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Ethnography of the kitchen: the Women's House, a space for feminist alliance and intercultural encounter

Abstract

In this article we delve into a debate about whether a kitchen was to be installed in a new Women's House, in a city in the Basque Country (Hernani, Gipuzkoa). The ethnography presented here was conducted by observing the participants' collective deliberative process about the House. Articulating the debate's main points led us to examine the dominant cultural assumptions about cooking in Basque society, especially in view of the opposing feminist positions on the kitchen and the domestic sphere. To understand the changes happened, it is essential to consider the participants' previous experience, the shape the discussion took and the diffractions and interferences that occurred during the process, as well as the priority placed on "being and doing together", being-aware of the (self)imposed limits while also allowing, even for a short period of time, the dichotomies that characterize and delimit this intercultural encounter to be questioned.

Keywords: Feminism, social movements, Basque society, Women's Houses, kitchen, alliances, diversity, dichotomies.

1. Introduction

The kitchen and the very act of cooking have very different social and cultural meanings, depending on their contexts. Indeed, anthropology has always shown interest in this area, though in recent decades it has become integrated with more general studies on food (Faizul, 2018). The kitchen is the place where life happens, is arranged and sustained; it is a political, physical, symbolic and affective space that allows us to reflect on very different themes. Beyond being a physical space, it is a social space "made up of material and symbolic elements, positioned actors, a producer of rhetoric, assumptions, mythologies, contradictions, hierarchies" (Licona García and Cortés, 2019: 172).

Given the above ideas, in this article we delve into a debate about whether a kitchen was to be installed in a new Women's House in a city in the Basque Country and during which different feminist and cultural approaches emerged. Our unit of observation is the very process that the participants undertook collectively in determining the interior

design of the House how the House would be run. There is a traditional saying in Spanish—"hasta la cocina" (lit. 'as far as the kitchen')—which takes on three distinct meanings in our study: in its most ethnographic sense, it refers to "going to the core" of said process; in a more literal sense, it means examining the specific discussions about the consequences of there being or not being a kitchen in that space; and in a deeper and more processual sense, we will address the "kitchen work" itself, including of the reflection and dialogue work that the participants undertook together to make both this and other decisions with regard to the House itself and how it is run.

The participatory process that we analyze began in 2016 and took place in Hernani, a city of 20,000 inhabitants with a lively social, cultural and political life. It is located a few kilometers from Donostia-San Sebastián, the capital of Gipuzkoa, one of the seven provinces of the Basque Country (located between France and Spain, on the Bay of Biscay and on both sides of the Pyrenees).

Women's Houses are municipal spaces pioneered by the feminist movement and in close collaboration with local institutions. They began to operate in 2003, and since then, they have spread throughout the Basque Country, uniting various types of women's associations, city councils, and equality advisory boards. The Houses run a variety of programs and have legal, labor and sexual health counseling services, and provide targeted support for precarious groups (Authors). The Women's House in Hernani is called *Kulturarteko Plaza Feminista* (Intercultural Feminist Space; in this article we will use the Basque abbreviation, KFP), because it houses both the local feminist and anti-racist movements, the latter of which is led by AMHER, the Multicultural Association of Hernani, a collective that works on issues related to immigration, interculturality and coexistence.

The primary aim of this article is to show how the debate about the kitchen allows us to investigate into the assembly manages social diversity and the work done to arrive at a consensus. It is a consensus that is, like the KPF project itself, under continuous construction, and yet despite being unfinished, it is sufficiently stable to allow different genealogies, histories and practices to intersect and continue nurturing the consensus process. All this takes place in a social context of profound change that creates alliances between different parties and social movements. Achieving such alliances requires an openness to dialogue, to mutual knowledge and reciprocity, and it also enlists the application of specific techniques and know-how. The feminist movement has a know-

how that is not always present in other social movements (Authors); it is a know-how rooted in a long history of encounters and disagreements between different feminists and one that allows for improvisation. It is a dialogue that materializes in the physical and emotional encounter between different people who make up the movement. Such an encounter means that theoretical and political displacements occur, responsibilities are assumed, and the observation of social inequalities becomes more complex. Thus, in using the concept of tension applied in Teresa Del Valle's (2005) study of feminism, the kitchen becomes a metaphor, a juncture of critical and creative tension: it is critical, because it is based on a position of continuous analysis of and judgment about problems and ways of acting; it is creative, because it promotes imagining the possible alternatives and solutions for achieving the necessary consensus.

To achieve our aim, we will first explain our research methodology and then we will describe our ethnographic framework and the social changes that Basque society is experiencing, including the changes related to how politics are done. In the sections that follow, we will delve into the debates and the various views that emerged in the conflict analyzed. We will refer to the dominant cultural assumptions and imaginaries held about cooking in Basque society, as well as to the opposing feminist positions regarding the domestic sphere and cooking, which paint a theoretical and practical picture that is very complex. And we will show how the participatory process is dynamic in two senses: on the one hand, the immediate issues at hand are addressed; on the other hand, as positions become more flexible and are projected into the future, it becomes necessary to build and maintain the conditions that keep the relationships from breaking and allow the pact to be renewed and nurtured as many times as necessary. This is a process in which priority is placed on "being and doing together", which entails an awareness of (self)imposed limits, but also allows for, even if only for a short period of time, the dichotomies that characterize and limit the intercultural encounter to be questioned. We end by proposing and discussing some conclusions.

Following Maria Livia Alga (2018), we will assert that the KPF's approach to diversity gives rise to oblique and transversal readings of feminist convictions, which are enhanced by the interferences and diffraction (Haraway, 1999) that occur in the fixed and dichotomous understandings of cultural and gender differences. The result is that the political subjectivities that are formed, despite their being situated in a specific territory and society, tend to transgress and overflow "normative, sexual and cultural, linguistic

and geographical borders, which are not identified with a single 'world' nor a single category" (Alga, 2018: 147).

2. Methodology

The specific analysis that we will present in this article is part of two research projects. The first, XXX, is financed by the Spanish Ministry of Economy, Industry and Competitiveness (anonymized). The second, XXX, was carried out in 2018 with financial support from the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa's in agreement with the Vice-Rector's Office at the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU). The research team is composed of a large group of people belonging to different research groups funded by the Basque government. Specifically, the authors of this article are part of a research group that has a long history and specializes in feminist anthropological and sociological studies.

Both projects aim to analyze the actions launched by different social movements, focusing on the collaboration, alliances and interactions between different actors and movements (especially feminism, anti-racism, environmentalism and the promotion of the Basque language), because we believe that a close examination of these processes is essential for understanding how the different communities are (re)weaving themselves. To that end, we implemented a qualitative and ethnographic methodological design, one that combines different research techniques.

The part of the study that we present here is based on an extended ethnography (two years of field work), where we participated in the process of creating the Women's House, the KPF, from the very beginning. In addition, we observed very different events that were related to the House, to feminism and to the dynamics of other social movements in the municipality. Secondly, between 2018 and 2020, we conducted 13 in-depth interviews with people directly involved in the KPF and/or other socio-political initiatives in the municipality. Thirdly, we analyzed a variety of materials: the various collectives' and entities' websites, articles from *Kronika*[1] (the local newspaper) and leaflets and manifestos, among others. Lastly, we compared our results with the results corresponding to the study of other Women's Houses in the province of Gipuzkoa, namely the analysis of the processes observed in the Houses in the cities of Arrasate, Donostia/San Sebastián and Errenteria, as part of the same project. Though these Houses are all at different stages of operation, their social outreach and scope are similar;

however, they differ in terms of the characteristics of the municipality and the people who participate in them.

3. Promoting social change in a changing society

In recent decades, there have been transformations in all areas of the so-called Western societies, from the political and economic to the most intimate; changes that have been highlighted further by the Covid-19 crisis. On one hand, we have witnessed the deinstitutionalization of social relations (Touraine, 2005), which have impacted social cohesion and order. Additionally, we are facing an ecological crisis, a care crisis and a civilizational crisis (Herrero, 2016), crises which have been denounced by feminism in different parts of the world. Likewise, unemployment has spread, working conditions have deteriorated and public services are increasingly precarious, while inequalities between rich and poor have increased (Gaindegia, 2016; Gálvez, 2013). As a result, there is greater pessimism about the role of institutional democracy (Subirats, 2005), and at same time collective responses and different proposals regarding participatory democracy have emerged (Santos, 2004). Indeed, the need to rethink politics has led to an increase in citizen participation initiatives (Martínez-Palacios, 2017). All these changes have influenced how political action and the political subject are conceived, and new forms of political participation have gained importance (Authors), giving rise to models that are more open, less rigid, and coherent (Authors) and processes of subjectivation that are dynamic, contingent and decentralized and made and remade at each step (Berardi, 2013; Diz, 2019; García, 2019).

