

XXK.

Feminismos, pensamiento y acción





Constellation
of the Commons

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Who are you and what connection do you have to the collective XXK. Feminismos, pensamiento y acción [XXK. Feminisms, Thought, and Action]?

My name is Amaia Pérez Orozco and I am, by training, an economist. But I'd say in spirit I'm a feminist. So I try to combine an economic viewpoint with a feminist viewpoint. I've spent about twenty years working on matters of feminist economics, both professionally and as an activist. At the professional level, right now I'm a part of the collective XXK. Feminismos, pensamiento y acción, which we're about to talk about. And as an activist, I'm involved in various projects. Right now the most important one is a feminist coordinator that was created due to the pandemic and is called "Feminist Coordinator of Euskal Herria, Lives at the Center." I now live in Bilbao after having lived more than 20 years in Madrid, which is where we are right now.

In what year and where did the collective XXK. Feminismos, pensamiento y acción begin?

XXK was formally recognized in 2018, but the idea came to us about a year or so before. It started between Bilbao and Madrid because at that time there were three of us: One of my colleagues was in Bilbao, the other in Madrid. And I was sort of between both worlds. But over time it has become centered more in Bilbao. Right now it's mostly based there.

Is there a connection between the experience of 15M and the birth of this collective?

I believe 15M has impacted all subsequent professional political processes, but I also think sometimes there's too much emphasis on 15M as a moment of collapse and rupture. I think 15M revealed transformations that were happening, which had to do with our way of being in the world and of confronting that politically. And when I say politically I also mean professionally because I believe that the workplace is another place to make policy. So changes that were already happening, but didn't start with 15M, were made visible by 15M and perhaps were reinforced. So yes and no. I would also say that 15M had very different impacts in different places. It had a bigger impact in Madrid than, for example, in Euskal Herria. So those of us who came from Madrid were much more influenced by that moment but for people from other places, not so much.

Why is your process called this?

We have come up with a few theories, but really we called it that because we didn't know what else to call it. When we first met there were three of us, so we put "meeting of XXX" on the agenda, and we thought, "Why not leave it that way?" But XXX was too pornographic, and we were sure that everything would go to spam, so we decided to change the last letter to K because we thought it would sound good. And it was easy to pronounce in Spanish, in Italian, which is Valentina's native language, and in Euskera. Those are our three languages, and it seemed easy to pronounce in different languages including English.

Who is a part of this process and what drives it?

To start, XKX is a young project. Formally, we've been an organization for three years, and the idea has been around for four. That's not very long. So everything needs to be understood as evolving, and not just changing because everything is always changing, but also consolidating a bit. The three of us started out thinking that this would be mostly a way to make a living, to be wage slaves but doing something that interested us politically. Over time, of the original three, two of us have stayed, and what we are trying to do more instead is expand the activism part. We have an XKX assembly where there are about 12 of us. It's more of a work project even though it also has a political purpose for two of us. And it is a less intense activist project for our other 12 colleagues.

On your website, you describe yourselves as a "feminist collective." Can you explain the legal status you have chosen for this initiative?

Well, the reason from the dimension of making a living was that we live in a capitalist system and we are wage slaves, we need money to live. We can't just do what interests us politically or what motivates us personally. It was about trying to do that together, not alone, because we were people that came from a mix of worlds, from working in public policy administration, to working with universities, in research, and in training with other institutions. I, for example, worked for the United Nations. We came from different spheres, and we were interested in working together and working on our own projects that could very clearly have that feminist political purpose.

That was the emphasis, the aspect that now has more to do with an actual activist association. We were feminist colleagues in different areas who were interested in this. Having a meeting space where we could express our unease about the world and share our thoughts about it and create something that could change things a little, right? The response again is that it isn't decided in the sense that we have chosen and it's all confirmed. Things are still happening. The first thing we did was establish ourselves as a nonprofit association. The nonprofit aspect was always very clear to us. We never thought about being a company motivated by profit. Never. But our doubt was about whether to be an association or a cooperative. An association, in theory, isn't established for making a living but instead for having a political impact. A cooperative, in contrast, is a way to make a living in partnership, without generating profits with other collaborators. Right now, as I was explaining earlier, we are kind of in between those two possibilities. In fact, we can legally establish ourselves as both, and we're thinking about it. Initially we established ourselves as an association because it was clearly much easier. Forming a cooperative is more difficult. But then we were thinking about

transforming ourselves into a cooperative. Cooperatives are a recognized legal category that do fit our project. But it's a lot more complicated at the level of taxation, it's also more expensive to be a cooperative, etc. So we stopped thinking about it. We were at the point of doing it, and then the pandemic hit and it paralyzed us. We are now thinking again about having two statuses: the cooperative for the labor part and the association for the more activist part.

The XXX collective links the generation of economic income with political and vital commitment. Some might think that you are starting a profitable company that professionalizes political activism. How would you respond to someone that makes that conclusion?

