



The necessary voice of feminists in Basque Country´s democratic process

In the last few decades, mainly in the last three, a large amount of research has been developed and conducted in order to analyse which the role of women has been and it is in political and military conflicts and in the resolution of them, as well as in driving the enrolment of women. Although, it is true that the preoccupation for introducing the feminist perspective in war and peace is increasing, there is still a long road ahead in understanding that we, feminists, have to do, considering that for an extremely long time the construction of peace and the feminist practise and theory never really went hand in hand.

There are numerous ways in which women have taken part in war and conflicts. In spite of the role of the victim and carer given to women by the patriarchal system, we have gone through the barrier of silence and we have exercised the role that we have seen as necessary in order to defend our rights. Therefore, when we come to talk about the role that we have carried out or we intend to carry out in political conflicts, we have to analyse every sphere of life and every function that without visibility and recognition we have made. There are many women that have wielded weapons in the defence of the liberation of their countries, many who have achieved the continuity of community, many that were fighting with their teammates while they were working on political parties and institutions. Many of them have transgressed the assigned roles and have become part of the public space to be heard in out loud. Many that against all the economic and political interests, are still working on it to achieve peace and justice.

However, in all of these mentioned above there are several repeated elements: invisibility and lack of recognition, continuous questioning and added punishment, and lack of power of decision. In spite of working with our teammates, we have been looked down on by our own parties, we have been set aside to secondary status in relation to transcendental decisions, we have been tortured by armies and police groups, we have been questioned for taking the initiative, we have been victims without recognition... trying to make us accept the social role that we belong to... submissive, quiet and good.

We could say also that the current society, besides the roles it assigns to women and men and the way it has associated us with a victim role, it has associated us with having an essential role in the construction of peace. The naturalization of sexes and the stereotyped attributions of gender have assigned different dichotomous principles to women and men, also regarding the conflict´s resolution. While the public is associated with men, the private is associated with women. While men are associated to reason, we are more associated with feelings. While they (men) are

active and violent, we are passive and pacifist. But, this association and mainly, this tendency to naturalise the socially assigned roles is another method to try to socially legitimise the existent inequalities among men and women. So, women are seen as incapable of looking after themselves and therefore need to be protected, that is to say, like victims or like symbols for peace.

This association is based on the one hand on the exclusion of women from the power system and from the political decision-taking and, on the other hand, for the assumed care capacities which are derived from the exercise of maternity. Behind that hidden is the theory that women who have the capacity to give life, are unable to take it away, we are more pacific than men. As if it was not compatible to be a mother and guerrilla fighter. History shows us that this association doesn't have natural support; peace is not innate in women.

But the truth is that women have developed a lot of initiatives for the construction of peace. Because of the assigned role, because of the learning processes, because of our victim condition, because of our structural oppression, we have worked throughout the length and breadth of the globe in order to get through the patriarchal oppression and the construction of a fairer society.

With the intention of facing the grave situation in which women are living in war like situations there have been some pronouncements, recommendations and resolutions that we should take into account when we come to carry out tactics for our country, as well as to demand to the states and principally, to political parties to fulfil them.

Those measures and perspectives we should take into account, were collected in the IV women's worldwide conference which took place in Beijing. All of them highlight the importance of strengthening the participation of women in any of the phases of conflict and, at the same time, they address an appeal to protect women. In addition to that, the achievement of peace and the respect of women's rights were tightly connected and, the attention was drawn to the necessity of counting on women in order to achieve a long-lasting peace.

In addition to that, in the 2000, the UN's Security Council agreed to women's resolution, peace and security. Every party involved was questioned and was requested to encourage women's participation in every aspect of decision making. At the same time, they call on introducing gender's perspective in peace agreements.

It is true that all of these declarations are very important, but the reality contrasts these assertions. Even though many countries have subscribed to these declarations, none of them have been implemented. The states and the involved parties have not applied the accepted measures and they have turned a blind eye to the demands, suggestions and requests of women and the feminist movement.



