COMMUNAL FEMINISM AND SOCIAL SELF-DEFENSE

COLLECTIVISING OUR NEEDS AND ORGANISING OUR LIVES

email : womenstructureprosfygika@riseup.net

instgram: womenstructureprosfygika

Women's Structure of the Community of Squatted Prosfygika

Women's structure of the Community of Squatted Prosfygika

The Women's Structure of Sy.Ka.Pro started for the first time in 2016 and restarted in 2019, initially as a Women's Café, as a way for all the women of the neighborhood to meet and to get to know each other. In our neighborhood we were many women, from every corner of the planet, with different languages, religions, cultures, ages, beliefs, perceptions. We were women and femininities which may never had our voices heard, who had health issues and didn't even have access to health care, who had problems within our families or relationships, who had experienced or were experiencing abusive behaviors, who had legal issues and more. We started talking about what was concerning us and sharing our experiences, which we found were common, even though we were very different from each other. The realization of the common experiences of all women from below and our shared daily life in a community formed the basis of our collectivization, which then evolved with trust building into comradeship. Thus, we began to organize our assembly with specific topics and priorities and set goals, using tools of the Community and of our constitute framework, which were our common agreements.

At the same time, guided by radical and revolutionary movements and struggles both from the past and the present time, we took tools and methods and created our own reality.

In the last five years, we have worked a lot on problematic behaviors that have arisen within the Community and have been based on gender and patriarchal characteristics. The various tools, processes and methods we have used have been based on collective responsibility and commitment in order to solve, to not reproduce the problematic behaviors and to build a common understanding towards those patriarchal structures that we all carry in our attitudes and behaviors and that we have to deconstruct. We highlighted the issues of patriarchy as collective ones and not as issues that concern only a part of a group (women, femininities, queer people). We worked together with all the parts of the community to collectivize the tools and processes and especially the perception in relation to which attitudes and behaviors are considered problematic and patriarchal and the way that we will create an environment in which such attitudes and behaviors will be prevented at their inception, will be managed collectively and deterred or even eliminated.

At the same time, we put emphasis on our own empowerment and on the recognition of the assimilation of patriarchy from our own side. Supporting each other and taking responsibility for each other, we began a process aimed at exploring ways in which we could take space and step forward, not antagonistically with the rest of our community, our comrades and our families, but instead in a supportive and promotive way for our collective empowerment. It was, and it is still now, common understanding for us that it is not enough to just acknowledge and point out the patriarchal attitudes that we face. It is a priority for us to find how to not reproduce ourselves the same culture that oppresses and undermines us, how we can do common internal work, how we can challenge facts and internalized roles, how we can shift and how we can promote a new proposal of life as a whole. For us, in the Community of Squatted Prosfygika, this proposal is our framework itself, which permeates every aspect of our daily life: from our cooperation in common work to our collective processes of critique and self-critique, from how we build our relationships to our participation and role inside the struggles, from our common recognition - understanding of problems and their resolution to the construction of another collective culture, against the dominant one.

As Women's Structure of Sy.Ka.Pro we recognized from the beginning that there is no personal freedom without collective struggle and without cost and we decided to stand on the front line against what oppresses us and undermines our lives and dignity. Thus, we have participated in a series of social struggles, solidarity actions, marches, interventions, gatherings and we aim in the future to strengthen our presence in social struggles and our connections with other women's and femininities' organizations and collectives.

A step towards this opening was the creation of the physical space of the Women's Structure, a double apartment in the neighborhood of Squatted Prosfygika, which was designed to accommodate all our common activities and needs. From being the space for our assemblies, film screenings, events and celebrations, to operating as the kitchen for collective cooking and for making handmade products for our internal economy but also as a hostel for women and femininities in need, the "double house" was our own first response to our needs and a step for us to share our experiences and the experience of our collective life and culture with other female comrades.

In November 2024 we held our first two-day open event on the topic of "Communal Feminism & Social Self-Defence", the product of which is this brochure, in which we tried to condense the values, processes, relationships, culture and horizontal legal system from below, within the living process of self-institution and autonomy of a community of struggle. We hope for it to be a contribution for those who look forward to social liberation and build here and now another world in rupture with the existing one.

Community and comradeship relationship the base of revolutionary culture

The foundations of patriarchy had already been laid even before the shaping of class society, as we know it today, with the appearance of the first accumulation of wealth and with the changing of power dynamics. It was the transition from the power of the community to the power of people, meaning the power of an oligarchy. So throughout the years the few systemized their hegemony over the many, oppressing them and sharing roles with this resulting in increased exploitation and increased profits of the relevant capital. Capitalism was based on this condition and consolidated through colonialism over entire peoples, over the entire oppressed class and on the role of the social gender.

