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Feminism

Women: a strategic subject

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Description:

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Following this year's feminist upheaval, I have had the opportunity to share discussions and experiences over the last few weeks with women from different parts of the world at the International Institute for Research and Education's International Women's Seminar, in addition to the usual and necessary conversations and exchanges with comrade Julia Cámara. [1] Following her latest reflections on sisterhood and this exchange, I have ventured to develop an intuition that we may share with many. Reflections arising from collective debates that may allow us to understand the complexity of the coordinates of a strategy of emancipation.

We are witnessing a new cycle of international feminist mobilizations and this is something that can be seen especially in this last year. The response to the March 8 call, as well as the replications of the Women's March around the world are something new with respect to recent decades. But also, since the cycle of 2011 we are experiencing a feminization of protest. We saw it in the Arab Spring; we have seen it in mobilizations in defence of the public; in peasant protests in Latin America or in a more particular form in the PAH [Platform for People Affected by Mortgages] in the Spanish State. It's not by chance.

The impact of the socio-economic crisis on women has been widely discussed and analysed. How the disintegration of the welfare state has damaged the living conditions of millions of women who now find themselves at much higher rates of poverty and multiplying their burdens compared to previous decades. How women fill the ranks of the informal and submerged economy. How we continue to put up with living conditions despite capitalism. Women who before 2008 already took on double and triple days and whose conditions have been generalized to increasing sectors of the working and popular classes. Women who bear the burdens of reproductive force inside and outside the home, inside and outside the market, inside and outside employment (formal and informal).

To dispel suspicions, it is not that women constitute a class in itself linked to "the domestic" as some currents of the second wave had argued; the point is that we are a strategic sector of this. Avoiding self-centred identity politics, it is this position in capitalism in general and in the particular recrudescence that we experience that we become a potential strategic subject. Not by a kind of accumulation of oppressions - the more oppressions, the more potential - but through the role of maintaining reproduction (in its broadest sense), which puts us in a strategic position to deploy.

Maintaining reproduction incorporates care, but not only that; it incorporates the domestic but goes much beyond its four walls: the reproductive is also in the market, in employment, in the state and therefore impacts on the majority of women. Most, but not all, women transversally occupy this position. The women of the bourgeoisie, the establishment, the high society, the dominant elites, the state apparatuses do not play that role, although some of them may come to break at critical moments. We, for our part, have accumulated a key experience for the current phase: the welfare state was in itself insufficient.

Why is it a key experience? Feminist economists in the Spanish state have developed extensively on this question, through work such as those of Carrasco, Ezquerro or Orozco and many others, providing a good review of the limits of what is called the "welfare state"; I will not paraphrase them. I believe that this accumulated experience is key to rethinking an economic, social and political strategy in the crisis phase of capitalism in which we find ourselves. A sort of illusionism has been installed of the return to a golden age of "welfare" that was not such for most women; but which functions as a desirable horizon. Meanwhile, exploitation rates are increasing, proletarianization processes are increasing globally, and the non-formal and domestic economy plays a central role of survival in ever-increasing sectors of the class; something that women in Latin America and Central America know very well.

This periphery in which the welfare state not only did not develop, but also sustained high rates of exploitation and oppression to support the central countries. Two years ago, the comrades from Brazil, listening to the report on the situation in the Spanish state, told us: "you are living through a process of Latin Americanization", a complicated word to pronounce but which indicates a clear trend towards where we are going. We are in a clash between expectations that are not going to be realized in this phase of capitalism and a reality of change of cycle for which there are no socialized and sufficiently matured economic strategies.

A strategy that seeks to undermine the basis of the oppression of half the population should not only "integrate"; but must rethink social and economic policies in the current framework of capitalism where there is no turning back, nor Keynesian recipes that serve. We are in a framework where the state leaves greater and greater gaps. Gaps in the functions of reproduction that the state had assumed (education, health, social services and so on) and which are currently commodified by being taken over by a market which is exploitative, savage and ruthless towards working women; or reorganizing these functions, enclosing them in the four walls of the house and letting them fall on the shoulders of the women in individual and familiar form.

It is in our hands, the same hands that clean, cook, heal, care, work; the same hands that defend the earth, the public, the community, the bodies; it is in our hands to be able to propose new ways of organizing work, new ways of relating to nature, new ways of relating between ourselves that pass through common interests, free of phobias of all kinds. We already do this, we organize life, it is us today who sustain and seek those common interests invisibly, marginally and in situations of misery. These hands must be harnessed to organize them collectively by putting those functions at the centre of a comprehensive political and economic strategy. And the interests of women workers, those below, the 99% as the US comrades say, are not only our interests; they are the interests of the social majority, of the class as a whole. Therefore, we keep the potential to organize other institutions that emerge from our struggles, from experiences of feminist and feminized self-organization. Institutions that are at our service, in our power and that resolve the social crisis in a radical way.

That means strategically thinking through our political practice to develop that potential. Because it is precisely that: a potential, which does not have to happen if there are no active and conscious politics. Strengthening and deepening the self-organization of women in all possible areas, not as a matter of political correctness, but as a strategic element. Decentralizing power and delegating it (take it!) into new institutions that meet basic needs. We can look back a hundred years ago and draw lessons from the women of Petrograd who, having endured the misery of war and poverty, erupted on March 8 and were the spark of the February Revolution; but also the supporters of and participants in the strike movement. Indeed, they are not immediate reflections, they are horizons on which to work, on which to route our daily activism so as to cement a strategy of emancipation.

PS:

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[1] The International Women's Seminar is organized every two years by the Fourth International. The article by Julia Cámara "[Sororidad y conciencia femenina: qué hermandad de mujeres para qué propuesta política](#)", in *Viento Sur*.