



*Words and Silences is the Digital Edition Journal of the International Oral History Association. It includes articles from a wide range of disciplines and is a means for the professional community to share projects and current trends of oral history from around the world.*

<http://ioha.org>

Online ISSN 2222-4181

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***Words and Silences***  
***September 2019***  
***“Memory and Narration”***

*Nobodies' voices:  
the archive regarding feminism and memories by Arada.*

Arada. Eina de Feminismes i Memòria.  
[Collective text written by the members].  
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“Mire a donde mire, solo veo mujeres luchando. Dejándose las mejillas en los adoquines, la piel en el fuego, la espalda contra la pared.

Luego todos se llenan la boca con privilegios, con derechos inmunes, con su causa de fusta, rellenan la historia con injusta crueldad de olvido, con esa arrogancia que desprenden las farolas que se creen capaces de iluminar todo el camino, rellenan su bolsa como si jamás hubieran conocido la vergüenza.

Y ellas mientras, sosteniendo los remos, siguen sin odiar las galeras, y reman”.

ESCANDAR ALGEET

(No matter where I look, I only see is women fighting.  
Leaving their cheeks in the paver, their skin on the fire, their backs in the walls.

Then everyone fill their mouths with privileges,  
with immune rights, with their whip cause,  
fill history with the unfair cruelty of oblivion,  
with that arrogance that they exude,  
the streetlights that believe they can light every path,  
fill their bag as if never before had known shame.

And they meanwhile, holding the oars, still do not hate the galleys, row).

*Arada. Eina de feminismes i memòria* is an initiative that includes diverse projects regarding feminist historical memory. We are an open collective of women, rooting from interdisciplinarity, that develops cultural dissemination activities about gender's history, not only researching the past but collecting what is happening nowadays.

The name *Arada* is actually a metaphor: in Catalan, *arada* (plough in English) is an agricultural gadget used for opening furrows in order to start farming. Therefore, we use memory as a tool: cultivating the past in order to sow the future. The group was formed in September of 2016, coming from the sociocultural context of a strike that called women to stop (*Vaga de Totes*) according to the following statement; "if women make the world go round, now we are stopping it." It was commonly claimed, due to March 8th, the united strike in order to revert the invisibilization towards the huge social power of women regarding productive and reproductive jobs. These queries came from previous revolts: May 15th of 2011 (15M was a demonstration where people camped in almost the most important square of Spain's capital, claiming for dignity and rights for the people, which had a huge impact in Spanish society and politics), student protests, and anticapitalist, local, radical feminisms. Finally, in combination with all of these events and background was built the social context where multiple debates and discourses emerged, paving the way to new alternative lifestyles and searching brand-new realities. These assertions are thought to be the ones that lead our position and actions in the historical field, given that, at first, most of the founding members came from the history degree. This environment encouraged the aim of expanding our academic and political education, providing us at the same time, a project where we could channel our ambitions.

Moreover, here it was when we got our first contact with using memory as a powerful researching tool that rescued the most critical and invisibilized voices.

Memory lets us restore day-to-day life, such as expressions commonly used, emotional experiences that were normally torn apart from the official historical discourse. It was an open door to escape this exclusionary speech of history, to explore what Estellés said in his poem: *Un amor, uns carrers; “Els amors fan l’amor, les histories la història” (Loves make love, stories make history)*.

We understand memory, paraphrasing Leyla Elena Troncoso Pérez and Isabel Piper Shafir, as:

“A collective construction (...) a social practice that helps creating what we call past. (...) A form of action or social, political and cultural practice that is symbolically built and has an interpretative and relational behaviour. Memory (...) constitutes a social action of past interpretation that it is made constantly in the present and that has concrete effects in building realities. Memory’s symbolic strength lies in its productivity of subjects, relationships and social imaginary”.<sup>1</sup>

In this sense, according to our experience and condition, we decided to focus our activism in the recovery of an inclusive history for, by and within women, that could contribute to recover everyone’s histories (in lower case). This, far beyond the traditional feminine canon that is commonly recognized, which contains either the royal figures, the welfare classes like the pioneers or the unconventional, see Marie Curie, Simone de Beauvoir, Frida Kahlo, Valentina Tereshkova between many other referents of the most liberal feminisms, we opt for gathering nobodies’ testimonies. In other words, in some way, women were confined to the shadows of history, whose achievements or jobs haven’t been acknowledged, and directly marginalized due to the fact that it didn’t fit the economic interest of the system.

We choose to recover the memories of the precarious ones, the worker ones, the peasants, the racialized ones, the ill ones, the deficient, the crazy ones, the hysteric ones, the

trans ones, the lesbians, the prostitutes, the marginalized. Ultimately, the ones that have been put down. Therefore, *Arada* started in order to gather, to recollect, the voices of the closest women. We wanted to unearth memory from our contemporary fellows and referents with the intention of creating emancipation mechanisms.

Through memory we pretended to incorporate gender's point of view towards the analysis of the past in order to provide tools for building a present discourse, from a feminist perspective. It is thanks to the remembrances that we interpret the past and guide the future, not only rationally, but emotionally, which lets us create identifications and identity ties. We believe in memory as a means that allows us to rebuild the past and transmit the knowledge in order to redefine the individual and collective identities that set the future<sup>1</sup>.