Basque society is similarly affected by all these new realities. With its population of 3,000,000, the Basque Country has had the historic claim of being an independent nation for a very long time. The region's political and armed conflict of recent decades has had a profound influence, along with all its unfortunate consequences (deaths, torture, attacks, repression by the State, and so on), but the political coordinates have been reconfigured in the wake of the ceasefire and the dissolution of ETA in 2011 and 2018, respectively. Furthermore, throughout most of the Basque Country there are two official languages, Spanish and Basque (Euskara), though they are far from equal; additional languages are also spoken in the territory as a result of migration. Coexisting in different languages and the simultaneous defense of the Basque language entails a great deal of social activity.

In this context, feminism is a growing social movement, becoming a transversal axis and a significant impetus for many other initiatives and movements. Feminists are proposing more dynamic and horizontal participation methods, paying attention to relationships between people and taking care of collective processes (Authors). Furthermore, feminist debates are becoming increasingly complex, refining the analysis of social and gender inequalities through an especially interesting intersection between queer, transfeminist, anti-racist and class perspectives and positions favorable to the recognition of the people's sovereignty. Likewise, such debates try to address the system of privileges and the lack of material and symbolic redistribution among women and the population in general from an approach that is accountable and self-critical. In fact, one of the challenges that the Basque feminist movement has on its political agenda and which it laid out at the 5th edition of Euskal Herria Feminist Conference (Durango, Bizkaia, November 2019) is to commit to a practice that is anti-racist, intersectional and decolonial. It is precisely for this reason that we believe that a space shared by feminist and anti-racist groups, such as the KPF, is a privileged laboratory not only for analysis, but also for learning and experimenting with necessary social transformations.

4. Results: The participatory process at the House and the debate over the kitchen

Before focusing on the debate at KPF, we would like to make two general points about the Women's Houses in the Basque Country. This first is to note that the horizontality of the dynamics surrounding House management is a key principle of those very dynamics, but this does not mean that there are no internal power imbalances. The second is that the Women's Houses are run in a joint manner by the feminist movement and local institutions, where many times the institutions themselves are the ones that initiate the establishment of a House in response to community demands, which in many cases are quasi-historical. This is the case for the KPF of Hernani.

Hernani's Women's House project emerged from a proposal by the city's Equal Opportunity Board (a body made up of citizens, equality specialists and political party representatives), following a participatory process that began in 2016. This process, which is still ongoing, was originated by the city council, but facilitation has been carried out by a cooperative that is specialized in participatory processes and group-facilitation methodologies. Members of relevant associations and groups, as well as individuals, participated in the process, and the meetings served as the primary space for debate and

decision-making, although there was also a steering group that coordinated and led the process.

As we have already noted, the Women's House will be home to various groups and individuals involved in the city's feminist movement as well as the immigrant association AMHER. AMHER's members come from more than twenty different countries and the association has various working groups. One such group is made up of women, and it participates in local feminist initiatives, including the creation of the Women's House. Thus, in addition to collaborating, both movements intersect. This enriches the process, and it also blurs, to a certain extent, the boundaries between the two groups. All those participating in the House process view the KPF as a point of reference against all types of discrimination, although they are also aware of the difficulties involved in managing "diversity" in its most general sense.

The people involved in these two groups are also involved in other initiatives in the city: youth movements, political parties and unions, environmental and cultural associations, and collectives that support the Basque language or the LGTBI community. Furthermore, many of the same people are engaged in more than one initiative at any one time, a phenomenon that characterizes Basque activism in general, as it tends to be multiple, multi-sited and interrelated. The fact that people in a city like Hernani participate in multiple initiatives, know each other, come together and collaborate enriches the project by involving a multiplicity of perspectives and understandings of sources of oppression. This guarantees a more inclusive vision regarding the building the common space, one that is supported by the affective relationships that bind the participants together. All of this directly affects their desire for "being and doing things together", an idea inspired by various authors (Authors; Gil, 2011; Kypriotaki, 2012). As we will explain later, this desire is an effective way to weave bridges between different groups and create solidarity networks.

Some of the most intense discussions that emerged in our analysis of the participatory process were related to the physical and architectural design of the house, the most illustrative example of this being the decision about whether to dedicate a specific space to the kitchen. This topic came up in all the conversations we had with the participants without us needing to prompt them. Some people gave it more importance than others, but it was a recurring topic, and everyone had an opinion about it; almost

from the beginning we realized that there was a sticking point there that would allow us to discern the process as a whole.

At the time when the interior layout of the House was being decided, some women from AMHER proposed that space be set aside for a large kitchen and a day-care for children, sparking a very passionate debate around both issues. Although the issues are related, we will save the second for another occasion[2] and focus on the controversy over the kitchen, which was more extensive.

Aisha, a woman who is very active in AMHER and also has ties with the feminists, summed it up by saying that the kitchen is a fundamental space for the women in AMHER. She argued that the space that they were using at that time, where they would meet and have their Spanish classes, was also equipped for cooking. It was a space that they used often, not only because cooking and eating in a group was the main event of any meeting. But it was also the case that having a space to prepare food enabled some women to earn money, because they received orders for "food from different countries around the world." Ángel, who is of Latin American origin and a member of the AMHER collective, noted in a conversation about women from African and Latin American countries: "Women from Morocco or other African countries have the custom of inviting people to their home and receiving them in the kitchen, and they always offer you something to eat as a way of expressing that you are welcome."

But for some other women at the meeting, the idea of the kitchen generated great contradictions and a very intense debate broke out. These women, who had spent many years in the feminist movement and had attained a high degree of education, were radically opposed since they problematized the fact of relating the specific spaces for women with the domestic tasks traditionally assigned to them. Additionally, they thought that using the KPF premises as a place of employment for some would a very difficult issue to administer and there would be endless consequences. Mari Karmen, one of the women opposed to the kitchen, reported that what had caught her attention most was the reaction of the young feminists who were not members of AMHER. Not only did the young women not understand the debate, they thought that having a kitchen would be a good opportunity to prepare vegan food and eat together, bringing the topic of food into the idea of group mutual care. In later conversations with her, she added that over time she had realized that what these young women stood for at the time was becoming the general trend in some feminist or mixed associations.

As we noted, the deliberations, which took place over several sessions, were complicated and of interest to everyone, although the idea of imposing some kind of limits on the physical space of the kitchen prevailed. The final agreement was that the House would have simple (rather than industrial grade) equipment for cooking, but the space would be multipurpose, meaning that meetings and other types of activities could be held there.

Before going further into the details of the debate over the kitchen, let us first review different feminist readings on the kitchen, readings that, as we will see, are reflected in the various positions found in the KPF. We will also take into account the cultural significance that the act of cooking has acquired in the Basque Country in recent years, as we believe that this significance undoubtedly influences the feminist position "against the kitchen". We will start with the latter.

4.1. The symbolic importance of the kitchen in Basque culture and the usurpation of female knowledge

As Mabel Gracia-Arnaiz (2014: 26) points out, based on the work of George Peter Murdock and Caterina Provost (1973),

> "ethnographically and historically, women have been and are—with the exception of those who are part of elite groups in differentiated societies—the people responsible for daily sustenance, especially in relation to the tasks of provisioning and preparing family meals."[3]

Gracia-Arnaiz also points to Stephen Mennell (1985): "In societies where a gender-differentiated kitchen exists, the role of the cook—the *chef*—is male" (Gracia, 2014). This distinction between cooks and chefs is present in very different societies, including Basque society. The differentiation is based on a gender-based division of labor that does not view many of the tasks performed by women to be labor; this division, in turn, is articulated, though not always linearly, through the dual characterization of space and a differential allocation of prestige. Thus, everything related to the female world is considered "domestic" and less prestigious, and everything related to the male world is considered public and more prestigious. The separation between male and female kitchens is a phenomenon that takes different forms in time and space. An example of this are televised cooking shows. Such shows enjoy tremendous popularity, and for

authors like Todd JM Holden (2013), they serve "to represent masculinity, associating the ideas of power, authority and possession with the labor of being chef" (Gracia, 2014).

Turning our attention to Basque society, the first thing that must be stressed is that the kitchen, just like the house, plays a central role in our cultural context. The kitchen is a place of caring that invokes the family and the act of gathering, and women have traditionally played a key role in this regard. But the practice of cooking in Basque society, like in many societies, is increasingly mediated by technology, processed foods and/or transformations in what caring looks like, and the home is now organized and designed around leisure. And the act of cooking, as a hobby in the *gourmet* sense, has become connected to the consumer society. Authors such as Anne Murcott (1983) hold that some technological advances "both simplify and complicate women's tasks but do not, crucially, not cancel them" (Gracia, 2014). At the same time, care should be taken with generalizations, since women's and families' situations can vary greatly if we take into account variables such as social class, age, occupation or educational level (Gracia, 2014 Hupkens, 2000; Moore; 1991).