I don't like talking about businesses at all because to me a business clearly has the objective of making a profit. That is, in making products, services, whatever it is, where the most relevant thing is the social dimension of what you do, it's not just about making a living, but also focused on growth, which creates a logic of accumulation. That's why there's an income tax, etc. With cooperative, although someone might want to call it a business, the logic is different. We do try to make a living with it because we live in a capitalist system, we're wage slaves. But it's doing something that in the first place makes sense for you to be doing, and then also allows you to make a living. So it has a social purpose. On the other hand, you aren't looking to accumulate, grow, or make a profit. Or rather, cooperatives are also very strictly regulated legally, to limit you from making profit. You have to make your living, cover costs, and that's it. You can't then distribute dividends or anything. And then you have to have an operating structure that is expressly horizontal as well. For me, that's not a business. A business is motivated by profit. A cooperative is an organization where there's paid work, but it isn't the same. And I think that's important because when we talk about markets we always think about capitalist markets. In capitalist markets, money is the end goal. The goal is accumulating capital. You invest something not to have it given back to you later, but to make a profit. There's another type of market where money is a means of exchange. Money is not the aim and you don't try to accumulate it. So businesses are the way to operate in capitalist markets. We believe in a different type of exchange, some of which can also be monetized, but that isn't driven by profit, where money is a means. Cooperatives and other organizations of the social solidarity economy, for example, would be part of this other type of market. And we'd say that our logic is part of a political perspective where we have to move from a capitalist market, where capitalist markets occupy almost everything, to other ways of organizing life, with different types of markets that aren't capitalist markets. From a market society to societies with markets and other ways to function. That's it. It's also important for us to distinguish here salaried employment from remunerated, paid work. In salaried work, you put your labor to the service of a company that with your labor will make profits. And you do this first and foremost because you need money to live. For us, salaried work is a way of working that should be transformed and ultimately destroyed. Another possibility is a job that can compensate you monetarily, but you do it because it has a social purpose, because it aligns itself with processes that work together to support collective life rather than the accumulation of individual earnings. So, we imagine paid work in a future of transformation combined with other forms of unpaid labor, but not with salaried work. We like to think that what we do is paid work but not salaried work. And this also means that we don't consider ourselves a company because we are not willing to accept money from private companies for profit. So, we never work with private for-profit companies.

On your web site, you organize your work into five areas: Research, training, conceptual policy framework, political impact, and accompaniment. Why these 5 areas? What type of work does each area involve?

We organize our work on the web around those five key areas so they can be understood better from the outside, but in practice they all mix together. We chose those five because they were the ones that allowed us to explain the path we came from and what we knew how to do and what we could help with. Research and training are the easiest to understand. "Conceptual policy frameworks" is a mouthful, but with it we wanted to refer to how we sometimes do research that goes beyond just understanding specific processes, being able to name what's happening. And naming what is happening also means doing it from a certain political position. This process of constructing a broader political position, looking for names for it, constructing arguments, understanding global trends in broader terms. We thought that went beyond the idea of research. That's why we named it conceptual policy frameworks. I'll give an example. Right now we are accompanying one of the main unions in Euskal Herria in its process of defining an aging care policy. That's constructing a policy framework. What do we think? How can aging care be addressed? What do we mean when we talk about a right to care? What do we mean when we talk about a public, communal system of caretaking? We think that goes beyond what can just be considered research. On the other hand, political impact has to do with everything. We'd say that ultimately all of our work is meant to influence socioeconomic, political, and citizen transformation processes. Or rather, all of our work has this purpose of having a political impact in a broad sense of politics. But sometimes there are jobs that are more focused on that. For example, when you join with a local government to help them think about putting in place policies that allow them to move towards more sustainable ways of living. That is a more direct process of political impact. Or when we join with our colleagues at the Observatorio de Multinacionales with whom we share this space to try to press for a constitution for a center for surveillance of large companies from a human rights perspective. Those are more direct processes of political impact. And accompaniment, that's an area that my colleague Silvia focuses on more. It has to do with supporting collectives, organizations, public institutions, and groups involved in the social solidarity economy in internal processes that aim to change something about the way things work. For example having ways of doing things that favor gender equality, or reviewing their internal operations to make them more sustainable in a multidimensional, reproductive sense. So the accompaniment aspect refers to processes that help the people like to work with in their more internal processes.

What relationship is there between the XXK collective and the area of formal education and research?

Well, I'd say it's a complex relationship. The three of us who initially made up the group are the more cooperative part. The three of us had worked a little bit in universities, but we had all left the academic world, for various reasons, but ultimately because we didn't feel comfortable with how the academic world worked. But we all have that experience and we all have relationships as well. So, our relationship with the area of formal education is at the university level, not at lower levels. We don't do, for example, workshops in high schools or elementary schools. We don't deal with primary and secondary education. To this day, we have relationships with universities both because we do teaching in some courses for postgraduate or master's courses, etc. and because we work with research groups as part of open research processes. For example, this

past week I was at a conference about communal democracy that was organized by a research group from the University of the Basque Country in Euskal Herria. So we work together, but only occasionally. We aren't part of big research projects and we don't have a constant presence in teaching. We have occasional collaborations.