Throughout history, oppression based on discrimination and the role of gender has been the cause and often the centre for the struggles of women and femininities and has shaped stages and manifestations of feminism. These struggles, even if some were assimilated into the system, have left a legacy in the collective memory and experience of movements and societies. In some feminist struggles we see that the real needs of women of the oppressed classes are not included nor prioritized, and this happens because those issues are not put into a holistic basis. If this happened, it would lead to the realization that the abolition of sexism and patriarchy cannot be achieved without the abolition of classes, hierarchies, dominance relationships and political beliefs that support the same system that creates those inequalities. After all, women's struggles that are not linked to the overall struggle for social liberation are themselves adapted within the patriarchal imaginary that wants them to be introverted, fragmented and in minority.

Within our movement, we understand that we are experiencing this kind of contradictions among ourselves as well, as long as the roles of the oppressor and the oppressed are being preserved. These roles seem to be the only options for survival within the social fabric inside the bipolar world of capitalism and patriarchy, with the oppressed part seeking a place within this dipole.

Thus, they either recognize and accept themselves fatalistically without any perspective, or they claim an upgrading of their position within a hierarchical society, which means exercising power on some others and thus performing the role of the oppressor. Those contradictions that the movements themselves carry have also been reflected within the history of the social struggles. It is a constant responsibility of the struggling subjects themselves to restore and re-establish each time the only option for the survival of society, which is the abolition of the authoritarian framework in which it exists. By breaking this dipole, our gaze turns towards the perspective of a third option, which is the path to self-organization and communitarianism, drawing in essence from the legacy of human societies that have survived for thousands of years and continue to exist to this day in the non-western world. Our gaze turns towards the necessity of repositioning of this legacy, at the core of which lies horizontality, solidarity, sharing, collectivization, the recognition of the self as a part of the whole, into the modern world. Through the collective experience and the experience within the community we found ourselves closer to the basis of communal feminism.

Even if most of us are either raised within European feminism or, for those of us who have not been born in the western world it is still an important reference point, the experience of living and struggling inside a community has helped us to see its limitations clearly. Since it has at its core individualism and therefore individual rights, it comes into contradiction with the concept and the essence of community and collectivization, so it contradicts the very reality that proves that each one of us is an organic part of a larger whole. Having as a horizon this third perspective, that opens up in front of us, we are increasingly aware that our freedom is impossible if it is not freedom for everyone. The community itself clarifies be this necessity for holistic freedom, and communal feminism enhances its realization, since it constitutes the horizontal dimension of the community. In the same way, every community realizes that its autonomy is built in parallel with the creation of a web of connections and interactions with the other communities. Finally, each struggling community realizes that the road to social liberation cannot be in the direction of closeness and privatization, but opens in parallel and dialectically with the building of the bigger community of the communities of the struggling people.

We, as Women's Structure of the Community of Squatted Prosfygika, as women and femininities from below we realized that gender is not enough to unite us and we self-organized beyond age, racial, cultural, religious and political differences. Already living inside a community, we had the ground for the first step which is the collectivization of our needs. The answers to these needs were and of course continue to be given by ourselves. By actively participating in structures and processes of a self-organized community, we take the responsibility and we commit here and now, but also with a long-term perspective. Every time that we achieve collectively giving an answer, we consolidate a basis on which we build the next steps of our collective movement.

The proposal of communal feminism is the abolition of authoritarian relationships and the creation of relationships of equality and comradeship. From our part, we believe that the first step for building these relationships is the understanding of our diversity as part of ourselves rather than our whole identity, which allows us to see ourselves beyond the narrow boundaries of the imposed identities. This process is not a personal journey, but is walked collectively. It requires trust, responsibility, commitment and openness, interaction, consensus, consistency, criticism and self-criticism.

It is an ongoing process of getting rid of the dominant culture, that allows us to connect dialectically with ourselves and those around us and to smoothen our contradictions.It is, in other words, a process of collective transition.

What do these relationships mean in practice? We live and decide commonly, we work together in the structures and respond collectively to our needs, we care and look after each other. All this culture infuses every aspect of our life and daily routine. Based on this culture we realize that any kind of relationship, in order not to be authoritarian, must have the characteristics of a comradeship relationship. The comradeship relationships are the most complete and inclusive ones that can be created between people. They involve all kinds of relationships inside their core and cover all the emotional needs, support, tenderness, sharing, trust, security. While we are getting trained in this kind of relationships, we are able to understand them in broader fields and not just on the political plane. They are the relationships with our children, the romantic relationships, the friendship relationships and all kinds of interpersonal ones. The comradeship that is created forms a total system of values and attitudes, that is expressed from the way that you will talk to your neighbor to the way you will stand in the street and won't leave anyone behind. In essence, those bonds form our collective strength.

