Gender equality, austerity, vulnerabilities and resistance in the Spanish neo-liberal life cycle / by Louise Grisoni & Sonia Ruiz.

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Introduction

In this chapter we examine how central government neoliberal austerity measures have negatively affected gender equality in Spain, one of the European countries most severely affected by the recent global recession. It may be that neoliberal responses to austerity contains a deliberate set of policies designed to break the public sector (Mirowski, 2014) and that women and disadvantaged groups will suffer most. Klein (2007) argues that neoliberal free market policies have risen to prominence in some developed countries because of a 'shock doctrine'. The exploitation of national crises such as austerity is used to push through controversial policies while citizens are too emotionally and physically distracted to resist effectively. Using a heuristic approach we focus on the unique features of the impact of the recession and subsequent austerity measures on women and disadvantaged groups. Taking into account the argument that the state is no longer a guarantor for gender equality but more often a threat to it (Rubery, 2013; Ruiz, 2013), our analysis identifies different ways in which gender equality has experienced a backlash, which we argue is as a result of gendered austerity measures. We have adopted a feminist perspective to explore the multiple nature of the impact of the recession, and evidence the growing gendered nature of disadvantage in publicly available statistical data.

One of the unforeseen outcomes of the economic crisis and consequent austerity measures in Spain is the opening up of new possibilities for collective action specifically for gender equality. In Spain, the deterioration of representative democracy resulting from the imposition of a range of austerity measures has resulted in a resurgence of feminist collective action. The Indignados movement's (15M)[1] slogan "no nos representan"[2] points directly to a crisis of representation which aims to tackle political gender issues (Ruiz, 2015). Different forms of collective action have emerged in response to austerity: a political movement, 'Barcelona en Comú', and two examples of feminist activism, 'Igualdad de género frente a la crisis económica', and 'La Vaga de Totes'. These initiatives point to alternative ways of engaging with work and working lives, in the hope of redressing the inequalities that have increased over recent years.

The lessons from Spain would suggest that there is a populist move to the political left at local level, which has resulted in innovative forms of political activism. In general, political institutions generate low confidence among the Spanish population as they do not take into account the participatory voice of the people. Central Government is not setting gender equality as a priority and we anticipate that this will continue to have consequences for the life of women

[1]The Indignados (also known as the 15M) movement in Spain emerged when several organizations called for a public protest to publicly express the intense insufficiencies of the current democratic system to be held on May 15, 2011. After that date the most important squares in Spain were occupied and hosted citizen assemblies on the political system, economic, feminist or ecological issues. An own cyber and digital work also supported the street action.

[2] "No nos representan" translates as "They do not represent us"

in the long term. The conservative and social democratic labels for policy no longer offer reasonable solutions to austerity as more radical democratic forms of action emerge.

The multiple nature of the crisis and emerging policy scenarios.
Debates surrounding the impact of austerity have broadened to include an understanding of a multiple systemic and structural crisis (Wallerstein, 2010; Marquand, 2012). The dynamics and interrelationships of the wider system are seen as central to understanding events in Spain where political and social issues are discussed conjointly with concerns about economic and financial sustainability. This explanation of the recession is further enriched by feminist critiques which question normative assumptions of the crisis by integrating gender, food, care and ecological concerns into a description of a 'multidimensional crisis' (Larrañaga, Jubeto and de la Cal, 2011; Pérez Orozco, 2011; Fraser, 2014; Herrero, 2017). The crisis from a feminist perspective specifically directs attention to austerity impacts on social reproduction, care and domestic work and all those activities which are necessary to sustain life, rather than a narrow focus on paid labour (Elson and Pearson, 2015).

Financial markets are also an area of concern for Adkins (2015), who calls on feminism to include the strategy of putting finances to the service of gender equality in the field of redistribution policies. More recently scholars have focused on how the economic and social crises are linked to political ones. Lombardo and Kantola (2017) have provided evidence on the changes in the economic institutions and processes as a result of the crisis and they have also collected gendered impacts of the dynamics between European Union policies and domestic policies as a result of austerity measures.