Gathering to eat is fundamental to the social imaginary and identity at the Basque culture. It is an act that tends to be related to consumption and leisure, and one that we cannot fail to link with the primordial material and symbolic place occupied by what are known as gastronomic societies, which are member-operated clubs for private recreation and gatherings. Given that these societies are present in cities and neighborhoods, they play an important role in socialization, social engagement and the creation of networks of influence and power. But gastronomic societies have traditionally been led and run by men, and through them women have been socially excluded. Today, in the vast majority of cases women can be members, but they are not always allowed in all the spaces, especially the kitchen (Farapi, 2010).

The most paradigmatic example of the transformations that have occurred around the kitchen in the Basque Country is represented by the male cooks who run the Michelin-starred restaurants that are the drivers of what is known as the new Basque cuisine. It is a highly prestigious profession and very clearly gendered, and since the creation of the Basque Culinary Center (which is part of the Mondragon University, an affiliate of the Mondragon Corporation) it is a profession that is now associated with a university degree. Once again, we see the separation between female cooks and chefs, a phenomenon that is criticized among feminists, such as the criticism by anthropologist Del Valle (2000),

who has described it as a usurpation of women's knowledge: "... a usurpation that implies the denial of genealogies despite the fact that they make references to their grandmothers to highlight the traditional nature of their stews" (2000: 55).

In fact, inside the Basque Country as well as outside it, the belief that "men know more about cooking, do it with more imagination and refinement, and are better able handle large, industrial stoves, is a platitude shared by professionals and many food critics" (González; 1999: 14). Thus, men perch at the top of the pyramid in a lofty position, bounded by their exception and located in a time and space outside of everyday life, while women bear "the weight of [the pyramid's] broad and subordinated base, that of the everyday routine, next to the anonymous stove" (González; 1999: 14).

4.2. Feminist readings of the kitchen and the domestic

In the second half of the 20th century, feminists belonging to the hegemonic tradition of the time, that is, those in Anglo-European societies, began to problematize the link between the traditional role of women and the domestic sphere. The home was primarily seen as representing a symbolic space where the discipline and oppression of women occur. In the words of Priscilla Gac-Artigas (2009: 512), "everything belonging to the intimate (and exclusive) sphere of the woman, the family or the home was rejected because it was considered to be the cause of the subordinate status of women in a patriarchal society". This movement, with its desire to "integrate" women into the social sphere and belief that "the personal is political", politicized everything that happened in the intimate sphere, the home and social relations, among other arenas. Symbolically, we could say that this breaks with the ideology and archetype of a woman and a perfect "housewife".

This approach was also supported by the work of authors such as Michelle Rosaldo (1974), who, like other contemporary feminist anthropologists, investigated the symbolic causes of the subordination of women. She showed how the conceptualization and opposition between the "domestic" and the "public" arose at one point in Western history and provides the basis for a structural model that allows the subordination of women to be identified and explored, arguing that men have acquired authority, hierarchy and rank through their actions in a separate political world (Maquieira, 2001). However, Rosaldo (1980, 1983) soon revised her theory, aware of the universality of the categories and theories used and of the essentialist dualist schemes. In addition, it became clear that

the public/private dichotomy has a clear ethnocentric bias, and that it cannot be applied as an absolute model of analysis in the West, either, due to the difficulty of defining the limits and character of these areas as well as the complexity of reality (Authors; Maquieira, 2001). In that first period, artists like Martha Rosler, creator of the videoperformance *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975), also made a significant contribution to the criticism of the domestic.

If we widen our gaze, embrace other societies and other feminist traditions, and arrive at the present, we see that the approaches have not always been the same: while for many activists the kitchen remains a symbolic space that reflects women's oppression, for others it is or can be a space of agency, collective resistance and solidarity, where community and sisterhood are woven. In this regard, the impact of certain novels by renowned Latin American writers is relevant. Gac-Artigas (2009) analyzed the work of Rosario Castellanos, Isabel Allende, Laura Esquivel and Rosario Ferré, whose works turn the kitchen into a space for women's self-discovery and liberation.

A similar turn is also observed in ethnographies that review the anthropological theory of gender systems. Sherry Ortner and Harriet Whitehead (1996), for example, analyzed the distribution of power, authority and prestige, and emphasized "the preeminence of men in public space and women in private" (Curiel, 2019: 168). An example of a critical rereading of this tradition is Charlyne Curiel's (2019) research in Oaxaca. She proposes rethinking the analysis of the cargo or mayordomía system in Mixtec society (performed until the mid-eighties in some societies), which

> "made the work and activities carried out by cargo women invisible. Subsequently, the gender lens made this work visible, although it maintained the distinction between public and private for activities considered political, such as participation in assemblies, and domestic and less prestigious, such as cooking for a ritual—however, in all fiestas in Mexico, food is perhaps the most important element" (2019: 185-186).

4.3. "Entangled in the kitchen": the collective management of diversity and consensus building

Returning to the KPF, we observed that for some immigrant feminists, cooking had both a practical and cultural value; additionally, feminists of a certain age were, in a way, "feminists born and trained against cooking", and the youngest Basque women did

not see where the problem was. Many of these young women adhere to a kind of feminism that, inspired by approaches that emerged in recent decades, turns many of the previous theories around, and they are also influenced by a combination of alternative perspectives: from ecofeminist approaches and spiritualist worldviews, to the growing influx of communal feminisms and the postcolonial and decolonial theories of Latin American thinkers and activists. For them, the motto "put life at the center", which has become one of the signals of feminist identity today, allows them to fully accommodate the idea that cooking as a group is positive and can even be transformative.

Capitalist culture accelerates, commodifies and reduces time and space in the kitchen and, more generally, the daily tasks that sustain life, and many feminists are very sensitive to this process and demand time and space for collective care, turning it into an anti-capitalist symbol. And as we noted above, the decolonial critique has led many women to broaden, question and revise ideas and practices about intersectionality, geopolitics, social class, care, and the politicization of the personal. In the Basque context and throughout the Spanish State, this shift has come from the knowledge of and questioning by immigrant feminists who define themselves as racialized.

Meanwhile, what has happened or is happening with the kitchen in other Women's Houses in the Basque Country? Broadly speaking, in many of them there is a space equipped for preparing coffee or tea, or to heat food, but at the same time there is a tendency to put limits on this space in some way, sometimes intentionally and other times not. And if we leave our borders and focus on other spaces, such as the Women's House known as the "Centro Interculturale delle donne di Ramia" in Verona (Italy), an intercultural center for women that we are very familiar with, it allows us to find other nuances. That House is included in the social services provided by Verona's City Council and its operation is inspired by ideas from difference feminism. They conceive of that House as a new space, a "third space"[4], where the kitchen is a multipurpose space and a meeting place, serving as a space to eat together and, above all, a space that promotes the feeling of "being at home"; it is also is an economic strategy for people who have fewer resources. In addition, this House places great importance on recognizing all kinds of traditional and generational knowledge that is left out of the market.

Returning to the KPF, an aspect that we want to highlight from the debate about the kitchen is that it made many of the participants understand that what for some symbolized the danger of engaging in gender essentialisms was for others a kind

emancipation—a practical resource for their economic survival and gathering with others. Being able to listen to each other and bear witness to power relationships and privileges implies a willingness to move and go beyond one's principles, or at least, to make them more flexible. Although in the end the participants opted for the kitchen, it is viewed as a space for a multitude of uses. In short, thanks to the participants' previous experience and the facilitator's help, they were able to identify disagreements, leave room for dissent, and build consensus among everyone.

Feminism has ample expertise in the above regard, and the kitchen itself was used as a metaphor during the process. It is evident that this new House is already generating physical gatherings and will generate more in the future. Political and emotional relationships, especially when the politics of intimacy occur within them (Ahmed, 2004), are embodied and lead to the reinvention of ways to do politics (Authors). However, it bears repeating that managing diversity is not without complications and interferences. But it is precisely these interferences, as we will comment on in the next section, which allow for the development of a self-critical and regenerative approach. Thus, diversity is not merely an objective; rather it is more than anything else an exercise in unlearning certain attitudes, questioning one's own view of things and making the journey together.

The Women's Houses are spaces where new forms of solidarity, new methods and new ways of doing politics are being tested; spaces where "community is made", a community rooted in and committed to specific political, social and cultural coordinates, while aware of the need for thinking that goes beyond geographical and human borders. They are laboratories where horizontal forms of learning, mutual knowledge, conflict management, and practices of care regarding process, concrete projects, and the group are tested, experienced and developed. This is true even when projects sometimes fail. Because what is important is not the final product, but the path traveled together.

5. Discussion. The kitchen as a breaking of dichotomies and the renewal of politics

The debate analyzed here also allows us to highlight the importance of women's participation in urban planning and in all decisions related to the projects in which they are involved. This is true especially when these projects emerge from the joining of institutions and social movements, given the risks that are involved. In this sense, the real decision-making capacity that the participants have had in some Women's Houses has been quite a controversial issue (Authors), not only due to the very processes involved in

their creation but also due to the social limitations placed on the ability of certain groups, for example, immigrants, to participate in political decisions.

