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Women on the front line of the Covid-19 crisis: what next?

If the issue of the place of women in our society continues to seem anecdotal to some, it is undeniable that the debate on the status of women emerged at the heart of Hurricane Covid-19. The sharing of domestic tasks and mental burden, female precariousness and the devaluation of traditionally female professions, sexist and sexual violence...all these subjects seem to us to have increased tenfold in the light of this unprecedented health, economic and social crisis. Beyond these observations that we must make, our political apparatus must be able to draw the necessary lessons to invent and contribute to building a more egalitarian future.

Sharing of tasks within the household

It is no mystery to anyone in good faith that the distribution of household chores remains largely unequal among heterosexual couples, with women continuing to perform the majority of household and parenting tasks - 71% and 65% respectively¹.

The confinement within our homes, far from smoothing out this disparity, has on the contrary had an aggravating effect, as women often find themselves forced to juggle the usual household and parental tasks, followed by distance learning for their children and teleworking². Reading the Instagram account "You Thought of"³ is edifying in this regard: the "double day" seems to have tripled during confinement.

Far from the blissfully optimistic speeches and the myth of modern man's ever-increasing involvement in the domestic sphere, the problem of the division of labor still appears today as an eternal sea serpent in the debate on gender equality. Contrary to what one might think, the fundamental imbalances in the home have been very little shaken up in recent times: it is quite simple, at the current rate of progress, it would still take decades to reach equilibrium⁴.

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Clara Champagne, Ariane Pailhé and Anne Solaz. Men's and women's domestic and parental time: what factors have changed in 25 years? [online]. Insee, published on 29/10/2015. Available on :

<https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/1303232?sommaire=1303240>

2

Émilie Massemin. Cooking, cleaning, children... Containment exacerbates inequalities women-men [online]. Reporterre, published on 21/04/2020. Available at: <https://reporterre.net/Cuisine-menage-enfants-Le-confinement-exacerbe-les-inegalites-men-women>

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You thought of" account [online]. *Instagram*. Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/taspensea/?hl=fr>

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What are the solutions for a sustainable reversal of steam? The introduction of a paternity leave worthy of the name, following the example of the Swedish model (a 480-day parental leave, distributed equitably) appears to be an indispensable tool for redefining the balance within the household around the care of children: it is all the more essential since we know that the arrival of a child reinforces inequalities within the couple⁵. More generally, it is imperative to change mentalities and habits and customs within the sphere of work so that it is just as normal for a man as it is for a woman to take time off to look after their sick children, to limit for both parents the obligations of presence and meetings spent a certain hour⁶. Since wishful thinking and other labels have their limits, the time has perhaps come to think about a more incentive policy in the field of professional equality in its entirety, the modalities of which have yet to be precisely defined: intensification of the *name and shame* policy, already initiated by the government, which allows for the denunciation of companies that are the furthest behind in gender equality; incentive taxation with a bonus/malus system...

Female precariousness and devaluation of professions traditionally associated with women

Behind the inequality in the distribution of domestic tasks lies a very simple explanation: the gender pay gap, which for rational reasons pushes heterosexual couples to preserve the working time and career of the man, who is in the vast majority of cases the best paid partner. Although we often talk about this gap, we still tend too often to forget the hidden part of this iceberg, the obvious result of this logic pushed to its paroxysm: female precariousness, or even poverty. The over-representation of women in low-skilled and/or part-time jobs, career interruptions, or single-parent situations are all explanatory factors. Aurore Lalucq and Nicolas Matyjasik summed up this state of affairs incisively and effectively when they declared in 2018 in *Le Parisien* that "A poor man is a lonely woman"⁷. This is enough to put an end, once and for all, to the childish "social" versus "societal" opposition behind which certain leading figures of the left take refuge to explain to us that talking about feminism takes us too far away from our real struggles.

⁵ The unequal distribution of domestic tasks between women and men [online]. L'observatoire des inégalités, published on 29/04/2016. Available at: <https://www.inegalites.fr/L-unequal-division-of-domestic-duty-between-women-and-men>

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⁶ Arnaud Régnier-Loilier. Does the arrival of a child change the distribution of domestic tasks within the couple? *Ined*, published in 11/2009. Available on : https://www.ined.fr/fichier/s_rubrique/19129/popetsoc_461.fr.pdf

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⁷ Michèle Ferrand, sociologist of the family [online]. Women's Foundation, published on 08/06/17. Available on: <https://fondationdesfemmes.org/michele-ferrand-la-charge-mentale/>

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Aurore Lalucq and Nicolas Matyjasik. Aurore Lalucq and Nicolas Matyjasik: "The poor man is a lonely woman". *Le Parisien*, published on 03/06/2018. Available on : <http://www.leparisien.fr/societe/aurore-lalucq-et-nicolas-matyjasik-l-homme-pauvre-est-une-femme-seule-03-06-2018-7750332.php>

Coming back to the health crisis, it is interesting to note that if women have found themselves in the front line of the fight against Covid-19, notably in the medical sector, it is mainly in low paid and valued positions: let us recall that 88% of nurses and 90% of the personnel working in EHPAD are women, whereas they are a contrario only 47% among doctors⁸. Among the other professions that are usually little considered and brought to light in an exceptional way during this crisis, one will also think of cashier's hosts, of which women make up 90% of the workforce⁹. It is interesting that these professions traditionally associated with women often belong to the field of care or personal services, and that the dedication shown by those who practice them tends to be considered natural or self-evident. It goes without saying that we need to invest in education to balance the workforce in these professions and also to ensure that they are revalued in the long term, but we must also take a higher profile and ask ourselves in a more global way about the best way to avoid situations of precariousness and economic uncertainty for these women. For this reason as for others, the path of the universal income, or failing that, the basic income, deserves to be further explored and deepened.