In order to consider the nature of austerity measures and its gendered impacts, there is a need to understand the current crisis of capitalism by incorporating gender inequalities into the analysis. Lux and Wöhl (2014) do so by integrating the social construction of gender – in relation to other categories that may cause inequalities and relations of domination, by including the public-private continuum, including social reproduction, and the hegemonic gender orders and gender regimes. Based on value Marxist theory, Charnock, Purcell, Ribera-Fumaz (2014a) focus on the limits of the accumulation of capital in Spain taking into account historical and structural roots of the economic crisis and highlighting financial issues, urbanization factors and policy dynamics. Charnock, Purcell, Ribera-Fumaz (2014b) argue that Spain is a paradigmatic case in the crisis of capitalism as the country's growth possibilities have been limited to a model where social reproduction is subordinated to money power and authoritarian law. Gender relations should be analyzed as a constituent part of capitalism (Fraser, 2014) and the impacts of neo-liberal measures can also be a catalyst for political change:

> "*On the one hand, they [neo-liberal policies] have stabilizing effects by externalizing social reproduction and care work to private households, especially in times of crisis, and thus bolster accumulation process. On the other hand, they have a destabilizing potential as those externalization processes are questioned and challenged by various*

individual and social groups". (Lux and Wöhl, 2015:103-104).

There has been a direct attempt to (re)impose a conservative gender order by means of the austerity related measures implemented in the recent years, favouring a recessive perspective in terms of women's rights. Therefore there is a need to further understand how gender inequalities are related to a capitalist system in crisis. Alonso and Paleo (2013) argue that the right wing Popular Party, in office since 2011, has had a negative impact on women. The social policy initiatives of the conservative party go beyond the objectives of economic adjustment and deliberately intend to structurally change both the socio-economic model of the country (del Pozo and Martín, 2013) and the way gender policies are structured by the state. This is consistent with changes regarding welfare, the family, the care system as well as the labour market which are reshaping gender relations across Europe (Rubery, 2014), and it has been argued that the EU-framed austerity measures have blurred differences between social democrats and conservatives (Lombardo, 2013).

We consider how austerity measures aim at transforming gender regimes taking into account the relations and tensions of the gendered division of labour, namely the presence and situation of women in paid labour, care and domestic work. We are aware of the danger of conceptualizing a gender regime that is single dimensional. We therefore work with Walby's definition (2015), which runs parallel to the intention to structurally change the gender regime and addresses financial policies, public expenditure, employment and care giving in households as well as in the political system. In addition Connell (1987) is concerned with symbolic, emotional, production relations and power. We understand the concept of gender regime as "rules and norms about gender relations allocating tasks and rights to the sexes" (Sainsbury, 1999:5). Growing gender inequalities in employment are a common feature across the EU (Larrañaga et al, 2011). Scholars have also identified the reduction in public expenditure (Rubery, 2014) related to austerity measures as a threat to women's welfare rights. These policy responses to the financial crisis effectively cut the income of the poor and of women where services are most needed (Walby, 2011). In addition, the neoliberal agenda that extends the market into all areas of activity puts at risk the de-familialization of care and other progress made towards equality achieved before of the crisis (Karamessini and Rubery, 2014).

Gender equality policies and state feminism agencies

The neoliberal agenda in the EU (Lombardo, 2013) has subordinated equality between women and men to a focus on 'more urgent' economic issues. Gender equality needs constant state support to be successful, yet the approval of gender-equality laws has stopped in Spain. In Galicia (2009), Catalonia (2010) and Cantabria (2011), projects for regional equality laws were put on hold (Alonso and Paleo, 2013). In addition, the Conservative party suspended an anti-discrimination and equal treatment law developed by the previous socialist party in opposition to EU directives. This Spanish anti-discrimination and equal treatment law not only highlighted discrimination based on gender, but also other dimensions of inequality, such as ethnicity, race, class, age, and sexual identity or orientation (Bustelo, 2009). Nevertheless, the main equality body, the *Instituto de la Mujer* established in 1983 has just been renamed as "*Instituto de*

la Mujer y para la Igualdad de Oportunidades"[3]. The mission has been broadened to prevent and eliminate discrimination on the grounds of "*birth, sex, race or ethnic origin, religion, ideology, sexual identity or orientation, age, disability*"[4]. Although its duties have broadened, at the same time the new Institute's budget has been significantly reduced.