From the beginning of the process, both the feminists and the city government made the effort to bring together people of different origins, social positions and ages. And, in general, most of the people interviewed have been satisfied with the extent to which women have participated in the process and the diversity among the women. Nevertheless, with the help of the participants, we have identified a set of obstacles that particularly affect immigrant women. Such obstacles are not always easy to deal with, and in some cases, they are not even readily apparent. Obstacles include their lack of time to participate in socio-political action due to their employment situations and/or the lack of childcare networks; city policies that support multiculturalism (which is also promoted by progressive groups) but which often tend toward folklorism (particularly the privileging of activities related to food); and, most crucially, the division between "us" and "them", which is present even in the mind of the youngest women.

It is not our intention to present a simplistic or excessively positive reading of what happened, nor to present the case analyzed as a fluid and linear process, running cleanly from back to front and always moving forward. If we probe further into the pitfalls of the process, including the elements discussed in the previous paragraph, we find certain key points that conditioned the debate and that will still be present in the future. These key points include differences in education and experience in politics among the women in the KPF and the format in which the discussion took place, which has some features that favor mutual understanding and others that do not.

When Aintzane, the group facilitator, describes her experience with the process, several essential elements appear. On the one hand, the women who were strongly opposed to the kitchen had a higher level of education and greater linguistic competence from their years of being trained to defend their position in a group discussion. But this was not the case for many others, whether they were in favor of the kitchen or they did not understand what was happening, and who merely asked, time and again, why not have a kitchen. On the other hand, there is the fact that the sessions were held in Basque, facilitated by an interpreting service that was funded by the city council. While all of the women accepted the bilingual nature of the deliberations, this meant that the debate become less fluid at the most heated moments. This shows the difficulty that can arise when different languages are involved, even when technical and economic resources are

available. In any case, the role of the facilitator was essential (and praised by all); even when she did not fully understand what was happening, she made the effort to ensure that the floor was held equitably and to soften and streamline the tone of the discussion.

From our conversations with many of the participants, we have concluded that they were all aware of, or at least intuited, all the factors mentioned here—despite their not being made explicit as such—and in the end this awareness had a direct effect on participants' capacity to compromise and take more flexible positions. In other words, both the participants and the facilitator looked for mechanisms that could compensate for, even if only partially, the unequal position that some of the participants found themselves in. All of this is in keeping with their feminist philosophy and their long-standing political tradition.

But we would like to take the analysis a little further and delve into a couple of aspects mentioned in the introduction, aspects that strike us as defining. Our first observation has to do with the concrete form in which the discussion took place, which requires additional detail about how the meetings were held. From time to time, those participating in the House creation process would meet to discuss various topics, and everyone would sit in a large circle. A circular arrangement is "composed of a multiplicity of voices and hands (...) generates a specific way of sharing knowledge" (Cima, 2020: XIV), favors eye contact, listening and paying attention to others, as well as a sense of group belonging; this, in turn, enhances the space, making it more welcoming and promoting reciprocity (Cima, 2020). The center is an empty but non-neutral space which symbolizes, according to Alga (2019), the encounter and the possibility of thinking without predetermined schema. The facilitator is also in the center, occupying this special place while also being perfectly aware of her position. She moves around and "appears and disappears", synthesizing what is being said, asking questions—sewing the stitches that make it possible to baste the difficult discussions together. And all of this takes place within a framework of attachments, which play a key role in collective action. The attachments are learning and dialogue: the presence, the encounter between bodies that open themselves to relationships and to different languages and knowledge.

The second aspect, which is related to the above, has to do with a comment by Mari Karmen in which she stressed, in a tone that evoked the emotion she felt at that moment, that she was truly astonished by the reaction of some of the young feminists, who, despite having been schooled in Basque feminism, were surprised by what was

happening. What happened in that scene, and in similar other scenes they told us about? From our point of view, it was an instance of what Donna Haraway (1999) would call a diffraction, an interference in individual and collective thought. This would lead us to conclude that a map of diffractions and interferences that is drawn in a political and emotional territory that is ripe for criticism and self-criticism, such as the KPF, can introduce fissures and ask meaningful questions; in this case, we refer to the questioning of the dichotomous perspective of "us/them", "native-born/immigrant feminists". In other words, the accumulation of interferences facilitates an oblique, transversal look at feminist thought and action, which fractures verticality, the antagonistic gaze, and disposes those involved to be able to "widen the circle" (Alga and Cima, 2020) that they construct together. As long as circumstances are favorable, as was the case here.

In other words, in essence we believe the kitchen debate served to break, regardless of whether it was temporarily so, the dichotomy "us = native-born population/them = immigrant population." This dichotomy, despite the anti-racist ideology of social movements, is not easy to overcome, and feminists like Itsaso, another of the participants in the House process, consider it crucial to be very aware of the intersection of different factors and, crucially, not forget the importance of racialization, social class and educational training.

Recall that the process has not ended, not only because the building itself is not yet ready and the internal operating protocol is pending, but also because the work on feminist viewpoints continues. In other words, it is a consensus still under construction, not because the decisions made are not firm, but because it can be reviewed and completed later, and the shapes drawn do not have to be linear. In this regard, it is interesting that some of the participants who had not fully understood the reactions "against cooking", later told us that by taking part in other activities in the city, they were able to broaden their perspective. Specifically, they cite as a milestone a conference held in April 2018 as a tribute to Empar Pineda, a long-established Spanish feminist, who had been born in Hernani. The conference's organizers made an effort to integrate the feminist genealogy of the last five decades, which made it possible to contextualize the feminist proposals and analyses from the 1970s and 1980s.

In our field work, we have noticed that alliances emerge along with a renewed way of working together, which we have called "being and doing things together". This also happened in the case of Hernani. In this "being together", the projects and platforms

that are made up different groups and created on the fly through the participation of everyone are of the utmost importance. In general, we have also found that initiatives of a limited duration and that require a temporary commitment are particularly successful in today's social movements. This change is leading us to rethink socio-political participation. Activists involved in different movements have linked "being together" and "doing things together" with a renewed model of understanding citizenship that is based on active participation and clashes with other traditional ways of understanding citizenship, which are based on merely administrative or legal criteria.

The KPF's kitchen has been redefined as a privileged feminist space in which to think about all these questions. It is not because it the natural space for being a woman or women's relationship with the kitchen has prevailed, nor is it because it is believed that having a kitchen and cooking is better for a political space. Rather, it is precisely because this kitchen symbolizes the debate, the process, the listening, and the agreement reached among various political subjectivities that reformed themselves through the process. Although all those involved remember the deliberations as having been difficult, these debates are now part of the *body's memory* (Del Valle, 1997), which can be evoked and reactivated at another time as a way hold on to the awareness of how arduous but necessary it is to have a policy that is aware of intersectionality and internal and external inequalities, which promotes thinking that is constantly moving. Understanding a social action as a physical and emotional phenomenon provides the appropriate framework for investigating the place that community, relationships and emotions have within them (Author). The individual and collective subjectivities that we refer to in this article are in continuous transformation and allow the emergence of other ways of doing feminist politics and living a feminist life together (Ahmed, 2018).

Similarly, the specific case of the kitchen illustrates quite well the relevance of anthropological work. Being able to know the details of the discussions that took place, observing them in situ, and relating them to the feminist and cultural viewpoints that are behind ideas and experiences helps us better understand the limits and the complexity of the policies and social changes that are occurring and/or being proposed and be able to render account. Hernani's KPF is a project still under construction and one that will continue to be under construction after it begins operating. For only when under construction is it possible to face the dilemmas and difficulties of a politics that is aware of its (own) limits but aims for new agreements and consensus.

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1 https://kronika.eus/hernani/

2 Regarding the issue of day-care, the final decision was to guarantee day-care as a service, as has been done during local feminist activities, but not to dedicate an exclusive or permanent space to it.

[3] All the quotes in this article have been translated from Spanish by the authors, and thus they may vary slightly from versions published elsewhere in English

4 The “third spaces” are “relational places that, giving all the value to the subjective experience, the bodily experience of each one, allow mediation with social reality and

with institutions, from a position of strength or, rather, of empowerment" (Alga, 2020: VIII).

Ethnography of the kitchen: the Women's House, a space for feminist alliance and intercultural encounter

Abstract

In this article we delve into a debate about whether a kitchen was to be installed in a new Women's House in a city in the Basque Country (Hernani, Gipuzkoa). The ethnography presented here was conducted by observing the process around the creation of the House. Articulating the debate's main points led us to examine the dominant cultural assumptions about cooking in Basque society, especially in view of the opposing feminist positions on the kitchen and the domestic sphere. To understand the changes that took place, it is essential to consider the participants' previous experience, the shape the discussion took and the diffractions and interferences that occurred during the process, as well as the priority placed on "being and doing together" and being aware of the (self-)imposed limits while also allowing, even for a short period of time, the dichotomies that characterize and delimit this intercultural encounter to be questioned.

