is not even capable of recycling and taking into account the participatory proposals voiced by diverse agents. Combining this with the way the economic crisis has been handled, it is an ideal occasion to promote the rise of proposals that connect both fields of action. As in any other critical circumstances, when the structure of political opportunity is as open as it is today, there is also room for the development of counter-progressive options. Unfortunately, we are dealing with an advancement of racism, fascism and xenophobia among the European population at an institutional and governmental level. These practices are usually sexist, patriarchal, violent and intolerant, and it should be a common duty to disobey them and prevent them from spreading in our societies.

Fairer and more equal societies require transformations of the economic, political and human sphere that take a gender perspective into account. Life and people should be placed before economic benefit. The majority of the Spanish feminist strategies challenge positions fixed to the ruling sexist mercantile rationality, identify new political and economic problems and propose innovative solutions. When a vision of equality is implemented, organisations can put forward options that combine state management with horizontality, people's participation and communitarian action. This would mean a turnover of the current austerity measures and a more just reorganisation of time and work: an improvement of women's labour conditions without inequalities, the sharing of caregiving and domestic responsibilities, and an increased value of women's political contributions. The rise of progressive social movements in Spain provides fresh political options that open up new possibilities of interaction among movements and institutions. Traditional bodies, e.g., political parties and trade unions, urgently need to be transformed if they want to be useful for the people they are theoretically representing or to be part of the solution to the present and upcoming challenges. Institutions also need to begin a radical regeneration process with democratic participation and equality at its core. The complexity of the current political and economic situation is a great opportunity to build more gender-equal societies, to respect the common good, to avoid the imposition of an ancient gender order, and to put an effort into lives worth living.



Bibliography

- Alonso, Alba and Paleo, Natalia** (2013): «¿Es únicamente una cuestión de austeridad? Crisis económica y políticas de género en España», paper presented at the AECPA Conference, Sevilla 18–19 September 2013
- Benería, Lourdes y Sarasúa, Carmen** (2009): La culpa del paro es de los trabajadores, in *El País*; available at: elpais.com/diario/2009/11/24/opinion/1259017212_850215.html (last accessed in June 2013)
- Benería, Lourdes y Sarasúa, Carmen** (2011): «Crímenes económicos contra la humanidad», in *El País*; available at: http://elpais.com/diario/2011/03/29/opinion/1301349604_850215.html (last accessed in June 2013)
- Carrasco, Cristina** (2009): La crisis con mirada de mujer, (Ca la Dona), en Jornadas Feministas Estatales en Granada, Treinta años después, aquí y ahora, Federación Estatal de Organizaciones Feministas
- Castro, Carmen** (2013): ¿Cómo afecta la crisis y las políticas de austeridad a los derechos de las mujeres y a la igualdad, in *El desigual impacto de la crisis sobre las mujeres*. Fuhem Dossier Ecosocial, 13ff
- Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS)** (2013): Barometers of April and September; available at: www.cis.es (last accessed in October 2013)
- Cruells, Marta and Ruiz, Sonia** (2012), «Political intersectionality in current social mobilizations: factors at stake», paper presented at XXII IPSA World Congress, Madrid 8–12 July 2012
- del Pozo, Alberto and Martín, José Moisés** (2013): «Social cohesion and the state in times of austerity», Working Paper, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
- European Commission** (2012): Study on a comprehensive overview on traineeship arrangements in Member States. Executive Summary, European Commission, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
- Eurostat. European Commission** available at: <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/eurostat/home/> (last accessed in October 2013)
- Ezquerro, Sandra** (2011): Crisis de los cuidados y crisis sistémica: la reproducción como pilar de la llamada economía real, in *Investigaciones Feministas*. Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Vol. 2, 175ff
- Galvez, Lina and Torres, Juan** (2009): La crisis económica y sus alternativas: una perspectiva de género and Feminismo ante la crisis, *Fórum de Política Feminista*
- Gil Calvo, Enrique** (2012): Crisis sistémica y cambio de ciclo vital, in *El País*; available at: http://elpais.com/elpais/2012/12/17/opinion/1355766885_808443.html (last accessed in October 2013)
- Intermon – Oxfam** (2012): Informe Crisis, Desigualdad y Pobreza, available on at: <http://www.oxfamintermon.org/es/que-hacemos/campanas-educacion/crisis-pobrezadesigualdad> (last accessed in October 2013)
- Lombardo, Emanuela** (2013): «Gender mainstreaming and policy responses to the economic crisis: the 'unintended consequences' of EU and national policymaking on Spanish gender equality policies», paper presented at the AECPA Conference, Sevilla 18–19 September 2013
- Marea Violeta** (2012): Presupuestos Generales del Estado 2013. 24 % menos en políticas de género y de Estado de Bienestar; available at: <http://www.if.uji.es/sites/default/files/Manifiesto%20Impacto%20Genero%20PGE%202013.pdf> (last accessed in October 2013)
- Marquand, David** (2012): Europe's Multiple Crisis, in *Social Europe Journal*; available at: <http://www.social-europe.eu/2012/02/europes-multiple-crisis/> (last accessed on October 2013)
- Marugán, Begoña** (2013): La violencia de género, otra víctima de los recortes, in *El Público*; available at: <http://www.publico.es/484232/la-violencia-de-genero-otra-victima-de-los-recortes> (last accessed in November 2013)
- Muižnieks, Nils** (2013): Report The Commissioner – CommDH(2013)18, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, following his visit to Spain, 3–7 June 2013; available at: <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=2106465&Site=COE&BackColorInternet=B9BDEE&BackColorIntranet=FFCD4F&BackColorLogged=FFC679> (last accessed in October, 2013)
- Peterson, Elin** (2011): «Beyond the »women-friendly« welfare state: Framing gender inequality as a policy problem in Spanish and Swedish politics of care». PhD thesis defended in December 2011 at Complutense University of Madrid
- Pérez Orozco, Amaya** (2009): Feminismo anticapitalista, esa Escandalosa Cosa y otros palabras, ponencia en Jornadas Feministas estatales 2009, Granada. Available at: http://www.feministas.org/IMG/pdf/Feminismo_anticapitalista_esa_Escandalosa_Cosa_y_otros_palabras.pdf (last accessed in June 2013)
- Requena, Ana** (2012): Los recortes en dependencia impactan en el mercado laboral, in *El Diario*; available at: http://www.eldiario.es/economia/recortes-dependencia-impactan-Seguridad-Social_0_75942443.html (last accessed in November, 2013)
- Requena, Ana** (2013): Economía feminista para salir de la crisis, in *El Diario*; available at: http://www.eldiario.es/economia/Economia-feminista-salir-crisis_0_182332069.html (last accessed on October 2013)
- Rodríguez, Luz** (2013): Atención a la situación de las mujeres en el mercado de trabajo, in *El Diario*; available at: http://www.eldiario.es/zonacritica/Atencion-situacionmujeres-mercado-trabajo_6_157894216.html (last accessed on October 2013)
- Ruiz, Aida y Porta, Carme** (2012): Informe: las mujeres primero... finiquitando los derechos laborales; available at: www.sinpermiso.info/textos/index.php?id=4781 (last accessed on October 2013)
- Ruiz, Sonia** (2013): «Trabajo y género en el movimiento feminista y de mujeres en el Estado español (1988–2012). De Obreras, Cuidadoras y Activistas». PhD thesis defended in September 2013 at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
- Several Organisations (IGCE)** (2009): Igualdad de Género frente la crisis económica; available at: <http://feminismoantelacrisis.wordpress.com/> Also available in English: <http://feminismoantelacrisis.wordpress.com/2009/02/26/gender-equality-to-fight-the-crisis/> (last accessed on November 2013)