The expansion of government equality bodies has been stopped. In 2010 the first Ministry of Equality was removed, as were the equality services in Galicia, the Women's Institute in Murcia and the Women's Council of Madrid - a regional women's NGO created as an advisory body in 1993 (Alonso and Paleo, 2013). Local authority responsibilities for gender equality were suppressed by law in 2013, and the consolidated local safety net for assistance and protection for women suffering gender violence is being dismantled. In fact, the Spanish government had been working without a framework for action on gender equality for three years, which meant that there was no strategic direction and work programme at the same time as the worst of the recession was in progress. It was not until 2014 that a "Strategic Plan for Equal Opportunities 2014 – 2016" was finally adopted. However, in 2017 there is no longer a working strategic plan.

Employment, care and domestic work

Instability has been the leading characteristic of the Spanish labour market for decades and the employment structure promotes a high deregulation of labour relations. Today, there are fewer jobs characterized by stable, permanent employment with decent working conditions. More women are trying to enter the labour market changing the tradition of staying in the home to look after family. Government policies are trying to return women to the home, but many women resist this retrograde move.

In the first months of the crisis, the biggest blow to employment was the crash of the construction sector, a male-dominated area. This meant that increasing unemployment among women went unnoticed and the reduction of the number of jobs was understood as a gender-neutral issue by the government (Ruiz, 2013). Spain has the highest rate of unemployment of the OECD, and long term unemployment is double the EU average, running at 49.7%, (Instituto de Estudios Economicos, 2014). This increase has accompanied a gendered reduction in unemployment protection. Unemployed women in Spain have a 77% likelihood of not receiving any benefit at all (CCOO, 2014).

Unemployment for men and women has increased, although 4 out of 5 jobs created have been targeted for male workers. A question here is whether cutbacks in male employment reproduces or changes gender norms (Lux and Wöhl, 2014). At the margins of official data, there are many other non-formal jobs that define the Spanish labour market. A large number of the employed population is working an illegal job and there is also a high percentage of non-

[3] "*Instituto de la Mujer y para la Igualdad de Oportunidades*" translates as 'Woman's Institute and for Equal Opportunities'.
[4] Ley 15/2014, de 16 de septiembre, de racionalización del Sector Público y otras medidas de reforma administrativa

formal housework, domestic services[5], internships[6], sexual work and prostitution, and other precarious categories. The majority of the people working these jobs are women and women make up 72.9% of part-time employees (PIGY, 2014). Part-time employment was established in 1984 as work that allows the combination of labour activity with domestic tasks, and is a female-dominated field (Ruiz, 2013). Occupational segregation is still an issue in the Spanish labour market. There is a 23% gender pay gap, and it increases according to the level of seniority as careers progress and the age of the female worker. Women in Spain would need to work 84 days more than men each year to earn the same salary performing a similar job (UGT, 2014).

The labour market measures implemented by the current conservative government are deepening the gender inequalities that already exist. Austerity measures have put the brake on what would have been one of the most effective work-life balance policies: non-transferrable parental leave for childbirth established on a basis of equal rights for women and men – in terms of both time and remuneration. For example, in Barcelona 35.1% of contracts issued in 2016 were less than one month and 59.6% of contracts issued were for less than 6 months (BA, 2017). Both the debate and implementation of reforms in this area have been stopped (Castro, 2013).