All of the above, in other words the perception that our freedom is not an individual but a collective case and is only gained through struggle, the recognition of ourselves and others on equal terms and the way in which we relate with each other at all levels, are processes through which another culture is being built, in rupture with the dominant one.

Transformative justice: The dialectic of transition inside the community framework

People who are on common ground are collectivizing themselves upon the need, whether it is practical or conscious. They start with the recognition of what they don't want and why they don't want it. For example, I don't want to be underestimated, I don't want to live with my abusive husband, I don't want to live under cruel labor exploitation, I don't want to live in a system that breeds exploitation and injustice, I don't want war, I don't want the destruction of nature and so on. Throughout this path, that many times has been walked with different speeds from different places, it becomes clear from the beginning that the fulfillment of needs passes through the path of collectivization and organization. So, the imaginary starts being built, which goes beyond "what I don't want" and forms the "what I want", that doesn't concern only the individual but all the people, not just the close ones but the whole of the society.

A collective will for respect, dignity, equality, solidarity, peace, beauty of relationships, of self-institution. For all of this to take shape, we need a framework which is nothing other than the common agreements between all parts, to be able to live together. The main pillars of this common framework are solidarity, sharing and recognition of common responsibility, horizontality, commitment of every individual separately within the collective, within a common daily life.

These common steps on the basis of these principles and values create a common perspective of the life that we want to live. In this way, we learn how each part from its place can take responsibility for maintaining and promoting the common agreements. We learn how to tear off the tangle of our habits and to weave a web of common understandings, perceptions, attitudes and after all habits that altogether form a common attitude and culture. Thus, the imaginary is verified here and now, creating another paradigm of life with a realistic perspective for society as a whole.

Every self-organized system, in order to be able to exist with the above terms, is based on a system of justice that is formed within it. The justice always reflects the prevailing culture and ethics of each society/community, while at the same time it shapes it and is being shaped by it.

In self-organized systems the organization of people starts from the grassroots, with the basic goal of coexistence, cohesion and the perspective of the collective body. So law itself is based on values and evolves dialectically and along with the overall culture. It takes shape with the first common agreements of the different parts for the forming of the collective, which is the basis of self-institution. It is a dynamic process which, as it evolves from the formal to the substantial, is transformed into the culture described above.

In all the movements and projects of both the past and the present, the common factor of justice systems is the perception that has to do with facing problematic behaviors. They do not operate in terms of exclusion, but emphasize the collective dealing, the participation into the solution and the shifting in the terms of the community. Influenced by the paradigm of these projects, we have developed a mentality adapted to our own condition. The community has developed its own justice system and as women and femininities of the community we have the key role in realizing and promoting this justice system. We recognize that this responsibility falls more on us, since always as women and femininities we are the most underprivileged and oppressed parts of any society. If not us, then who?

We start from the understanding that our problematic behaviors/stances have a common basis as long as we are trained by the same system. The key issues that we perceive as problematic are those that stem from the dominant culture of individualism and antagonism and are expressed as underestimation, manipulation, separation of the self from the collective, imposition of individual limits and filters, dominant, hegemonic and authoritarian behaviors, elitism, instrumentalization, objectification and sexualization of other people, gender discrimination and oppression, closeness, submissiveness, delegation, denial of responsibility and commitment.

The problematic behaviors appear in minor or major incidents in everyday life and it is our responsibility to be aware of them, regardless of their level and intensity. For example, a moment of tension or aggression that occurs within a group of people who have undertaken a practical task, e.g. cleaning, painting a house, etc., can extend to the whole community. The problematic behavior may start from one person and involve the whole group, which means that regardless of who started it, everyone got involved by maintaining a competitive field. Then we are talking about a problematic situation.

In contrast, if the collective body takes a common stance and stops the problematic behavior at the moment it starts, we are talking about a common perception.

Another issue we often face is the closeness in the interpersonal relationships, which depending on the type of relationship is reflected in different forms. This closeness is based on control, either it is control over maintaining the image that the individual wants to have of for his/her/their self or control over others and over the relationship itself. The most concrete expression of this control, sometimes in the form of manipulation and sometimes in the form of repression is being expressed inside romantic and familial relationships. These relationships are the main field of expression of possessiveness, which is fully legitimized in the social consciousness. As long as this closeness is not commonly perceived as a problem in an organized collective body and as long as the problematic stance remains unseen by the collective gaze, relationships have no perspective to be healthy nor to be comradeship relationships, as described above, but only reproduce the vicious cycle of toxicity.

The next common problematic stance is elitism, which is the attitude from the outside and from above, often in the disguise of an ideological label. This means that people maintain a distance, judging everything from far away, without entering into the situation to realize collectively what they think is right. Thus, any critique moves within the sphere of idealism, while individuals maintain a position from above, participating selectively and on unequal terms, claiming purity and a privilege for themselves. In essence it is a choice of non-commitment and indifference towards the choices and evolution of the collective body, which to an extreme level can reach to its undermining.