UGT (Unión General de Trabajadores) (2013): »Las políticas de recortes acentúan la igualdad salarial y social entre mujeres y hombres. Informe sobre desigualdades salariales«, Informe sobre desigualdades laborales 2013; available at: <http://www.ugt.es/actualidad/2013/febrero/18 informe sobre desigualdad salarial 2013.pdf> (last accessed on October 2013)

Varela, Núria (2013): Feministas para la crisis; available at: <http://www.lamarea.com/2013/10/04/feministas-para-la-crisis/> (last accessed on October 2013)

Walby, Sylvia (2009): Gender and the financial crisis, UNESCO and Lancaster University; available at: http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/doc_library/sociology/Gender_and_financial_crisis_Sylvia_Walby.pdf (last accessed on October 2013)

World Economic Forum (2012): World Gender Equality Index. Global Gender Gap Report 2012; available at: http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2012.pdf (last accessed on October 2013)



About the author

Phd in Political Science, **Sonia Ruiz García** is a researcher in public policies and gender issues and teaches in several university courses. She has worked as a policy officer in the European Women's Lobby in Brussels and as a political adviser in the Cabinet of the former Spanish Minister of Defense. Being part of the civil servant corps of the Government of the province of Barcelona, at present she is working there as a social policy adviser.

Imprint

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung | Western Europe/North America
Hiroshimastraße 28 | 10785 Berlin | Germany

Responsible:
Anne Seyfferth, Head, Western Europe/North America

Tel.: ++49-30-269-35-7736 | Fax: ++49-30-269-35-9249
<http://www.fes.de/international/wil>
www.facebook.com/FESWesteuropa.Nordamerika

Orders/Contacts:
FES-WENA@fes.de

Commercial use of all media published by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is not permitted without the written consent of the FES.

The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung or of the organization for which the author works.

This publication is printed on paper from sustainable forestry.



ISBN 978-3-86498-763-2