Reforms in the Spanish pension system are worsening female poverty. Given that women are over-represented in the informal economy and more frequently interrupt their professional career than men to look after children or relatives, women often meet with difficulties in reaching the minimum requirements for a decent pension (Ezquerra, 2011). The 2012 labour reform has had negative consequences for gender equality in the workplace. Tax discounts for employing women have been removed and the reform boycotts work-life balance rights by limiting workers' power to negotiate flexible working arrangements. There has been a move to stop women from using time during the day for breastfeeding and the option to accumulate this time to additional days for child care has been removed and eliminates state financial incentives when women return to their former jobs after childcare leave. With this reform, part-time jobs are allowed to add overtime (extra time) and the privatisation of the labour market continues to expand through the promotion of temporary work agencies. Unilateral opportunities for employers to introduce more de-regulated labour conditions without having to respect collective agreements have increased thus making it easier and cheaper for employers to fire employees, including pregnant women. (Lombardo, 2013; Ruiz and Porta, 2012; Ruiz, 2014; Ezquerra, 2011).

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

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

Current data on the use of time (CIS, 2017) shows that women are increasing their commitment to care and domestic unpaid work. Women are 'mainly responsible' for preparing meals in 54.6% of Spanish households, compared to the 19.4% of the men who are 'mainly responsible' of cooking. Similar data are to be found in relation to washing the dishes (48% of women and 20.6% of men) or cleaning the house (44.9% of women vs 14.8% of men). The management of the households is the only task that is equally shared by women and men (34% of women and 34.5% of men). Unpaid leave for taking care of dependent relatives is increasing in Spain. The leave to take care of children has increased by 10.6% between 2005 and 2014. Women were 94.01% of those requesting leave to take care of children (León, Ibáñez, Muñoz-Mendoza, 2016). In addition, household workers have seen their situation worsen since the Popular Party took office.[7] Caregiving is seen as a woman's obligation with an absent state, i.e., a state that is not taking responsibility for the care needs of its society, the reduction of family economic resources, and the increasing number of men not sharing caring arrangements (Ezquerra, 2011). Around 1 in 4 women shorten their working day to take care of their children[8] and 38.2% of employed women have taken leave of more than one year for caring responsibilities. Women in Spain dedicate an average of just over four hours per day to domestic work – two and a half hours more than the male's contribution, which has increased by only 45 minutes in the last seven years (INE, 2011).

This work overload, the double burden of family and job responsibilities also has an impact on women's health and their vulnerability increases along with their age and with the number of children or relatives who depend on women care givers. Moreover, the lack of gender disaggregated statistics does not help to show the entire picture of female poverty. For example in Catalonia (2016) the poverty rate for single parent families (mostly women) is 42.8% and 13% of female workers are in poverty (Rovira and Fuertes, 2016).

Social and welfare policies

The welfare state regime, especially in southern European countries, is facing a critical challenge. For years, the common good has been confronted with the trend to create opportunities for profitable privatisation and progressively minimize the state (Ruiz, 2013; Rubery, 2014). As women tend to rely more heavily on welfare benefits, public services and social care, government cuts affect them disproportionately (Peterson, 2011; Walby, 2011). The demand for 'insertion minimum wages' for people without income, (61% of them are women), increases, meanwhile the main plan for basic social services has suffered a new budget reduction and its amount is currently 27.6% of the 2009 budget (PIGY, 2014).

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

[8] http://www.publico.es/actualidad/506338/ocho-etapas-de-la-discriminacion-laboral-de-las-mujeres

Cuts to the Dependence Law[9] have meant a dismantling of services: economic resources have decreased by more than 14% and benefits for people whom the state considered 'moderately dependent' have been eliminated, affecting thousands of people in disadvantaged situations (Marea Violeta, 2012). Subsidies for professional caregivers in nursing and old people's homes have been reduced (Lombardo, 2013). The social protection for non-professional caregivers named in the Dependency Law has disappeared. These and other dependency cuts are part of a strategy to push women back into the home, promoting a reduction of their labour activity rate and generating more jobs available to men in the labour market. In 2011, 160,000 people were registered as non-professional caregivers in the social security system: more than 90% of them were women and a majority of them were over the age of 45. After the 2012 reform, only 24,000 of them were still registered (Requena, 2012). Despite 65% of dependent people are women and 83% of the non-professional caregivers, the dependency budget is not present in the institutional gender impact evaluation (PIGY, 2014).