In this context, and reflecting on the exercise that we have been doing and want to keep performing, we decided to rethink our discourse's terms. In the first place, the idea of rescuing the plural name women caught our attention, instead of concreting the singular woman, given that it already exists in the collective imaginary, a prototype of woman created by the traditional representations that grants all women a series of specific characteristics. The singular *woman* offers an illusion of homogeneity, however, we rooted for the abolition of the unique and universal vision, this is why we decided to use the plural, allowing us to be coherent when reconstructing an inclusive and collective memory.

At the same time, we rethink the stories irradiated with feminism and we opt for using the term *feminisms*, to do justice to the variety and complexity of different streams, past and present, and to the ineffable ways to make feminism. At a later state, we also reflect about the significance of the category *gender*. Issues came to our minds, issues such as: Is *gender* an exclusionary category or rather inclusive? Does this category embrace the global South

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<sup>1</sup> LLONA, Miren (2009): "Los usos de la memoria para el feminismo", en *Viento sur* (Vol.114), pp. 35-42.

experiences, with a great variety of sexual and gender identities? Is it a reproductive category of man-woman binarism? Some criticism, focused in the last two decades, have accused gender of being a euro centrist concept with the man-woman binarism attached. In fact, Joan Scott herself<sup>2</sup>, pointed out that the category had lost its critical thread, in favour of normalization and essentialism. Maria Lugones, from de-colonial feminisms, talks about gendered colonialism referring to the colonialist systems that absorb the category itself<sup>3</sup>. It is worth mentioning, in that sense, gender is understood not as a simple derivative of biological sex, but as a diverse cultural construct, with multiple margins and not necessarily universal. The gender identity shapes and transforms the experience: it is reworked regularly in the different scenarios owing to the fact that it is a demonstration of the sociocultural structure of every context. Thereupon, rethinking gender implies taking into account its utility and complexity according to the situation.

This is how we understand history, women (or not women) and feminisms, which led us to raise a question: which subjects shall be studied? From which perspective do we analyse them? We chose memory from a feminist perspective -- as we address in the title of our book *Arrels, llaurant memòria amb perspectiva feminista*<sup>4</sup> - in order to project our interest in recovering the stories of these subjects. Trying to make a critical and humanitarian analysis of the past, and to question the traditional androcentric speech, using memory from a feminist perspective, in order to regain the collective memories of women and their different resistance and oppression experiences.

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<sup>2</sup> SCOTT, Joan W. (1999): "Gender and the Politics of History", New York, *Columbia University Press*.

<sup>3</sup> LUGONES, María (2012): "Subjetividad esclava, colonialidad de género, marginalidad y opresiones múltiples", *Pensando los feminismos en Bolivia*, pp. 129-138

<sup>4</sup> ARADA. EINA DE FEMINISMES I MEMÒRIA(2018): *Arrels, llaurant memòria amb perspectiva feminista*, València, *Calíu Espai Editorial*.

So, why do we resort to memory with a feminist perspective rather than simply using feminist memory? Due to considering essential not only the recovery of feminists' narratives but the fights and experiences (both individual and collective) of those women that were not directly related to the feminist movement, but carried out actions of truly empowerment and resistance in their daily lives. As previously mentioned, the study of history has often focused on singular, powerful or outstanding personalities, forgetting the testimony of the humble, small groups (microhistories), as well as those who were outside the elites (political, social or cultural). The result is the exclusion of some personalities of history itself. This project of memory with feminist perspective allows us to vindicate the value and importance of recovering the narratives that were deliberately forgotten by cultural and political institutions (elitist) that assume to have legitimacy to limit what can and cannot be interesting enough to remain in history. In *Arada*, we believe in the subversive potential of recovering said narratives: we defend the diversification of the stories of the past and the proliferation of said voices as a useful alternative to break with the hegemonic memories.

Nevertheless, how are the narratives rescued? How are the memories restored and built? While many methodologies being used in the restoring of memories' field, in *Arada* we have been working especially with the oral history field, as we see in it a fundamental tool for ending invisibilization of hidden past narratives. As mentioned before, since the outset of the Project, the will of creating an archive that gathered different voices of women of our surroundings arose and in order to accomplish that, oral memory became indispensable (alongside written memory).

Collecting every kind of oral sources became fundamental: either audio-visual interviews, audios that tell their experience, expectations and sensations concerning historical events of feminism (for instance, March 8th), etc.; however, as we previously mentioned, not

dismissing the collection of written documents as an also highly relevant source. All in all, which sections did we decide to be worth including in the archive (our first main line)?

First off, it is safe to say that we have started by gathering different feminist groups of the País Valencià's documentation, putting the limit in geography as we are aware that our actions and work are not limitless, in this case, of reach. This documentation features oral interviews, intern texts, posters of events, videos or images of their activities, e-mails or WhatsApp conversations, and others, which we shelve for militancy and effort of activists (performed by different collectives nowadays) to be recognized in the future, alongside making documentation available according to the collectives' will.