Sexist and sexual violence

The joke emerged on social networks, even before the official announcement of the containment.

Our freedom of movement would be drastically reduced, but at least, maybe the street stalkers would leave us alone. Hopes that were quickly dashed by numerous testimonies, to be found in particular on the Facebook page "[Pay for your confinement](#)"¹⁰, letting a very different reality emerge: no, even for an hour, even within a perimeter of one kilometer, it is not possible for a woman to move at her ease in the public space.

Still within the broad spectrum of sexist and sexual violence, however, the confinement led to fears of another phenomenon: an increase in domestic violence and its direct corollary, femicide. Confinement within the home and the resulting tension, making it difficult for women victims to go outside to seek help... A well-founded fear, since domestic violence has been the main cause of police custody since the beginning of the 1990s.

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The Demographics of Other Health Professions (HPRPs and ELDAs) [online]. *Drees*, published on 08/04/2015. Available at: <https://drees.solidarites-sante.gouv.fr/etudes-et-statistiques/open-data/professions-de-sante-et-du-social/la-demographie-des-professionnels-de-sante/la-demographie-des-autres-professions-de-sante-rpps-et-adel/?fbclid=IwAR0arhxzLj0QOwbS00q7E5Nx0D7F6E6pTpkiqueaqwEfZ8jjswabiXkwIjY>

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Philippe Bertrand. Why the cashiers will completely disappear. *Les Echos*, published on 05/12/2019. Available on: https://www.lesechos.fr/idees-debats/editos-analyses/pourquoi-les-caissieres-vont-completely-disappear-1154038?fbclid=IwAR1FrQXmqPzY2V1xLY_0-FEGAIkrVKU9N6h4IxHdOkiwZhrYPGdAiV34p3A

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"Pay for your confinement" page [online], *Facebook*. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/payetonconfinement/>

containment¹¹. The beginning of a black year, following a year 2019 marked by a dramatic increase in feminicides (149, if we stick to the count made by the collective "Feminicides by companion or ex").

Our party must be beyond reproach in this area. With regard to our discourse elements, already: it must be heard by all that this violence is not the prerogative of the working classes but concerns all social categories, that it is not a tragic news item but a brutal and systemic reality, fueled by a deleterious state of mind that consists again and again in relativizing the extent of this violence and questioning the word of the women victims. We must loudly and clearly proclaim the imperative of means that are equal to this reality, far from the infinitesimal and highly symbolic increases behind which the current government takes refuge. Finally, in this area as in others, it is necessary to ensure, through real tools of control and sanction, that our forces of law and order are up to the challenge and do not reproduce in their practices the mechanisms of violence and symbolic domination that women face elsewhere.

Women's place in the public sphere

In April, in the midst of the crisis, Forbes magazine wondered in a self-congratulatory article whether countries led by women had responded better to the pandemic, citing seven countries as examples, including Germany and New Zealand.

¹². Problem, as the feminist Rebecca Amsellem points out in her newsletter *les*

The glorious April 15th, the reasons put forward to explain their success are at best dubious, at worst essentialist - one of the qualities evoked for these leaders being none other than...love. Because they are women, these public figures would be better able to show empathy and attention, so much needed in this period of crisis¹³. An analysis that is problematic to say the least, and which brings to light a stereotype that is still too present in the collective unconscious: if it is in our interest to put women in power, it is so that once in office they can apply qualities considered feminine (kindness, a sense of listening, gentleness...). So that women leaders can

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Yann Bouchez and Zineb Dryef. Conjugal violence: "Confinement has become a additional instrument for aggressors". *Le Monde*, published on 05/04/2020. Available on: https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2020/04/25/violences-conjugales-le-confinement-became-an-supplementary-instrument-for-aggressors_6037722_3224.html

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Avivah Wittenberg-Cox. Have Women-led Countries Responded Better to Pandemics? *Forbes*, published on 16/04/2020. Available at: <https://www.forbes.fr/femmes-at-forbes/countries-led-by-women-have-they-reacted-better-to-the-pandemic/?cn-reloaded=1>

Rebecca Amsellem. Are women really better leaders than men [online]. *Les Glorieuses*, published on 15/04/2020. Available at: https://lesglorieuses.fr/meilleures-leaders/?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Les+Glorieuses+-+Saison+V+-+numro+31&utm_content=Les+Glorieuses+-+Saison+V+-+numro+31+CID_7a170d10370fde1bcc876bdd776ebdc4&utm_source=Email+marketing+software&utm_term=Lire+la+mme+chose+en+ligne&v=11aedd0e4327

If the gender dimension is to be analyzed solely through the prism of their competences, and not through the gender stereotypes associated with them, it is more than ever essential to intensify existing gender parity policies in the political sphere. Beyond the current legislation, which would undoubtedly deserve to be extended to more elections, we must also rethink our practices as a party and be exemplary in this regard, by stopping, among other things, reserving territories deemed unwinnable, sometimes referred to more modestly as "territories of conquest", for women. The choice of the heads of the list for the Paris municipal elections alone reveals just how far we still have a long way to go.

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