Since September 2012, the Spanish health-care system has no longer provided universal medical coverage. People without a residency permit are excluded from these services, and a large number of vital medications formerly subsidised by the state now have to be paid for by everybody, regardless of their situation or income level. The 2015 budget allocated for health services is the 56% of the 2011's budget. A privatization process has started in many regions and 53.000 workers in the health system have been dismissed since 2009 (PIGY, 2014). Austerity has also dealt a drastic blow to education policies. Among others, the 2015 budget allocated for schooling for children between 0 - 3 years represents 75% of the 2010 figures (PIGY, 2014).

Gender violence, sexual and reproductive rights policies.

Attacks on women's freedom and rights have included the issue of control over women's bodies with the aim of reinforcing the traditional role of women as mothers and carers, keeping them in the home and out of the public sphere. From 2008 to 2013, laws on the protection of pregnant women have been approved in six regions all of them with conservative governments (i.e. Castilla la Mancha, Castilla León, Murcia, Galicia, Madrid and La Rioja). Under these laws women in vulnerable situations, i.e. teenage girls will continue their pregnancies; and some of these governments stress the *'tragedy of abortion'* (Alonso and Paleo, 2013). In addition, central government has explicitly excluded lesbians and single-mothers from public infertility treatments. The project to control women's sexual and reproductive rights has had at its core the intention to suppress the 2010 law that regulated voluntary termination of pregnancy according to criteria established by the World Health Organisation and in line with the majority of EU legislation. This proposal was finally dropped in 2012 following pressure from feminist groups.

[9] **Ley 39/2006, de 14 de diciembre, de Promoción de la Autonomía Personal y Atención a las personas en situación de dependencia,** better known as "Dependence Law", is a Spanish law that created the current System for Autonomy and Care Unit , which is the set of services and benefits for the promotion of personal autonomy and protection and Individual Care through concerted public and private services accredited

Ten years after the implementation of the law against gender violence, the statistics are discouraging. Preventative measures against gender-based violence are one of the policy areas that have suffered most from economic cuts and the conservative government. Up to August 2017, 73 women were killed by their partners, although the central government only acknowledges 36. From 2010 to 2013 the evaluation of 'extreme risk' situations – which needed constant supervision – dropped 31% and the 'high risk' ones 46%, while those requiring just an occasional surveillance increased 3.1% (Sanchez, 2014). It is being stated, that austerity and the new conservative wave in Spain is endangering the existing previous consensus among ideologically different parties, on gender-based violence from the late 1990s (Lombardo, 2013). It can be argued that austerity policies in promoting inequality have fostered increased violence towards women. Job insecurity in Spain has increased and has contributed to an increase of gender-based violence and harassment against women in the labour market, especially in relation to motherhood (Gálvez and Torres, 2009). The 2016 report of the Spanish public prosecutor states a 40% increase of sexual harassment at the workplace in the last two years (Madrigal, 2016).

Emerging forms of gender action and resistance. The negative impact of cuts at times of austerity (McDowall 2014) has been well catalogued and scholars also suggest that the current political scenario might become a catalyst for progressive political change (Walby, 2011; Rubery, 2014). Neoliberal policies are having a negative impact in women's lives and resistance is being expressed in feminist collective action establishing new organisations and political movements. For example the proposed introduction of a law to restrict abortion was withdrawn by the government as a result of feminist opposition, which can be seen as a success of feminist mobilization. However, counter forces continue to operate, illustrated by the pro-life demonstration that took to the streets of Madrid in November 2014. Walby says:

> *'It may be a tipping point or a critical turning point, either an opportunity for the right to gain ground….or an opportunity for the resurgence of the social democratic project' (Walby 2011:119).*

Drawing from the Spanish case we suggest that there is more of a move to the political left together with potential for other forms of innovation and activism beyond the social democratic project that could drive a different future for the feminist agenda. Charnock, Purcell, Ribera-Fumaz (2014b) point out that any transformation towards a global society that is not just subjected to the accumulation of capital remains an urgent need. We believe that this can be only attained by a conscious fight of the international working class. However, this is unlikely to be successful if other issues such as the decline in social democracy across Europe as well as neoliberalism refusal to consider gendered exclusions, especially relating to care and paid labour activities (Evans, 2015).