Economistas sin Fronteras released a study this past year reporting that economics education programs in Spanish universities only focus on the teaching of capitalist economic theory. This study discusses the elimination of courses and the lack of curricular alternatives to orthodox economics maintained by the capitalist economic model. As an economist, how do you interpret these changes?

Well, I think that question offers a lot to discuss, but I'll say two things at least. On one hand, it's because ultimately the economic theory that exists and is transmitted sustains a certain world, a world built around relationships of privilege and oppression. So if you question economic theory you are questioning the current status quo. And there's no desire to question the status quo. The entrance of critical viewpoints isn't allowed because they destabilize. And to me that is clearly tied to economics considering itself the most exact of the social sciences. It's considered to be outside value judgments, it's considered neutral and objective. So it doesn't accept viewpoints that clearly recognize that they are viewpoints with an evaluative role, that are viewpoints with a political commitment and that are, in fact, saying that in looking at the world values are always present. We'd be fooling ourselves to deny that. And that's what orthodox economics — which sustains capitalist, neoliberal, and other types of models — does. So it confronts them with what they want to hide, that there are also values embedded in the economics that is being taught now.

Right now in the Spanish context it seems that we have gone from talking about “feminism” alone to considering the existence of multiple “feminisms.” Can you explain to us why this shift has happened?

This shift, I'd say, from identifying a singular feminism to feminisms in the plural, is a bit of an expansion of this idea that there isn't a singular place from which one can build a feminist perspective or from which one can identify gender inequality. Gender inequality always overlaps with other sources of privilege and oppression. It might be social class, racialization, sexual orientation or gender identity. So depending on which position we are talking from and what we emphasize, we construct a distinct viewpoint. We also emphasize distinct problems. We propose different solutions as well. And what's important is the dialogue between them, more than trying to find a theory that explains everything and a way of saving us all. So there isn't a singular viewpoint or a singular political solution. Multiple feminisms recognizes this. But the idea of multiple feminisms also picks up on the meaningful approach of: it doesn't exist, but we want to create it. We want to create a viewpoint together. We want to build shared transformative solutions that also make us look at the unequal relationships between us as well, not just those with the heteropatriarchy, but also those that are between us, where at the same time there is the willingness to create something together. From the recognition not just of diversity but also of inequalities. So, we'd say there's a goal, building an “us” on the horizon. But we can't start off thinking that that “us” is already settled just because we're all women. That tension is a little bit of what the idea of multiple feminisms tries to capture. Having said that, there's also the question of whether we have moved toward emphasizing the plural because it seems that with environmentalism, for example, there's only one, with critical economics there's only one. Other critical viewpoints are wide-ranging and unified, while in feminism

there's internal conflict. I believe that environmentalism, there is a more environment-focused environmentalism and a more social environmentalism. There are different environmentalist viewpoints, different decolonialist viewpoints. That recognition, that exercise in honesty that these feminisms are doing, of recognizing inequalities and internal tensions, other political movements should be doing that too. And they aren't doing it. Sometimes it appears that feminists are on bad terms with one another when there isn't actually a conflict but rather an exercise in creating an "us" that is stronger.

Is talking about a feminist economy the same as talking about an eco-feminist economy? Can we use the two concepts interchangeably to refer to the same framework of analysis?

I'd say that in Spain, at least, and a little in Latin America with Abya Yala, what 15 years ago we might have called feminist economics many people now see as ecofeminism. So the labels are also fluid and are not the most relevant part. I think that both when we talked about feminist economics and now when we talk about ecofeminism, which is perhaps more accurate, what we are doing is suggesting that what concerns us when looking at the world and trying to change things is not what's happening in the markets; it's not how much money we make, the job we have or don't have, definitely not per capita income, etc. Rather, what matters to us is what happens with vital processes – vital for people and for the planet. So we emphasize this viewpoint based on life-sustaining processes because we understand that we can never take life for granted. It doesn't come from magic or divine intervention; instead, life comes from us doing the work of creating it, caring for it, sustaining it. So, this important idea that life is vulnerable directly conflicts with the capitalist idea that we don't need anything or anyone else, that we are self-sufficient, and you deserve what you have earned individually. This profoundly meritocratic idea, also the idea of the American Dream. We move away from this idea and say: life is never self-sufficient, life is vulnerable. And the only way to face vulnerable life is to do so together with everyone, in interdependence and in a living planet in ecodependence. So our question is the question of collective life on a living planet. That is the strength of ecofeminism. We're talking about collective life: collective between people and collective between other living and non-living beings on this planet.

What would be the background for a critical feminist perspective displayed in all of its diversity?