On the other hand, we have established a second main line of documentation surrounding the event of March 8th. 2018 was an overgrowing national event to feminisms, including Valencia, whose streets were bursting out of people to the point that people ended the march when there was still people starting the path, which made it complicated to move, significant though. Further, we consider that this was the first time that the idea of a non-mixed strike was an idea empirically presented, something that truly reflected the potential and importance of feminine endeavours in society. Since this, we decided to widen the archive with a section especially reserved to March 8<sup>th</sup>, as we are certain that it is going to be a transcendental event in history for feminisms. It is formed by oral testimonies, where we gather narratives and individual testimonies, with the aim of the different points of views, changes, visions, conflicts, tensions and experiences that helped building that day and the future ones. We also gather, at the same time, photos, videos and artworks of all kind that belong to these experiences.

In a parallel effort, apart from the compilation task, we also consider a main line of our fight the dissemination of knowledge that is believed to generate and recover collective

memories of women and that is a useful tool for empowerment of their fellows. Therefore, we have been aspiring, through the dissemination of said events, to extend the subversive and transforming discourse that stops perpetuating dynamics and, instead of that, adds alternative and invisibilized perspectives.

This task has been done using social media, providing talks in high schools, collectives, associations, conferences or more ludic and participative activities, like games or trivia. However, dissemination cannot be understood as a unidirectional action, rather than a space dedicated to common learning where we also learn and form ourselves constantly. In such a way, we aspire to build and disseminate, by using a collective and correlative way, an anticapitalistic, anticolonialistic, intersectional message focused on the importance of daily life actions.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that we also have been working in a third main line: investigation, understood as a constant and mutual formation of their members (the perpetual task of sowing and farming), an indispensable issue to grow a clear vision of our reality and the constant changes that affect it. This main line, on the one hand, by group formations, uses the reading of diverse texts as the basis of our common ideas and emotions, which lets us debate about them. Formations in which, sometimes, with external specialists in some certain aspect of memory that we have been keen on. Thus, we have been able to equip our discourse of an *intellectual corpus* and build our theoretical frameworks from the horizon of walking towards inclusivity.

Furthermore, it has been carried out a huge investigation task by writing *Arrels*. *Llaurant memòria amb perspectiva feminista* (“Roots. Ploughing memory with a feminist perspective”), a book made of diverse stories, materialised and grouped in different chapters, in which we deepen in different aspects of feminsims. In *Arrels*, starting from the testimonies

we have gathered, we have pretended to accuse official historiography and hegemonic discourses, that as we have previously stated, have created traditionally a negative image regarding the role of women and have contributed to invisibilization of certain spaces and work fields; at the same time, we have suggested alternative perspectives in order to create, through memory, new visions in feminisms nowadays, having as a basis the thoughts, for instance, about the political use of memory, Franco's regime repression, domestic work, decolonization of the bodies and the importance of our grandmothers' testimonies.

And, of course, it is worth pointing out that from the collective work, investigation is also born from our own internal contradictions and from the effect of being a big group of people that have different experiences and perspectives. Thus, because of walking towards inclusivity, the emergency of discussing particular debates arises in order to address our resolutions and disagreements, so that we can solve our own contradictions. Having stated this, we can affirm that in our case, investigation comes also from a constant state of critical and auto critical exercise and its applicable debate. In this way, we also define our principles, our methodology and our attitude as a group, moreover, we introduce new aspects and feminist perspectives that makes us take sides. Examples of it are the use of language or the gender constructs that have been evolving also with the analysis of different axis of oppression that we, members of the collective, directly suffer.

As a corollary, we can then point out that from these three lines of action (collecting, disseminating and investigating) we have defined our goals in these three axes. In the first place, achieving the creation and preservation of a solid archive based in a feminist perspective that enhances the huge number of movements that are included in this cause, as well as letting every person that wants to, discover the reality of *País Valencià* when it comes to feminisms. In the second place, vindicate the need of a more inclusive historiography in

formal education. And last, achieving to pass the importance of memory in our process of building the society and one selves to population.

After more than two years, diverse goals have been reached, however, many more challenges are yet to be accomplished. We have been greatly greeted by the feminist and anticapitalist movements: we have been interviewed by media, we have been handed many collectives' documentation to contribute with the archive, various social centres have reached us to impart speeches and presentations in their places... and thanks to *Caliu*'s proposal, we even wrote a book. Consequently, we were given the possibility of spreading our ideas and knowledge in educational centres, cultural spaces, a long list of valencian towns and cities and finally mass media.

Furthermore, the feminist archive is growing bigger, richer and plural. Using this platform, we invite you to join our project, as a collective handing us your documentation or as an individual, telling us your feminist testimony by video, audio or essay. You can contact us by Gmail using the following direction: [aradamemoria@gmail.com](mailto:aradamemoria@gmail.com), or by our social media @aradamemoria (Twitter, Instagram and Facebook).

With all of this, we want to thank every single person and group that has given support and collaboration to this project, sharing their spaces so that our work is widespread, this is possible thanks to you. Plough the past in order to sow the future (*Llaurem la memòria per sembrar el futur*).