We argue that the multiple crisis, which we have presented in the form of austerity policies, represents an opportunity for new voices and activism to emerge in the political arena. Thus new forms of advocacy and representation appear in political parties (particularly at the local level which are promoting

progressive policies), trade unions, and social movements. The examples of collective action we discuss extend Walby's (2011) proposal that suggests the only way gender equality action can counteract the neoliberal trend is through a social democratic project and show that alternative, more radical, routes to activism and gender policy making are under construction in Spain.

Our analysis shows that two alternative economic strategies have been adopted by emerging groups to address the central government's policy response to the crisis. These are not isolated from each other, but in permanent dialogue. Both are seeking ways to reduce inequalities created through austerity policies and other measures. Drawing on Agenjo (2011), the first perspective is a *'merged'* strategy anchored in the market with a focus on production that has been reviewed with a gender perspective. This is a social democratic approach, where the market and the domestic sphere merge, and both are given the same value and the same analytical status. Differentiated effects of the crisis on women and men are considered and scholars make visible the important part of women's work that is hidden in the economy (Agenjo, 2011). Proposals to overcome the crisis emphasize reshaping the financial economy and the promotion of new employment models that are socially and ecologically sustainable (Larrañaga et al, 2011) as well as the promotion of work and life balance.

The second strategy is a *'transcending'* strategy where the focus is on a sustainable living argument (Beneria, 1999; Kuiper and Sap, 1996; Carrasco, 2011). This is a more radical democratic approach which aims at transcending the dichotomy of employment and domestic work in relation to productive and reproductive spheres. It identifies aspects of the current multidimensional crisis: the social reproduction crisis – with female migration at its core – and links it to the care crisis, the ecological and the food crisis (Pérez Orozco, 2011). Solutions include: the socialization of the responsibility of care; business tax on care; the promotion of community projects; tackling private property and putting a focus on body politics and ecological concerns (Herrero, 2017) - in conjunction with traditional care policies such as the public provision of nurseries and dependency centres, measures to support dependency situations; the implementation of mechanisms that allow for the collectivization of rights such as pension systems, universalization of rights promoting high quality universalized health and education systems (Perez Orozco, 2011).

These two different strategies are found both in new feminist movements and in new political parties that aim to counteract neoliberal approaches to austerity. Three examples of feminist mobilisation that have emerged since the beginning of the crisis demonstrate how collective action aims to change the institutional or traditional parameters of representation and address the negative impact of austerity policies. Intersectionality, radical democracy proposals, participatory initiatives and feminist demands are at the centre of all these initiatives. As feminist perspectives are voiced in the streets, in social networks and in new political structures, there is opportunity to develop new organisational forms of protest and action.

***Merged* strategy**	***Transcending* strategy**
Market and domestic sphere merge and are given the same value	Transcends the dichotomy of employment and unpaid domestic work
A system integrator approach (Agenjo, 2011) with a focus on: • Reshaping the financial economy • Promoting new employment models that are socially and ecologically sustainable • Addressing work-life balance • Increasing nurseries and dependency centres	A sustainable living approach (Beneria,1999; Carrasco, 2001) with a focus on: • Introducing business tax in order to socialize the responsibility of care (Perez-Orozco, 2001) • Displacing the materialist conception of economy and focus more on body and ecological issues (Herrero, 2017) • Tackle the issue of private property ownership (Herrero, 2017) • Supporting community projects on care
Part of the social democratic neo-liberal project: how to distribute the cake better! E.g. "Igualidad de genero frente a la crisis economica", " Barcelona en Comu"	A radical democratic project: how to change the recipe for the cake! E.g. " La Vaga de Totes", "Barcelona en Comu"