I think it is essential to recognize that nobody in the world ever invents anything. That is, we never create anything from zero. What we do is recreate collectively, not alone. And so, the effort to always look for individual names of who came up with an idea first to me seems to be an awful exercise in the privatization of knowledge and politics, when it is always collective and is always a process that doesn't appear out of nowhere, like how 15M didn't appear out of nowhere. That being said, as far as background, from my standpoint which is more the area of economics, I'd say that as long as economics has existed as a discipline there have always been critical feminist viewpoints. Those that nourished this form of ecofeminism, I'd say come more from a marxist perspective, from anticapitalist critique. That's one part. Another is, hopefully, we are able to integrate and better understand what is called trans feminism here, in other places queer feminism. It's a viewpoint that has a less closed-minded and fixed view of men and women, and more of an idea of reconstructing identities and at the same time material and symbolic processes. Then I think a lot also comes from, for example, I wouldn't want to say whether feminism comes more

from equality or difference, because it comes in part from both. I think it comes from other critical economic viewpoints as well. Clearly from marxist viewpoints, etc., from environmentalism of course, from feminist colleagues that have been working in more environmentalist areas. Since I haven't mentioned it, I won't say much about the more essentialist ecofeminism. And then I think above all it comes from the strength of the feminist movement in its diversity and the feminist movement of Abya Yala, which is what the more decolonizing viewpoint prefers to call Latin America. They very much result from what colleagues have created in their lived processes, grounded in their own lives opposing the expansion of globalized neoliberal capitalism. So, for example, the idea that what's at stake isn't salaried work, or all jobs, including unpaid ones, but that what's at stake is life itself. These women clearly showed that in the processes of fighting against trade and investment agreements. Or the idea that in this context in which life itself is at risk, what sustains life is in the hands of women. Not all of them, nor in the same ways, but the invisibilized hands from those hidden dimensions of the system also made this clear when these women talked about how they faced processes of crisis, of social reproduction experienced as a result of structural adjustment programs. So a lot of the things that we name come from the strength of feminist colleagues from different contexts, including feminist workers here leading opposition, leading union struggles, etc. But a lot of it has to do with Abya Yala.

How do you interpret the proposals of transformative economics or social solidarity economics from a perspective that's in dialogue with critical feminisms?

I think that within social solidarity economics, or transformative economics as some colleagues like to call it, approaches are being developed that are trying to fundamentally change the way things are done. Trying to respond in different ways and identify the needs that exist in a different way. Responding in different ways to the needs that exist. Spreading out work in a different way. Valuing them in a different way. Ending the sexual and racialized division of work internally. Looking for more democratic and horizontal ways of organizing that remove interpersonal violence from the way of doing things. These are fundamental tests of what could be different methods of socioeconomic organization. There's super important work being done here, of going from theory to practice. Having said that, it doesn't mean that it's completely perfect. The sexual division of work continues to be perpetrated. A central concern, for example, is who is being left out because the social solidarity economy, in the context of Spain, isn't opening itself up to migrant and racialized populations. Or maybe it is, because, what is a social solidarity economy? Because the forms of popular economy that are being developed as modes of subsistence by many migrant communities, for example, why don't we call those social solidarity economies too? The other day I was in L'Hospitalet with colleagues who were trying to revise the criteria for identifying practices of social solidarity economics from this viewpoint, which allows for visualizing different economic possibilities that are developed by the migrant population and that to this day continue to be left out. Nothing is perfect. But fundamental things are happening. And of course, with a transformative outlook the social, solidarity, transformative, popular economy will come up without a doubt. In fact, I would also say that one of the other fundamental questions these days is how do we connect these economic possibilities with the public sphere in the sense of creating a communal public sphere?

You have a doctorate in international economics and development. Could you explain to someone who hasn't studied economics why the existing capitalist economic model is problematic and what we would

need to do to carry out the transition from this capitalist model toward a communal and communitarian economic model that supports the sustainability of the planet, social justice, and equity?