Keywords: Feminism, social movements, Basque society, Women's Houses, kitchen, alliances, diversity, dichotomies.

1. Introduction

The kitchen and the very act of cooking have very different social and cultural meanings, depending on their contexts. Indeed, anthropology has always shown interest in this area, though in recent decades it has become integrated with more general studies on food (Faizul, 2018). The kitchen is the place where life happens, is arranged and sustained; it is a political, physical, symbolic and affective space that allows us to reflect on very different themes. Beyond being a physical space, it is a social space "made up of material and symbolic elements, positioned actors, a producer of rhetoric, assumptions, mythologies, contradictions, hierarchies" (Licona García and Cortés, 2019: 172). It is also a space that is of particular interest from a feminist perspective (see, for example, Rosaldo, 1974; Abarca 2006; Gac-Artigas 2009; Williams 2014).

In this article, we delve into a debate about whether a kitchen was to be installed in a new Women's House in a city in the Basque Country and during which different feminist and cultural approaches emerged. Our unit of observation is the very process that

the participants undertook collectively in determining the interior design of the House how the House would be run. There is a traditional saying in Spanish—"hasta la cocina" (lit. 'as far as the kitchen')—which takes on three distinct meanings in our study: in its most ethnographic sense, it refers to "going to the core" of said process; in a more literal sense, it means examining the specific discussions about the consequences of there being or not being a kitchen in that space; and in a deeper and more procedural sense, we will address the "kitchen work" itself, including of the reflection and dialogue work that participants undertook collectively to make both this and other decisions with regard to the House itself and how it is run.

The participatory process that we analyze began in 2016 and took place in Hernani, a city of 20,000 inhabitants with a lively social, cultural and political life. It is located about ten kilometers from Donostia-San Sebastián, the capital of Gipuzkoa, which is one of the seven provinces of the Basque Country (located between France and Spain, on the Bay of Biscay and on both sides of the Pyrenees).

Women's Houses are municipal spaces pioneered by the feminist movement, in close collaboration with local institutions. They began to operate in 2003, and since then, they have spread throughout the Basque Country, uniting various types of women's associations, city councils, and equality advisory boards. The Houses run a variety of programs and have legal, labor and sexual health counseling services, and provide targeted support for precarious groups (Authors). The Women's House in Hernani is called *Kulturarteko Plaza Feminista* (Intercultural Feminist Plaza; in this article we will use the Basque abbreviation, KPF), because it houses both the local feminist and anti-racist movements, the latter of which is led by AMHER, the Multicultural Association of Hernani, a collective that works on issues related to immigration, interculturality and coexistence.

The primary aim of this article is to show how the debate about the kitchen allows us to investigate how association members manage social diversity and the work done to arrive at a consensus. It is a consensus that is, like the KPF project itself, under continuous construction, yet despite being unfinished, it is sufficiently stable to allow different genealogies, histories and practices to intersect and continue nurturing the consensus process. All this takes place in a social context of profound change that creates alliances between different parties and social movements. Achieving such alliances requires an openness to dialogue and to mutual knowledge and reciprocity, and it also enlists the application of specific techniques and know-how. The feminist movement has a know-

how that is not always present in other social movements (Authors); it is a know-how rooted in a long history of encounters and disagreements between different feminists, and one that allows for improvisation. It is a dialogue that materializes in the physical and emotional encounter between different people who make up the movement. Such an encounter means that theoretical and political displacements occur, responsibilities are assumed, and the observation of social inequalities becomes more complex. Thus, in using the concept of tension applied in Teresa Del Valle's (2005) study of feminism, the kitchen becomes a metaphor, a juncture of critical and creative tension: it is critical, because it is based on a position of continuous analysis of and judgment about problems and ways of acting; it is creative, because it promotes imagining the possible alternatives and solutions for achieving the necessary consensus.

To achieve our aim, we will first explain our research methodology and then we will describe our ethnographic framework and the social changes that Basque society is experiencing, including the changes related to how politics are done. In the sections that follow, we will delve into the debates and the various views that emerged in the conflict analyzed. We will refer to the dominant cultural assumptions and imaginaries held about cooking in Basque society, as well as to the opposing feminist positions regarding the domestic sphere and cooking, all of which paint a very complex theoretical and practical picture. We will also show that the participatory process is dynamic in two senses: on the one hand, the immediate issues at hand are addressed; on the other hand, as positions become more flexible and are projected into the future, it becomes necessary to build and maintain the conditions that keep relationships from breaking and allow the pact to be renewed and nurtured as many times as necessary. This is a process in which priority is placed on "being and doing together", which entails an awareness of (self-)imposed limits, but also allows for—even if only for a short period of time—the dichotomies that characterize and limit the intercultural encounter to be questioned. We end by discussing the results of our analysis and proposing and discussing some conclusions.

Following Maria Livia Alga (2018), we will assert that the KPF's approach to diversity gives rise to oblique and transversal readings of feminist convictions, which are enhanced by the interferences and diffraction (Haraway, 1999) that occur in the fixed and dichotomous understandings of cultural and gender differences. The result is that the political subjectivities that are formed, despite their being situated in a specific territory and society, tend to transgress and overflow "normative, sexual and cultural, linguistic

and geographical borders, which are not identified with a single 'world' nor a single category" (Alga, 2018: 147).

2. Methodology

The specific analysis that we present in this article is part of two research projects. The first, XXX, is financed by the Spanish Ministry of Economy, Industry and Competitiveness (anonymized). The second, XXX, was carried out in 2018 with financial support from the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa in agreement with the Vice-Rector's Office at the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU). The research team is composed of a large group of people belonging to different research groups funded by the Basque government. Specifically, the authors of this article are part of a long-standing research group that specializes in feminist anthropological and sociological studies.

Both projects aim to analyze actions taken by different social movements, focusing on the collaboration, alliances and interactions between different actors and movements (especially feminism, anti-racism, environmentalism and the promotion of the Basque language), because we believe that a close examination of these processes is essential for understanding how the different communities are (re)weaving themselves together. To that end, we implemented a qualitative and ethnographic methodological design, one that combines different research techniques.

The portion of the study that we present here is based on an extended ethnography (two years of fieldwork), where we participated in the process of creating the Women's House in Hernani, the KPF, from the very beginning. In addition, we observed very different events that were related to the House, to feminism and to the dynamics of other social movements in the municipality. Secondly, between 2018 and 2020, we conducted 13 in-depth interviews with people directly involved in the KPF and/or other socio-political initiatives in the municipality. Thirdly, we analyzed a variety of materials: the websites of various collectives and entities, articles from *Kronika*[1] (the local newspaper) and leaflets and manifestos, among others. Lastly, we compared our results with the results corresponding to the study of other Women's Houses in the province of Gipuzkoa, namely the analysis of the processes observed in the same study in the Houses in the cities of Arrasate, Donostia/San Sebastián and Errenteria. Though these Houses are all at different stages of operation, their social outreach and scope are similar; however, they differ in terms of the characteristics of the municipality and the people who participate in them.

3. Promoting social change in a changing society

In recent decades, there have been transformations in all areas of the so-called Western societies, from the political and economic to the most intimate; changes that have been highlighted further by the Covid-19 crisis. On one hand, we have witnessed the deinstitutionalization of social relations (Touraine, 2005), which have impacted social cohesion and order. Additionally, we are facing an ecological crisis, a care crisis and a civilizational crisis (Herrero, 2016), all of which feminism has denounced in different parts of the world. Likewise, unemployment has spread, working conditions have deteriorated and public services are increasingly precarious, while inequalities between rich and poor have increased (Gaindegia, 2016; Gálvez, 2013). As a result, there is greater pessimism about the role of institutional democracy (Subirats, 2005), and at same time collective responses and different proposals regarding participatory democracy have emerged (Santos, 2004). Indeed, the need to rethink politics has led to an increase in citizen participation initiatives (Martínez-Palacios, 2017). All these changes have influenced how political action and the political subject are conceived, and new forms of political participation have gained importance (Authors), giving rise to models that are more open, less rigid, and coherent (Authors) and processes of subjectivation that are dynamic, contingent and decentralized and made and remade at each step (Berardi, 2013; Diz, 2019; García, 2019).

Basque society is similarly affected by all these new realities. With a population of 3,000,000, the Basque Country has the historic claim of having been an independent nation for a very long time. The region's political and armed conflict of recent decades has had a profound influence, along with all its unfortunate consequences (deaths, torture, attacks, repression by the State, and so on), but the political coordinates have been reconfigured in the wake of the ceasefire and the dissolution of ETA in 2011 and 2018, respectively. Furthermore, throughout most of the Basque Country there are two official languages, Spanish and Basque (Euskara), though they are far from equal; additional languages are also spoken in the territory as a result of migration. Coexisting in different languages and simultaneously engaging in defense of the Basque language entails a great deal of social activity.