Table to show Emerging strategies to re-establish gender equality

"**Igualdad de género frente a la crisis económica**"[10] was a 2009 manifesto with a set of measures to be implemented by the government. Their approach follows criteria of the *'merged strategy'* approach:

> *"Gender equality is key in making the most of women's human capital, and of the caring capacity of men; for the effective functioning of labour markets and government budgets; for making the change to a more technologically advanced economic model* ..."(IGFCE, 2009).

The proposals were signed by a large number of women's groups and individuals and publicly presented in several Spanish cities and towns. Among other measures, the manifesto called for a general reduction of time dedicated to the labour market; the sharing of domestic work and care tasks among women and men, or among the members of a household; a universal public

[10] "Igualdad de género frente a la crisis económica" translates as 'Gender Equality in the face of the crisis'

coverage of education for children from zero years; public services for dependent people; increased opportunity for working mothers to include the removal of care leave measures orientated to discourage women returning to their jobs following maternity leave; the establishment of an equal and non-transferrable paternal and maternal leave; the inclusion of domestic employees in the social security system's workers general regime, an updated widow's pension and the progressive equality of status for the non-contributory pensions. Their manifesto states: "*Women are necessary, now more than ever, as workers and as citizens*".

" La Vaga de Totes"[11] was a project that was active from 2014-2016. In October 2014 a massive strike took place in Barcelona. Thousands of people: young and old, women and men, paralyzed the streets of the city. They occupied offices of political and economic institutions and demonstrated under the call for "La Vaga de totes". The end of another year of austerity measures tipped people into action in a way that said: *'enough is enough'*.

This project fits into the *'transcending strategy'* approach, as it puts at the centre of its plans for action, issues that transcend the dichotomy of employment and care, as well as activities that flow at the edges of the productive and reproductive spheres. The origins of this action can be found in feminist perspectives on work and the conclusion that the world is organized on a patriarchal system and that women are allocated the task that will sustain it. The organisers of "La Vaga de Totes" denounce the current concept of work, because it excludes all activities that are not paid, that are not performed in the public space and that do not function in relation to criteria such as success, power, or capitalist accumulation (LVDT, 2014). "La Vaga de Totes" adopted a radical approach which aims at creating a mobilisation designed to collapse the present economic system. At the core of their action are: "*Unemployed women, precarious women, housewives, domestic workers, undocumented migrant women, retired women…Can you imagine a strike from them all?*"(LVDT, 2014).

Links with previous social and women's strikes are clear, for instance with the 2000 Global Women's Strike and the 2009 Prekarias a la Deriva (Vulnerable Women Adrift) a strike organized in Madrid in 2009 (Ruiz, 2013). Moreover in the two general strikes held in 2012 feminist action related to the Indignados movement denounced specific attacks by the labour reform movement against women. Strikes over food and care were organised, as well as gender strikes led by LGBT groups. Pickets in markets and at the entrance to schools also took place, led by 'care commandos' (García, 2014). Strikes are a well-established and traditional method of resistance to oppression, however, "all-women's strikes" is a challenging form of collective action.

"Barcelona en Comú" is a political party under collective development, open to the Barcelona citizenship. It provides an example of a political party aiming at a *'transcending'* strategic approach. Organized as a citizen platform it was launched to take part in the local elections in 2015. *"Barcelona en Comú is a*

[11] La Vaga de Totes" translates as "Everyone's strike" (NB reference to the feminine case in Spanish).