Today we have a socioeconomic model supported by the rationale of accumulating capital, of accumulating power and resources in fewer and fewer hands and in the hands of corporations that are getting even bigger and more powerful, much more powerful than most countries even. In the hands of what we call a very centralized corporate power, which functions at a global level and crowds out all other economic possibilities, sending them to the periphery and suffocating them. And it's a model that ultimately puts public institutions at its service. We have forms of government captured by corporate power, which delegates the responsibility of sustaining life to the invisibilized corners of system. That's why we say it's like an iceberg because there are hidden dimensions where life is being decided, which is being exploited in capitalist markets. How do we move forward from here? We suggest movement toward a socioeconomic model where the guiding principle is the shared responsibility for communal life that we were talking about earlier. If life is communal, the responsibility of sustaining it has to be communal. This places two tasks before us. First, taking power and resources back from corporate power. That's a clear task these days. We have to put the brakes on big corporations, starting there. And we have to bring the responsibility of sustaining life out of the shadows. Where does that put us? That puts us in the social solidarity economy, in self-management, in the public sphere. Why do we have to think of these different forms as "alternative" or "disjunctive," instead of as complementary to each other, as part of a movement toward reconstructing the commons, which operates in various different economic forms? From these various economic forms we can imagine a future in which some aspects of life are resolved with monetized exchanges, with paid work, and with certain buying and selling in non-capitalist markets. Others things would tend to come from rights guaranteed by the public and others might rely on processes of reciprocity, self-management, and mutual assistance that don't interact with the government or the market. The difficulty is how to thread these various approaches together. That's where we are. In that sense it's not so much about government centralization, but instead reconstructing public institutions that are looking increasingly toward capitalist privatization. It's making them look elsewhere, towards the shared community. And watch out, because here's where it gets tricky. Right now, there's a strong stake in public-private alliances. We shouldn't go in that direction. That's clear to us. We have to attack the rationale of accumulation, and those alliances move toward the rationale of accumulation. But saying "don't go there" doesn't mean that it commands us, which is where the triple helix that is sometimes called public-private-community is taking us now. The issue is that the public-community side is not compatible with the private-capitalized side. So the government must look elsewhere to completely recreate itself. I think that we have to reconstruct not just the economic forms of the government but also the political forms. There we start to get into a new arena, right? And in that sense, everything starts to be questioned. But it's very relevant to put the questioning of the economic system hand in hand with questioning of political systems. And I think that, for example, there is a great power in processes that fight to question colonialist nation-states. And I'm also including the Spanish state here with respect to, for example, the Catalan Nations, Catalonia, or with respect to Euskal Herria. So, questioning the nation-state of Spain, discussing territorial sovereignties as ways of trying to recreate institutions and socioeconomic systems at the same time, with the end goal of creating an economy, a socioeconomic system that is radically different.

Do you know if the possibility of implementing this economic model alongside interventions in the legal arena is being explored?

To be honest, I don't have the capacity to respond to that. I can tell you, for example, that when we were talking about the right to care being understood as a collective right, rather than an individual one, there were colleagues in Zaragoza in a law seminar that were trying to think about that. Right when I got here, I was talking to another colleague who is Brazilian and who is a lawyer working on the subject of land rights. Because, of course, there's no way to think about land rights from a private property perspective. So there are a lot of people addressing this, but I don't know if there is a structure or specific group that addresses it in that way. The field of law is a bit out of reach for me.

How does the concept of "private ownership of the means of production" fit into this debate?

I think that with capitalist private property, the first thing we have to do is to take back the debate and the questioning, which is something that has remained super hidden for years. Now, it's not taking this debate back to "It's either private property of each person or it's property of this large, unconnected, faraway state." No. We're thinking about other ways of managing and of, perhaps not of owning, but of utilizing and enjoying those resources. So I think private property has to be called into question. But first, private property of large property owners. So that people don't think that their tiny apartment is going to get taken away. We start with the biggest accumulations, the biggest accumulators, large property owners. I think that starting there can get us to a point of consensus, right? Supporting other forms of property, for example, is something that is discussed a lot with the subject of housing. There are those who are putting a stake in moving from housing in private property to housing in shared property, a transfer of use as it's called. It isn't property of a single person but instead of a collective, and what the people have a right to is using that dwelling for x years and even granting the use of the dwelling to whoever they want. So starting to explore these forms of property that are more shared, communal. But this directly conflicts with existing legislation. For example, a big problem in the social solidarity economy has been the issue of how an ethical bank should do the financing for individuals involved in these processes because they weren't financing the acquisition of a private property but rather a right to use. So there wasn't a legal way. They've had to look for legal tricks to be able to give a mortgage, to have the right to use the dwelling but not to own it. These are messy issues, but they are promising, and we have to involve ourselves in them. I think the idea of private property runs through everything for us. It runs through love, clearly, and our relationships with our kids. We have a colleague, XXX just presented her book about reproductive markets, and here there is a really strong critique of how we understand our offspring as private property and each person wants to have their own children. So, how do we move on from this idea of private property to begin thinking in more communal ways about reproduction and child rearing as well? So the idea of private property has to be called into question in many areas.

At the XXX collective you work on generating tools, both analytic and methodological, impacting political action and involvement. You yourself have taken part in the Congressional Reconstruction Commission to talk about caretaking as the flip side of a system urgently in need of interventions. From your point of view, is it important to be present in all areas of our reality, or are there spaces in which it isn't necessary or important to get involved?

I, for example, am not someone who would say that we have to go everywhere to bring a different message. That is, I think there are places where we shouldn't go, but we should go to many places. I think that in a certain sense we already interact with pretty different groups. When you're going to talk with public institutions, when you're going to talk with collectives of all types, when you're going to talk in academia, where a lot of different people come together. Somehow, I don't know how, but these things start to seep through a little. For example, 15 or 20 years ago, nobody was talking about caretaking. Nobody was talking about life at the center. Now the problem is that everyone wants to put life at the center. The question is what life and what center. But in some sense you say how can it be that these ideas have taken hold? I don't really know how, but I believe that this question of going to the multiplicity of locations, not from a pedagogical disposition of "come here I'm going to teach you what you don't know, I'm going to show you where the solution lies," but instead we're going to share your point of view and mine and we're going to create together. We're going to enter into a process of mutual discovery. I think that's central. Not entering with truths and salvation, but rather by supporting transformation in many places. That being said, not everywhere. Not long ago, XXK was asked to participate in some discussions with high-up executives from big companies to make them understand that it's necessary to move cities towards more sustainable models. Well look, if we find ourselves with high-up executives in our community, in a school courtyard, or in another place, we'll talk. But we're not going to go to talk with them because we see them as figures that can make a big impact. That's not why we would talk. That is, we believe that we've got to put down red lines of where we don't have dialogues and then try to have dialogues everywhere else.