In this context, feminism is a growing social movement, becoming a transversal axis and a significant impetus for many other initiatives and movements. Feminists are proposing more dynamic and horizontal participation methods, paying attention to

relationships between people and taking care of collective processes (Authors). Furthermore, feminist debates are becoming increasingly complex, refining the analysis of social and gender inequalities through an especially interesting intersection between queer, transfeminist, anti-racist and class perspectives and positions favorable to the recognition of the people's sovereignty. Likewise, such debates try to address the system of privileges and the lack of material and symbolic redistribution among women and the population in general from an approach that is accountable and self-critical. In fact, one of the challenges that the Basque feminist movement has on its political agenda and which it laid out at the 5th edition of Euskal Herria Feminist Conference (Durango, Bizkaia, November 2019) is to commit to a practice that is anti-racist, intersectional and decolonial. It is precisely for this reason that we believe that a space shared by feminist and anti-racist groups, such as the KPF, is a privileged laboratory not only for analysis, but also for learning and experimenting with necessary social transformations.

4. Results: The participatory process at the House and the debate over the kitchen

Before focusing on the debate at KPF, we would like to make two general points about Women's Houses in the Basque Country. This first is to note that the horizontality of the dynamics surrounding House management is a key principle of those very dynamics, but this does not mean that there are no internal power imbalances. The second is that the Women's Houses are jointly run by the feminist movement and local institutions, where many times the institutions themselves initiate the establishment of a House in response to community demands, which in many cases are quasi-historical. This is the case for the KPF in Hernani.

Hernani's Women's House project emerged from a proposal by the city's Equal Opportunity Board (a body made up of citizens, equality specialists and political party representatives), following a participatory process that began in 2016. This process, which is still ongoing, was originated by the city council, but facilitation has been provided by a cooperative that is specialized in participatory processes and group-facilitation methodologies. Members of the relevant associations and groups, as well as individuals, participated in the process, and the meetings served as the primary space for debate and decision-making, although there was also a steering group that coordinated and led the process.

As we have already noted, the KPF will be home to various groups and individuals involved in the city's feminist movement as well as the immigrant association AMHER.

The members of AMHER represent more than twenty different countries and the association has various working groups. One such group is made up of women, and it participates in local feminist initiatives, including the creation of the Women's House. Thus, in addition to collaborating, the two movements intersect. This enriches the process, and it also blurs, to a certain extent, the boundaries between the two groups. All those participating in the House process view the KPF as a point of reference against all types of discrimination, although they are also aware of the difficulties involved in managing "diversity" in its most general sense.

The people involved in these two groups are also involved in other initiatives in the city: youth movements, political parties and unions, environmental and cultural associations, and collectives that support the Basque language or the LGTBI community. Furthermore, many of the same people are engaged in more than one initiative at any one time, a phenomenon that characterizes Basque activism in general, as it tends to be multiple, multi-sited and interrelated. The fact that people in a city like Hernani participate in multiple initiatives, know each other, come together and collaborate enriches the project by involving a multiplicity of perspectives and understandings of sources of oppression. This guarantees a more inclusive vision regarding the building the common space, one that is supported by the affective relationships that bind the participants together. All of this directly affects their desire for "being and doing things together", an idea inspired by various authors (Authors; Gil, 2011; Kypriotaki, 2012). As we will explain later, this desire is an effective way to weave bridges between different groups and create solidarity networks.

Some of the most intense discussions that emerged in our analysis of the participatory process were related to the physical and architectural design of the house, the most illustrative example of this being the decision about whether to dedicate a specific space to the kitchen. This topic came up in all the conversations we had with the participants without us needing to prompt them. Some people gave it more importance than others, but it was a recurring topic, and everyone had an opinion about it. Almost from the beginning we realized that there was a sticking point there that would allow us to discern the process as a whole.

At the time when the interior layout of the House was being decided, some women from AMHER proposed that space be set aside for a large kitchen and a day-care for children, sparking a very passionate debate around both issues. Although the issues are

related, we will save the second for another occasion[2] and focus on the controversy over the kitchen, which was more extensive.

Aisha, a woman who is very active in AMHER and also has ties with the feminists, summed it up by saying that the kitchen is a fundamental space for the women in AMHER. She argued that the space that they were using at that time, where they would meet and have their Spanish classes, was also equipped for cooking. It was a space that they used often, not only because cooking and eating as a group was the main event of any meeting. But it was also the case that having a space to prepare food enabled some women to earn money, because they received orders for "food from different countries around the world." Ángel, who is of Latin American origin and a member of the AMHER collective, noted in a conversation about women from African and Latin American countries: "Women from Morocco or other African countries have the custom of inviting people to their home and receiving them in the kitchen, and they always offer you something to eat as a way of expressing that you are welcome."

But for some other women at the meeting, the idea of the kitchen generated great contradictions, and an extremely intense debate broke out. These women, who had attained a high degree of education, had spent many years in the feminist movement and/or had been union members, and were experienced in debating political topics (in both Spanish and Basque), were radically opposed since they problematized the fact of relating the specific spaces for women with the domestic tasks traditionally assigned to them. Additionally, they thought that using the KPF premises as a place of employment for some would be a very difficult issue to administer and there would be endless consequences.

Mari Karmen, one of the women opposed to the kitchen, reported that what had caught her attention most was the reaction of the young feminists who were not members of AMHER. Not only did the young women not understand the debate, they thought that having a kitchen would be a good opportunity to prepare and eat vegan food together, bringing the topic of food into the idea of group mutual care. In later conversations with her, she added that over time she had realized that what these young women stood for at the time was becoming the general trend in some feminist or mixed associations. These were very young women, many of them either high school or university students who participated in their schools' feminist groups as well as in the Urumea transfeminist squat coordinated the young Basque feminists who organize *Udaleku Feministak,* or feminist

summer camps. As antispeciesism and veganism are found in the latter two spaces, any activity relative to the kitchen has become a political issue.

As we have noted, the deliberations, which took place over several sessions, were complicated and of interest to everyone, although the idea of imposing some kind of limit on the physical space of the kitchen prevailed. The final agreement was that the House would have simple (rather than industrial grade) equipment for cooking, but the space would be multipurpose, meaning that meetings and other types of activities could be held there.

Before going further into the details of the debate over the kitchen, let us first review different feminist readings on the kitchen, readings that, as we will see, are reflected in the various positions found in the KPF. We also take into account the cultural significance that the act of cooking has acquired in the Basque Country in recent years, as we believe that this significance undoubtedly influences the feminist position "against the kitchen". We start with the latter.

4.1. Feminist readings of the kitchen and the domestic

Mabel Gracia-Arnaiz (2014: 26), following the work of George Peter Murdock and Caterina Provost (1973), points out that

> "ethnographically and historically, women have been and are—with the exception of those who are part of elite groups in differentiated societies—the people responsible for daily sustenance, especially in relation to the tasks of provisioning and preparing family meals."[3]

Gracia-Arnaiz also points to Stephen Mennell (1985): "In societies where a gender-differentiated kitchen exists, the role of the cook—the *chef*—is male" (Gracia-Arnaiz, 2014). This distinction between cooks and chefs is present in very different societies, including Basque society. The differentiation is based on a gender-based division of labor that does not view many of the tasks performed by women to be labor; this division, in turn, is articulated, though not always linearly, through the dual characterization of space and a differential allocation of prestige. Thus, everything related to the female world is considered "domestic" and less prestigious, and everything related to the male world is considered public and more prestigious.

Gathering to eat is fundamental to the social imaginary and identity in Basque culture. It is an act that tends to be related to consumption and leisure, and one that we cannot fail to link with the primordial material and symbolic place occupied by what are

known as gastronomic societies (*txokoak* in Basque), which are member-operated clubs for private recreation and gatherings. Given that these societies are present in cities and neighborhoods, they play an important role in socialization, social engagement and the creation of networks of influence and power. But gastronomic societies have traditionally been led and run by men, and women have been socially excluded. Today, women can be members in the vast majority of cases, but they are not always allowed in all the spaces, especially the kitchen (Farapi, 2010).

The most paradigmatic example of the transformations that have occurred around the kitchen in the Basque Country is represented by the male cooks who run the Michelin-starred restaurants that are the drivers of what is known as new Basque cuisine. It is a highly prestigious profession and very clearly gendered, and since the creation of the Basque Culinary Center (which is part of the Mondragon University, an affiliate of the Mondragon Corporation) it is a profession that is now associated with a university degree. Once again, we see the separation between female cooks and chefs, a phenomenon criticized among feminists; one such criticism comes from anthropologist Del Valle (2000), who has described this male-dominated professionalization of the kitchen as a usurpation of women's knowledge: "... a usurpation that implies the denial of genealogies despite the fact that they make references to their grandmothers to highlight the traditional nature of their stews" (2000: 55).