The next example is the recognition of hierarchies, which captures all the assimilation of the structuring of patriarchy, meaning classification, evaluation, competition, underestimation, submissiveness, imposition, maintenance of somebody's position. This recognition of hierarchies is expressed either in hegemonic characteristics, like not recognizing others on equal terms, or through delegation, or by attributing to different roles authoritative characteristics. In fact, such attitudes break down the horizontality, self-organization, empowerment and autonomy, and they dilute the collective perception.

The basic common feature of all the above problematic behaviors, whether it has to do with automatisms or conscious denial, is the reproduction of the dominant culture of individualism and privatization. Thus, this big "ego" is formed and distances people from collectivization and from the community, preventing the creation of meaningful bonds between people in horizontal terms. If while an individual wants to engage within collective bodies but insist on maintaining this "ego", then they use the territory instrumentally undermining the self-determination of the collective body.

Any process of recognizing and solving a problematic stance is in fact a greater or smaller act of attributing justice within the collective framework. In this sense, the collective body that constitutes the community is the only one that has the responsibility, the duty and power to do so. That is why it is always done on the basis of the collective criteria which are our own agreements and it starts with the process of critique. With the reestablishment of the common agreements we are able to collectively recognize what behaviors and attitudes work promotively to the agreements and the common perspective and which ones do not.

The critique is not based on personal filters and likes/dislikes, nor on projections, deductions, etc., nor, of course, with a cannibalistic attitude, but it is a political and ongoing process that takes into account the individual, the circumstances, the dynamics, etc. and the securitization of the community itself.

Moving away from the problematic behavior requires commitment to the collective process of resolution, on the logic that each problematic stance is part of us and with the recognition of the collective responsibility. Because each time that a problematic behavior finds space to develop, it means that the collective body has allowed it to happen, so the responsibility is collective and so the resolution is dealt with collectively. When someone criticizes another person, he/she/they automatically commit to not reproduce the same behavior or stance, so that the critique has practical impact and does not remain in a theoretical framework. The process of deconstructing the features that build the problematic stance of the individual is the process of self-critique. To begin such a process, the individual initially must want to work on that deconstruction.

Then the person must accept that he/she/they constitute more or less a product of this system and therefore carry the dominant culture and of course the person must recognize the collective body and have the willingness to be part of it.

At a collective level, the first stage of the process of resolution is the acknowledgment of the behavior that is outside of the collective framework and the proposal for common work on the behavior. In case that an individual has a repetitive problematic behavior, another type of procedure opens, which depending on the case, formulates the next steps and the program which the individual will follow. In order to do this, the recognition that there is an issue must be collective and at the same time the individual, on the basis of trust, must accept and follow these steps. Prerequisite to begin any process is the stopping of the specific behavior from the part of the individual, as we know that, of course, change takes time, but at the same time it is our responsibility not to perpetuate these problematic stances. In this way space and time is given to the individual, until he/she/they stop certain patterns of behavior, to see clearly and beyond them, to process the problematic stances and work on them.

In some cases, individuals are moved away from certain fields that feed their problematic behaviors and get involved in other areas, in order to remain part of the collective, but also to identify and process the various issues on practice, with the help of the collective body.

The processes of self-critique and critique are basic tools for dealing with problematic behaviors and for the development of the individual and the whole collective body. Through critique, which can be induced by a behavior of one of its members, the whole community recognizes and works on the same issues. This whole process is a collective move in which positions, attitudes, perceptions are constantly being shifted towards the direction of a common perspective. Therefore, the overall system of reference is shifted, within which justice is defined. In order to speak of radical revolutionary processes, they cannot be linear or static. We understand the many levels within the obvious levels. Thus the stages of this path at the same time as they are stepping on a basis and a revolutionary perspective are neither predetermined nor immutable, but are constantly evolving dialectically with the different levels conquered by the collective body.

As political subjects of a community of struggle that is an organic part of the movement, we recognize the necessity of collectivizing and opening such steps that will bring us closer to a common understanding and solution of our constant problems. We believe that the common overcoming of these problematics must have all those stages described above, which lead to a common culture. Such a culture gives the perspective and the tools to recognise problems at their beginning, not to escalate them and not to reproduce logics of individual responsibility, individual criteria and exclusions. We know that behind and beyond the characters and current difficulties there are structures and tools of collective culture, processes, common struggle, dialogue, tools for convergence and management of problems and conflicts, collective development and co-organisation. It is our responsibility to bring them again on the surface, to connect them, to collectivise and to develop them.

Women's Structure of the Community of Squatted Prosfygika