The critical eco-feminist viewpoint has taught us to understand that growth and capitalist expansion must be linked, in part, to the phenomenon of global chains of caretaking. In the co-dictionary section of the Constellation of the Commons and written by Camila Esguerra (Colombian anthropologist and researcher) we find a definition of this phenomenon applied to the reality of migrant persons. In one of the experiences that you have archived on the XXK website, we can hear you discuss this subject in a talk entitled "The caretaking economy in current society. Global chains of caretaking." How do you see this phenomenon operating in the Spanish state?

Well, I wouldn't say that exactly. That is, I have a handful of things to say about global chains of caretaking. First, they aren't new, what's new is their global dimension, but the transfers of caretaking, which are those jobs, the least valued, the most invisibilized, the most precarious, passing it on to those who can't refuse. That's always been the case. There have always been domestic workers from the smallest villages to cities, from one country to neighboring countries. I'd say that capitalism is a history always built upon invisible chains of caretaking, where caretaking has never gone well, it's always been in crisis. Only, now it's reaching a global dimension. But I'd say it's not just a problem tied to international and transoceanic migrations, for example, but rather it's a problem inherent to the system itself. On the other hand, I think it's essential to understand that these chains are neither an issue between women, of some exploiting others, or between individual families, where some exploit others. We have to talk about absences. The absences are of men in general, which isn't that they don't care for others but that they don't care for themselves. More and more women are trying to do the same thing, and then public institutions don't take on their responsibilities with respect to caretaking and big corporations are generally bleeding life dry for their own process of accumulation, and so they require this other side of invisibilized

jobs. So, we're talking about a structural dimension. What's happening these days? We believe that there are distinct situations in global chains of care. But we'd say that they reflect three big social problems, to summarize. First, sometimes the lack of public services. If you have an elderly mother with dementia there isn't a public collective alternative to take care of her. And there are people who can't do anything other than hire a domestic worker, which is a 21st century form of slave labor. So, sometimes what's happening there is that a lack of public responsibility is being made up for. We can't tell the family you're doing something wrong. What we have to do is condemn this absence of collective responsibility. Other times domestic workers are hired, for example, to avoid discussing more and more – even with rhetoric about equality – how we distribute things but then don't share them, because we ignore the problem by hiring someone else. Here we do have to say “hey, look at the conflict and deal with it, don't delegate it.” Here we have to do that, for example, or also when what we do is hire domestic workers because we'd prefer to have time for more important things. For example, I remember that in a study we did, a colleague told us that he was an executive, that he had a very complicated life and didn't have time, and so he didn't have time to clean his house. Well, I don't have time either. Time, of course. Who has time? What's really going on is that I don't want to spend my time down on my knees cleaning the toilet. So, what is “not having time?” It's that you don't want to take on the work that maintains your body. You prefer to have someone else do it. So, processes of social inequality get deepened. As it becomes cheaper to buy someone else's time, as the number of things you can do increases by freeing up that time, the more you're going to hire. So, here we also have to condemn this not wanting to get down on your knees to clean your toilet and making someone else do it. But, doing this in a more collective way rather than targeting specific households.

At the Constellation of the Commons we are working on a proactive and exciting collective imagination that encourages citizen participation in an exercise of co-responsibility for the approaching eco-social, polyethical, and economic transformations. At the XXK collective, how do you imagine the introduction of an economic system centered around the sustainability of life and grounded in co-responsibility?

When we talk about a socioeconomic system grounded in this shared responsibility of sustaining life, we think that this future model could be connected to our more everyday activities, where we have to do things for ourselves and for the people we live with. After that it's connected to a more communal sphere, of proximity, and from there to the public sphere. Sometimes we talk about a spiral, in the sense that these levels of managing life have to be interconnected. And we say that in the spiral, some responsibilities need to move outward. That if you have an elderly person at your side in a highly dependent situation, who needs constant attention and specialized knowledge, that can't be your responsibility alone. There must be a sense of shared responsibility for public and community affairs. So some responsibilities require looking beyond ourselves. But we also say that the spiral must have inward movement, responsibilities that have to return to us. So, indeed, we have to clean our everyday spaces, manage our diet, take care of ourselves, it can't be something that we delegate but rather that we take into our own hands. So, it's basically this idea of co-responsibility that breaks from the idea of I only look out for myself and I buy what I can in the market, and what I can't I get from the government. It can't be just that either I buy it in the market or the government gives it to me as if it were some unconnected being. The government, the communal-public sphere, isn't some unconnected being, it's something that

we're a part of. So, basically it's this idea of co-responsibility that departs from this practice of saying "domestic work is bad for taking care of elderly people, the state should do it." No, it's that we should do it collectively. Part of it would be the government and part of it would be us and part of it would be in shared spaces.