The gender-differentiated kitchen, and the specific transformations and divisions engendered by this division in Basque society, allow us to understand the "disaffection" noted by feminists in our study who are local-born and over the age of 40 and the disagreement over whether to give the kitchen a central space in the KPF. Those feminists are also influenced by a feminist tradition that is critical of identifying women with the domestic arena, as we will detail below; this critique extends to the name given to this particular Women's House, *Plaza Feminista Intercultural*, where *plaza* (a public space) was expressly chosen over Spanish *casa* (house) or Basque *txoko* (private spaces).

In the second half of the 20th century, feminists belonging to the hegemonic tradition of the time, that is, those in Anglo-European societies, began to problematize the link between the traditional role of women and the domestic sphere. The home was primarily seen as representing a symbolic space where the discipline and oppression of women occur. In the words of Priscilla Gac-Artigas (2009: 512), "everything belonging to the intimate (and exclusive) sphere of the woman, the family or the home was rejected because it was considered to be the cause of the subordinate status of women in a

patriarchal society". This movement, with its desire to "integrate" women into the social sphere and its belief that "the personal is political", politicized everything that happened in the intimate sphere, in the home and in social relations, among other arenas. Symbolically, we could say that this breaks with the ideology and archetype of a woman and a perfect "housewife".

This approach was also supported by the work of authors such as Michelle Rosaldo (1974), who, like other contemporary feminist anthropologists, investigated the symbolic causes of the subordination of women. She showed how the conceptualization and opposition between the "domestic" and the "public" arose at one point in Western history and provided the basis for a structural model that allows the subordination of women to be identified and explored, arguing that men have acquired authority, hierarchy and rank through their actions in a separate political world (Maquieira, 2001). However, Rosaldo (1980, 1983) soon revised her theory, aware of the universality of the categories and theories used and of the essentialist dualist schemes. In addition, it became clear that the public/private dichotomy has a clear ethnocentric bias, and that it cannot be applied as an absolute model of analysis in the West, either, due to the difficulty of defining the limits and character of these areas as well as the complexity of reality (Authors; Maquieira, 2001).

The feminists who problematized the kitchen as a feminized space described it as "rejecting the housewife role and the actions that accompany it, while focusing on the attempts to integrate women into previously male-dominated public spaces" (Williams, 2014, 2016). But as Stacey J. Williams (ibid) points out, although they have been less frequently discussed, during that period there were also proposals that suggested engaging with cooking in ways that were subversive and challenged patriarchal institutions. Some feminists suggested time- and labor-saving cooking methods, encouraged men to cook, and proposed that women make money from cooking. These ways of politicizing cooking "were meant to increase women's control of economic resources", bringing about "a more gender-equal world" (Williams, 2016: 270). Moreover, there are other studies that show how the kitchen, as a collective space, can be a space for women's self-care and collective care. Meredith Abarca (2006), for example, in her work on views of food and the world from working-class Mexican and Mexican American women, showed how cooking allowed them to express themselves, strengthen family relationships, and create a world of shared meanings with other women. Thus, Abarca (ibid), explores the importance of the knowledge found in the practical, concrete, and temporal aspects of the ordinary

practice of everyday cooking. In this regard, the impact of certain novels by renowned Latin American writers is also relevant. Gac-Artigas (2009) analyzed the work of Rosario Castellanos, Isabel Allende, Laura Esquivel and Rosario Ferré, whose works turn the kitchen into a space for women's self-discovery and liberation.

4.2. "Entangled in the kitchen": the collective management of diversity and consensus building

Returning to the KPF, we observed that for some immigrant feminists, cooking had both a practical and cultural value; additionally, feminists of a certain age were, to one extent or other, "feminists born and trained to be against cooking", and the youngest Basque women did not see where the problem lay. Many of these young women adhere to a kind of feminism that, inspired by approaches that emerged in recent decades, turns over many of the previous theories, and they are also influenced by a combination of alternative perspectives: from ecofeminist approaches and spiritualist worldviews, to the growing influx of communal feminisms and the postcolonial and decolonial theories of Latin American thinkers and activists. For them, the motto "put life at the center", which has become one of the signals of feminist identity today, allows them to fully accommodate the idea that cooking as a group is positive and can even be transformative. As already noted, these young feminists participate in other political spaces that are committed to vegetarianism or veganism, where cooking and eating as a group is directly linked to one's politics.

Capitalist culture accelerates, commodifies and reduces time and space in the kitchen and, more generally, the daily tasks that sustain life, and many feminists are very sensitive to this process and demand time and space for collective care, turning it into an anti-capitalist symbol. And as we noted above, the decolonial critique has led many women to broaden, question and revise ideas and practices about intersectionality, geopolitics, social class, care, and the politicization of the personal. In the Basque context and throughout the Spanish State, this shift has come from the knowledge of and questioning by immigrant feminists who define themselves as racialized.

Meanwhile, what has happened or is happening with the kitchen in other Women's Houses in the Basque Country? Broadly speaking, in many of them there is a space equipped for preparing coffee or tea, or to heat food, but at the same time there is a tendency to put limits on this space in some way, sometimes intentionally and other times not. And if we leave our borders and focus on other spaces, such as the Women's House

known as the "Centro Interculturale delle donne di Ramia" in Verona (Italy), an intercultural center for women that we are very familiar with, it allows us to find other nuances. The House is included in the social services provided by Verona's City Council and its operation is inspired by ideas from difference feminism. They conceive of that House as a new space, a "third space"[4], where the kitchen is a multipurpose space and a meeting place, serving as a space to eat together and, above all, a space that promotes the feeling of "being at home"; it is also is an economic strategy for people who have fewer resources. In addition, the House places great importance on recognizing all kinds of traditional and generational knowledge that is left out of the market. Nevertheless, it's worth noting that in this case there was also a discussion about the suitability of using the space to carry out economic activity, the result being the creation of a cooperative.

Returning to the KPF, an aspect that we want to highlight from the debate about the kitchen is that it made many of the participants understand that what for some symbolized the danger of engaging in gender essentialisms was for others a kind emancipation—a practical resource for their economic survival and gathering with others. Being able to listen to each other and bear witness to power relationships and privileges implies a willingness to move and go beyond one's principles, or at least to make them more flexible. Although in the end the participants opted to create the kitchen, it is viewed as a space for a multitude of uses. In short, thanks to the participants' previous experience and the facilitator's help, they were able to identify disagreements, leave room for dissent, and build consensus among everyone. This is reflected in the way meetings ended, with everyone sitting in a circle and facing the other participants; once the meeting was over, lively conversation followed, both in the meeting room and on the way home.

Feminism has ample expertise in the above regard, and the kitchen itself was used as a metaphor during the process. It is evident that this new House is already generating physical gatherings and will generate more in the future. Political and emotional relationships, especially when the politics of intimacy occur within them (Ahmed, 2004), are embodied and lead to the reinvention of ways to do politics (Authors). In this regard, the key elements were how the sessions ran—always in movement and maintaining physical contact, alternating small group work with work in the larger circle—and the facilitators' ability to give voice to all voices, soothe heated spirits and redirect the discussion when necessary. However, it bears repeating that managing diversity is not without complications and interferences. But it is precisely these interferences, as we will comment on in the next section, which allow for the development of a self-critical and

regenerative approach. Thus, diversity is not merely an objective; rather, it is more than anything else an exercise in unlearning certain attitudes, questioning one's own view of things and making the journey together.

The Women's Houses are spaces where new forms of solidarity, new methods and new ways of doing politics are being tested; spaces where "community is made", a community rooted in and committed to specific political, social and cultural coordinates, while being aware of the need for thinking that goes beyond geographical and human borders. They are laboratories where horizontal forms of learning, mutual knowledge, conflict management, and practices of care regarding process, concrete projects, and the group are tested, experienced and developed. This is true even when projects sometimes fail. Because what is important is not the final product, but the path traveled together.

5. Discussion. The kitchen as a breaking of dichotomies and the renewal of politics

The debate analyzed here also allows us to highlight the importance of women's participation in urban planning and in all decisions related to the projects in which they are involved. This is true especially when these projects emerge from the joining of institutions and social movements, given the risks that are involved. In this sense, the real decision-making capacity that the participants have had in some Women's Houses has been quite a controversial issue (Authors), not only due to the very processes involved in their creation but also due to the social limitations placed on the ability of certain groups, for example, immigrants, to participate in political decisions.