In the Basque country women and men don't have the same level of participation in power structures and in the management of them. While it is evident in diverse social areas, we could say that in the representative spaces it is even more evident. In addition to that, in those spaces that were created for the resolution of the Basque Country's political conflict, gender integration has not been promoted or developed, even though this has been internationally recommended.

For the feminist movement, since its beginning, the debate about the participation in the political sphere and the relationship with other class movements or national liberation movements was important. Besides being a constant debate, it was also a debate which structured and divided the movement in many cases. Thus, during many years, the political conflict was not an open debate in the movement, and we worked on it just in specific situations, such as to condemn in prison the police station's repression.

In 1998 the process of "Lizarra Garazi" for diverse circumstances, but mainly for the excitement it brought, a lot of feminist groups of the time met together and analysed which their contribution from the feminist movement should be to the ongoing process. Unfortunately, the process did not last enough to see the outcomes of the feminist's conferences which took place with the purpose of defining the movement's road map.

In 2005, the declaration of ETA's the ceasefire in Catalunya, and mainly the debate between political and social forces gave rise to a wide agreement, a feminist conference was conducted with the intention of dealing with the role that we, feminists, should have in the new process, that is to say, our requirements regarding the social participation process that we wanted to push forward. The conference was driven from Bilgune feminista and it concluded that feminists needed to be organized, we needed to create our own space and we needed a minimum to drive women's participation, like: the necessity of recognising the existence of a structural and patriarchal oppression, the necessity of recognising the feminist movement as a political speaker, and the necessity of taking social participation measures specially aimed at women.

However, this political conjuncture also gave rise to the women's movement in order to achieve peace "Ahotsak" in 2006. The declaration was subscribed by women with different ideologies, traditions and feelings. Personally and on the basis of what joint and separated them, they wanted to explore steps forward in the search of peace and reconciliation. Their intention was to give a boost to the ongoing situation and try to help in the search of solutions highlighting an unprejudiced dialogue without conditions is a great starting point, as well as respect for every person's rights. This initiative was signed by all kinds of groups such as political, cultural, feminist, union...and it also lead to some local groups from some villages in Euskal Herria.

The dialogue between the different parties and the social initiative did not achieve great goals, although it helped to progress with the debate and the political situation. We stand on the threshold of a new democratic process in which we have new conditions to walk ahead. The European's economic and political crisis, ETA's permanent and verifiable ceasefire, the new political bet of the pro-independence left, the wide "Gernika's agreement" among political and social forces for a democratic solution to the conflict and the necessity (becoming even more acute) of a village with social peace longing makes this a key moment to promote a feminist perspective.

From Bilgune Feminista we see the necessity of tackling the debate (with our accumulated experience) about how should Euskal Herria establish peace and justice from our understanding. It is the moment to answer the following questions: how is political conflict defined? In which parameter do we understand it? What is it we want to sort out? What is the role women want and should play? And feminists?

For all of that, we have a course full of possibilities to discuss and influence due to the fact that Euskal Herria's social-political conditions, both the feminist movement and the social one, are looking forward to tackling the topic and agree on a way which will carry us to a democratic scenario.

We do have it clear. It is indispensable to give a wider vision to the definition of the political conflict because the one which refers to national matter, that is to say, the definition that refers to the territory, is not the only one we need to sort out. We need to overcome all of the oppressions we suffered from a political nature to achieve a real long-lasting peace scenario based on the social justice. This should make the political recognition of the feminist movement, as well as of other social movements crucial, as if we leave the resolution of the conflict in political parties' hands; there's a risk that they will cut it short again for partisan (their) interests. Without forgetting that we should take into account the inequalities and the lack of democracy that we, women, are suffering and also many other social collectives to participate politically. If we do not take into account those differences, we will never be able to talk about democracy.

It is not easy to have this point of view and for it to be taken seriously in a political normalization process, considering that these problems are not considered imperatives when we come to talk about wars and conflicts. But if we really want to build a village based on social justice and a long-lasting peace scenario, we should attend to all of the social inequalities and injustices of our country. And in that way, feminists are an indispensable voice.