From your perspective, who is taking charge of caretaking in situations of dependency?

I would say clearly in these situations of caretaking, of dependency, whether due to age or functional diversity, are re-privatized these days. That is, they are mixed up in the private-domestic sphere. Ultimately, who guarantees this care is families and within families women, both women in the families and hired domestic workers. And privatized also in the sense of being mixed up in the private-commercial sphere. So, what's being developed is more a market of caretaking services and the little bit that has been put in place as supposed public service, as supposed rights guaranteed by public institutions, is ultra privatized. The Dependency Law, for example, that was enacted around 15 years ago, that tried to ensure this right to receive care in a situation of dependence, what it has done is promote private senior residences, a domestic support service that is privatized in practically all places. Often to give you money that you spend in the private market. So, it is clearly re-privatized in homes and in markets that are subsidized in large part by public institutions. And caretaking is also feminized. A huge majority of it is done by women. More and more, by women who are racialized, migrant, and temporary workers. There's a perverse relationship. As a job becomes more essential, and those of dependent caretaking are essential, the more feminized it is, the more racialized and more temporary, the less it pays. This was a scandal during the pandemic. How can it be that residence workers and etc. are in these conditions? Well, it's all still the same. Nothing's changed. And what it looked like was that it was going to be a huge injection of public money back into private companies to digitize caretaking and to build new equipment closer to people, rather than the big residences, but again they will go to the sector again, to the big construction companies. So, it's not changing anything. And here, I repeat, there is an absence of men in general, public institutions, and companies that are always extracting in various ways.

For this transformation to be completely thorough we need to develop a critical narrative of the transformation itself that, at the same time, is proactive: Can you tell us about some of the milestones that have been achieved?

Well, the idea of achievement tied to success would be another whole question to unpack. The other day, in fact, we were discussing the idea of success with two other colleagues from XXK. But, without getting mixed up in that, I would say that thinking in terms of achievements is not for us, it isn't thinking in terms of a radical change to the system overnight but rather in terms of transition. So, in terms of understanding first that the world is already changing. That it's not about us changing the world but instead trying to make sure that that change that is already happening goes somewhere moderately decent and not somewhere awful. So, it's getting involved around the change that's already happening and getting involved with the very mechanisms of the system, the best mechanisms of the system, look at public policy, look at impacts on employment, even though I have already spoken against salaried work. But we have to defend decent working conditions in salaried work for right now. So, trying to make an impact on that change with the mechanisms of the system, with things that already exist. But the system pushes other things aside, look at social

solidarity economics, look at these other collaborative housing efforts, also look at the networks of mutual support that have emerged during the pandemic, look at unpaid caretaking that is happening to this day, although it has a terrible heteropatriarchal dimension. So within the peripheries of the system and with new ideas, we invent ourselves. Thinking about achievements in terms of transition, being able to give answers to urgent questions while laying the foundations of systemic change. Beyond that, in terms of achievements, I have to confess that I'm not too optimistic, but I would say that one achievement has been that caretaking gets talked about, and that what happens with life and where life is gets talked about. That's an achievement, even though there's a huge risk that each side co-opts it, or that it ends up on contradictory sides, or that it gets filled with exactly the sorts of things we didn't want. At the level of discourse I think we have achieved things. At the level of specific rights, I think that feminisms have achieved a ton. That is, from the right to free voluntary interruption of pregnancy, even though that right has deficiencies, to legalizing families through marriage equality, although marriage is part of what we want to get rid of. But as a means of transition we can include marriage equality. I think there have been a lot of achievements. Another achievement, for example, is that it was just announced today that once again the Spanish government is in the process of ratifying Convention 189 for decent working conditions for domestic workers. They have announced that multiple times, we'll have to see if it's true this time. But that's an achievement, and it's an achievement accomplished through a ton of work on the part of domestic workers' associations. That's another achievement. Has it gotten rid of the problem of domestic work being precarious and almost enslavement? No. But I think there are some achievements. There are also big defeats. For example, the European funds for recovery and restructuring for me are a defeat and this is a big debate within the Left itself.

What does the future look like from a feminist viewpoint?