From the beginning of the process, both the feminists and the city government made the effort to bring together people of different origins, social positions and ages. In general, most of the people interviewed have been satisfied with the extent to which women have participated in the process and the diversity among the women. Nevertheless, with the help of the participants, we have identified a set of obstacles that particularly affect immigrant women. Such obstacles are not always easy to deal with, and in some cases, they are not even readily apparent. Obstacles include their lack of time for participating in socio-political action due to their employment situations and/or the lack of childcare networks; city policies that support multiculturalism (which is also promoted by progressive groups) but which often tend toward folklorism (particularly the privileging of activities related to food); and, most crucially, the division between "us" and "them", which is present even in the mind of the youngest women. Even though this

issue was always questioned when theorized about in the interviews, in more spontaneous speech and discussions, this issue often emerged.

It is not our intention to present a simplistic or excessively positive reading of what happened, nor to present the case analyzed as a fluid and linear process, running cleanly from back to front and always moving forward. If we probe further into the pitfalls of the process, including the elements discussed in the previous paragraph, we find certain key points that conditioned the debate and that will still be present in the future. These key points include differences in education and experience in politics among the women in the KPF and the format in which the discussion took place, which has some features that favor mutual understanding and others that do not.

When Aintzane, the group facilitator, describes her experience with the process, several essential elements appear. On the one hand, the women who were strongly opposed to the kitchen had a higher level of education and greater linguistic competence from their years of being trained to defend their position in a group discussion. But this was not the case for many others—whether they were in favor of the kitchen or they did not understand what was happening—who merely asked, time and again, why not have a kitchen. On the other hand, there is the fact that the sessions were held in Basque, facilitated by an interpreting service that was funded by the city council. While all of the women accepted the bilingual nature of the deliberations, this meant that the debate became less fluid at the most heated moments. This shows the difficulty that can arise when different languages are involved, even when technical and economic resources are available. In any case, the role of the facilitator was essential (and praised by all); even when she did not fully understand what was happening, she made the effort to ensure that the floor was held equitably and to soften and streamline the tone of the discussion. Aintzane uses the term "orthopedic" to refer to communication during the discussions: arguments in favor of the kitchen made in Spanish, often expressed in a less than fluid manner, and arguments against the kitchen made in Basque, often dynamically and loudly; words that cross each other but don't make it to the other side. In our interview with Pilar, she elaborates on the simultaneous interpretation used to facilitate communication between everyone and adds an arresting visual image of these moments: "Yes, but the immigrant women really stood out, they wore little antennas (from the headsets they wore to hear the interpreter) and sat together".

From our conversations with many of the participants, we have concluded that they were all aware of, or at least intuited, all the factors mentioned here—despite their

not being made explicit as such—and in the end this awareness had a direct effect on participants' capacity to compromise and take more flexible positions. In other words, both the participants and the facilitator looked for mechanisms that could compensate for, even if only partially, the unequal position that some of the participants found themselves in. All of this is in keeping with their feminist philosophy and their long-standing political tradition.

But we would like to take the analysis a little further and delve into a couple of aspects mentioned in the introduction, aspects that strike us as defining. The first has to do with the concrete form in which the discussion took place, which requires additional detail about how the meetings were held. From time to time, those participating in the House creation process would meet to discuss various topics, and everyone would sit in a large circle. A circular arrangement "composed of a multiplicity of voices and hands (...) generates a specific way of sharing knowledge" (Cima, 2020: XIV), favors eye contact, listening and paying attention to others, as well as a sense of group belonging; this, in turn, enhances the space, making it more welcoming and promoting reciprocity (Cima, 2020). The center is an empty but non-neutral space which symbolizes, according to Alga (2019), the encounter and the possibility of thinking without predetermined schema. The facilitator is also in the center, occupying this special place while also being perfectly aware of her position. She moves around and "appears and disappears", synthesizing what is being said, asking questions—sewing the stitches that make it possible to baste the difficult discussions together. And all of this takes place within a framework of attachments, which play a key role in collective action. The attachments are learning and dialogue: the presence, the encounter between bodies that open themselves to relationships and to different languages and knowledge.

The second aspect, which is related to the previous one, has to do with a comment by Mari Karmen in which she stressed, in a tone that evoked the emotion she felt at that moment, that she was genuinely astonished by the reaction of some of the young feminists, who, despite having been schooled in Basque feminism, were surprised by what was happening. From our point of view, it was an instance of what Donna Haraway (1999) would call a diffraction, an interference in individual and collective thought. This optical metaphor allows Haraway to include two aspects that she considers key to the critical exercise: the ability to look from the other side and to recuperate views that have been kept outside the hegemonic rationales. This is precisely what we believe was

happening in this scene and in many other similar scenes that occurred during the process of creating the KPF.

This would lead us to conclude that a map of diffractions and interferences that is drawn in a political and emotional territory that is ripe for criticism and self-criticism, such as the KPF, can introduce fissures and raise meaningful questions; in this case, we refer to the questioning of the dichotomous perspective of "us/them", "native-born/immigrant feminists". In other words, the accumulation of interferences facilitates an oblique, transversal look at feminist thought and action, which fractures verticality and the antagonistic gaze, and disposes those involved toward "widening the circle" (Alga and Cima, 2020) that they construct together. As long as circumstances are favorable, that is, as was the case here.

In other words, in essence we believe the kitchen debate served to break, regardless of whether it was temporarily so, the dichotomy "us = native-born population/them = immigrant population." This dichotomy, despite the anti-racist ideology of social movements, is not easy to overcome, and feminists like Itsaso, another of the participants in the House creation process, consider it crucial that participants be very aware of the intersection of different factors and, crucially, not forget the importance of racialization, social class and educational training.

Recall that the process has not ended, not only because the building itself is not yet ready and the internal operating protocol is pending, but also because the work on feminist viewpoints continues. In other words, it is a consensus still under construction, not because the decisions made are not firm, but because it can be reviewed and completed later, and the shapes drawn do not have to be linear. In this regard, it is interesting that some of the participants who had not fully understood the reactions "against cooking" later told us that, by taking part in other activities in the city, they were able to broaden their perspective. Specifically, they cite a conference held in April 2018 as a tribute to Empar Pineda, a long-established Spanish feminist, who had been born in Hernani, as a watershed moment. The conference's organizers made an effort to integrate the feminist genealogy of the last five decades, which made it possible to contextualize the feminist proposals and analyses from the 1970s and 1980s.

In our fieldwork, we have noticed that alliances emerge along with a renewed way of working together, which we have called "being and doing things together". This also happened in the case of Hernani. In this "being together", the projects and platforms that are made up different groups and created on the fly through the participation of everyone

are of the utmost importance. In general, we have also found that initiatives of a limited duration and that require a temporary commitment are particularly successful in today's social movements. This change is leading us to rethink socio-political participation. Activists involved in different movements have linked "being together" and "doing things together" with a renewed model of understanding citizenship that is based on active participation and clashes with other traditional ways of understanding citizenship, which are based on merely administrative or legal criteria.

The KPF's kitchen has been redefined as a privileged feminist space in which to think about all these questions. It is not because it is the natural space for being a woman or because women's relationship with the kitchen has prevailed, nor is it because it is believed that having a kitchen and cooking is better for a political space. Rather, it is precisely because this kitchen symbolizes the debate, the process, the listening, and the agreement reached among various political subjectivities that reformed themselves through the process. Although all those involved remember the deliberations as having been difficult, these debates are now part of the *body's memory* (Del Valle, 1997), which can be evoked and reactivated at another time as a way hold on to the awareness of how arduous but necessary it is to have a policy that is aware of intersectionality and internal and external inequalities, which promotes thinking that is constantly moving. Understanding a social action as a physical and emotional phenomenon provides the appropriate framework for investigating the place that community, relationships and emotions have within them (Author). The individual and collective subjectivities that we refer to in this article are in continuous transformation and allow the emergence of other ways of doing feminist politics and living a feminist life together (Ahmed, 2018).

Similarly, the specific case of the kitchen illustrates quite well the relevance of anthropological work. Being able to know the details of the discussions that took place, observing them in situ, and relating them to the feminist and cultural viewpoints that are behind ideas and experiences helps us better understand the limits and the complexity of the policies and social changes that are occurring and/or being proposed and be able to render account. Hernani's KPF is a project still under construction and one that will continue to be under construction after it begins operating. For only when under construction is it possible to face the dilemmas and difficulties of a politics that is aware of its (own) limits but aims for new agreements and consensus.

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1 https://kronika.eus/hernani/

2 Regarding the issue of day-care, the final decision was to guarantee day-care as a service, as has been done during local feminist activities, but not to dedicate an exclusive or permanent space to it.

3 All the quotes in this article have been translated from Spanish by the authors, and thus they may vary slightly from versions published elsewhere in English.

4 The “third spaces” are “relational places that, giving all the value to the subjective experience, the bodily experience of each one, allow mediation with social reality and with institutions, from a position of strength or, rather, of empowerment” (Alga, 2020: VIII).