radical democracy project", says one of the members of the gender group. Their policy on gender issues and basis for their electoral programme aims at eradicating all sexist, homophobic and transphobic violence. They want to guarantee people's participation in all spheres of their lives, from their bodies to the political, economic and social common decisions. They propose establishing mechanisms that ensure all voices are being heard regardless of sex, age, social class, ethnic origin, functional diversity or study level. In economic terms their analysis states that the public administration is responsible for the current care crisis. Barcelona en Comu aims to guarantee leave, universalize rights, review purchase contracts, support cooperative and community care strategies and recognise the importance of these tasks for the sustainability of life and economic development. This means also tackling inequalities in the labour market and transforming the economic model so that the city's wealth from paid and unpaid work is distributed among all the citizens. Their gender programme highlights both proposals placed in the "*merged strategy*" and the "*transcending strategy*". The gender intersectional approach, which takes a wide range of categories of inequalities, also has to be underlined. The recent elections in Barcelona were won on this platform.Several policies such as a strategy against feminisation of poverty and precariousness in daily life, gender urbanism and democratization of care have all been drawn up and are in the process of implementation. However, it is too early to assess the full impact of these policies.

New forms of gendered political action reflect the richness of democratic projects emerging in Spain, which aim at counteracting the central government's austerity policies. They present innovative organisational forms that are finding ways to counteract womens' inequality created by the austerity measures. They have some shared priorities such as the integration of gender-based violence concerns in their approaches. On the one hand, the more pragmatic approach of the *merged* strategy is mainly to be found in the new political parties and the *transcending* strategic approach is found in the feminist movements. Thus, new ways of gender equality activism to counteract the neoliberal trend are being developed beyond purely social democratic perspectives.

Conclusions

We have examined how austerity measures have affected gender equality in the context of Spain, one of the European countries most severely affected by the recent recession. We focused on the socio-political context that has developed and evidenced the growing gendered nature of disadvantage by drawing on publicly available statistical data. This reinforces arguments put forward by Mirowski (2014) that neoliberalism was not dislodged by the financial crisis because it now lies within ourselves. We are compelled to position ourselves in the market and as such we manifest neoliberalism's innate logic. We identified four different areas where women have experienced increasing inequality which we argue is as a result of austerity measures. We have shown how austerity measures have a multidimensional and systemic quality linking the economic crisis with political agendas. These have resulted in widening inequality and in particular, a worsening situation for women and their position in society. Challenges to the gender equality agenda, have been illustrated and

highlighted with examples of how inequality is being institutionalised for women. These include: increasing physical attacks on women, attacks on the right to reproduction and maternity leave, welfare and social policies, labour market changes that encourage women back into the home in caring roles and gender mainstreaming policies that bury the specific needs of women under a broader equality banner by focusing on a range of disadvantaged groups. The austerity measures are clearly having an impact in women´s living conditions, and in Spain we see deliberate and explicit government policies designed to reshape gender relations and increase inequality.

One of the unforeseen outcomes of the economic crisis and consequent austerity measures in Spain is the opening up of new possibilities in terms of the gender agenda, as well as opportunities for collective action. New forms of collective action have emerged - initiatives which point to alternative ways of engaging with work and working lives, in the hope of redressing inequalities that have increased over recent years. This reinforces Klein's (2017) optimism for transformative potential in the face of crisis, overcoming the neoliberal inertia that pervades. In the multiple crisis scenario radical democratic forms of action have come to the fore which go beyond the social democratic label from *merged* to *transcending* strategies for change. The *transcending* approach is being developed by activists and included in the manifestos and programmes of new movements such as "La Vaga de Totes" and "Barcelona en Commun". Institutions and traditional organisations generate low confidence among the Spanish population as they do not take into account participatory proposals voiced by the people. New forms of organisation have been successful in mobilising this by developing the struggle against austerity from a progressive perspective. Neither the conservative nor the social democratic label are valid any more, and radical democratic forms of action have come to the fore. In general we can say that the move to the political left is seen as potentially more favourable towards an equality agenda and a move to the political right is likely to lead to greater inequality. This is reflected in central (right wing) and local (more left wing) political organisations. These new initiatives in Spain bring hope. They will need ongoing review to see how they continue to develop and how effective they are in the longer term.

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