The situation seems difficult to me. We're in a situation of ecological collapse that goes well beyond climate change. Or rather, calling ecological collapse "climate change" seems like a defeat to me. I think the situation is difficult, but we don't have any other alternatives than to be optimists. And here, a few days ago I was talking with a colleague who is going to publish a book about feminist struggles in Latin America. It's very impactful to read how feminist collectives have been fighting to defend life in contexts of violence and enormous pain. For example, collectives that are fighting to find missing persons. So how can you keep living happily when what you're looking for is a person who was disappeared, who might never return, who might be dead, who might have lived through terrible sexual violence? But their approach was that life that is missing doesn't destroy the life that remains; rather that the life that is missing makes us live with more strength and more joy for the life that we have today. I think that's what we have to hold on to with the ecological collapse that's coming. This extremely difficult situation has to make us feel much more strongly than just any small struggle for life today and for happiness today. It's what gives meaning to everything, and the only thing that might let us have a future. So, this idea of "We want each other alive," that comes from the feminism of Abya Yala. We want to be alive and we fight to be alive. We are fighting from life and for life. I think we have to ground ourselves in that. Trying to not fall prey to fear, which is one possibility, complete discouragement, paralysis, or living for today in the worst sense, a living for today that is radically individualistic. Instead fighting for joy in our shared life is the most immediate priority. I think that this also alters the force of politics. Not to put it far away, or far away on the horizon, or far away from big things, but rather more in life that is concrete and close. I think that here there is an

immense strength in creating lives that are more livable in the immediate future. And that spaces of political impact are livable spaces, not the other way around as spaces of constant fighting. And I think that we're in a moment where there is a lot of risk of getting into fights, between exactly those of us who should be working together.

Do you work alongside other projects?

Silvia always says, or at least she points out a lot, that we don't like to do things alone but rather accompanied by others. And it's true that we never work alone. We work with different people, both with organizations and more purely activist, feminist, or other collectives as well as more transformative NGOs, such as social solidarity economy groups. We are part of REAS, which is the Network of Alternative Solidarity Economics in Euskal Herria. So here as well, with colleagues in academia or in public institutions, or even – we're not part of any political party – but with nearby political parties or with unions. In other words, with a ton of people. Those we don't work with are private for-profit companies, especially not big ones. That is, if you work with a tiny one, a PYME (small and medium companies), or a mini company, that's not a problem. So, with those, with others, with everyone we can.

What does it mean that the XXK collective is a political project?

It's hard for me to define politics, but it's a politics that goes much further than institutional politics. That is, we don't just talk about public institutions and it's much more than politics like political parties. Politics as, in a way, the management of collective life. So what we're talking about when we say that we're a political project is that we're a project that recognizes ourselves as part of a shared life for which we have a responsibility. So we see that responsibility and we assume it. I would say that's politics for us.

On your website, you have an entire series of open and downloadable publications. What is the XXK collective's stance on copyright and Creative Commons?

I'd say that going against copyright policy would indeed be one of those places where you see where to attack private property. But we don't have, fortunately, the obligation of academic credits. For example, we don't have to publish with publishers or with academic recognition because we aren't part of that league. So, not having that obligation, we're never going to publish with copyright. We're always going to publish with Creative Commons, both with publishers and many publications. Which means you just upload them to the web and you're done and whoever wants them can get them. This is not a criticism of those who have to be involved in that world and are part of that struggle. I understand as well that today you can try to make specific arguments for something to be closed for a certain period but then it opens up later, for example. But our stake is clearly in Creative Commons, and we're surprised by people, who I know of in both feminist and degrowth fields, that systematically publish in places with property, with copyright, that are inaccessible in most of the world, and therefore for large parts of feminist movements and colleagues in social movements. It surprises us that there are people who do this uncritically and systematically. That you do it because you are in that world, you don't have another option, etc. occasionally, sure. But the movement needs to be in the opposite direction. Another thing is then how do those publishers survive? Because if there isn't a co-responsibility and if I download everything for free regardless of my ability to compensate or give back something when I have it, you also force them

out. That is, how do independent publishers survive? It's a big problem. So, it also requires co-responsibility from us on the other hand, from those of us who can.

Thinking about your life trajectory, how do you maintain your confidence in systemic transformation in a time marked by energy collapse, a crisis of our model of civilization, and a general situation of political indifference?

I don't know, but I think the idea that intelligence only emerges collectively, and we have seen that. We saw it with 15M, we did see it there. Suddenly with 15M nobody was indispensable. That is, you could be in the streets or not, and things happened because really there was a collective body functioning and a collective intelligence. That was something that I haven't seen repeated again since the most intense moments of 15M in the streets. So the idea that intelligence is collective and that happiness is also collective. I often recall some years ago, doing a video on the subject of precarity. A woman who was young, who was a high-up executive, who at 31 had a heart attack because of the pace of her life. But she talked about how the private sector and the private company motivated her a lot because it gave her constant challenges. These challenges gave her a strong sense of purpose. So, how to shift from that sense of purpose based on individual challenges that private companies give you as a professional, to thinking about the collective challenge that we face together. Replacing the importance of motivation and of challenges as well. Personally, I could go to a conference and give a very successful talk but that will never give me as much happiness as I get from doing a shared workshop that we've prepared together, that we've done with others and that goes well. The happiness that comes from that has nothing to do with the other. Being able to really open ourselves to the joy that working together can give us, closing ourselves off from or putting limits on the search for individual merit.

Thank you very much as well for making us think about things that sometimes when you are in the Vorágine you don't stop to think about and being forced to, or, having to tell other people, is also a part of the process of construction and self-awareness.