To be autonomous might mean to know our connections and synergies, and to make powerful decisions about our interdependences, to walk a specific path with others. To be interdependent, on the other hand, might mean to know our autonomy and from there to reach out to embrace our entanglements and connections.

Commoning Care & Collective Power

Commoning Care & Collective Power

Manuela Zechner

transversal.at

COMMONING CARE & COLLECTIVE POWER

Manuela Zechner

COMMONING CARE & COLLECTIVE POWER

Childcare Commons and the Micropolitics of Municipalism in Barcelona

With a foreword by Joan Tronto
and a preface by Bue Rübner Hansen

edited by Lina Dokuzović and Niki Kubaczek

transversal texts
transversal.at

ISBN/print: 978-3-903046-31-3
transversal texts

transversal texts is text machine and abstract machine at once, territorium and stream of publication, production site and platform - the middle of a becoming that never wants to become a publishing house.

This book is available in print or as an EPUB or PDF.
Download: transversal.at
Cover and layout design: Pascale Osterwalder

transversal texts, 2021 eipcp Wien, Linz, Berlin, London, Málaga, Zürich
ZVR: 985567206
A-1060 Wien, Gumpendorferstraße 63b
A-4040 Linz, Harruckerstraße 7
contact@eipcp.net
eipcp.net ¦ transversal.at

The eipcp is supported by: Kulturabteilung der Stadt Wien / Culture Department of the City of Vienna.

This book has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement 724692). http://heteropolitics.net

Contents

Foreword: Complicating Care
by Joan Tronto 9

Preface: The Conditions of Strategy
by Bue Rübner Hansen 13

Introduction: To care as we'd like to 17

I. COMMON STRUGGLES: FROM AUTONOMY TO INTERDEPENDENCE AND BACK AGAIN 31

No commons without community and care 33

Minor genealogy I: Commons between autonomy and institutions 43

Minor genealogy II: Feminist subversions of the commons 59

II. CHILDCARE COMMONS: MOTHERS' SYMPOIEISIS, THE NEIGHBOURHOOD POLITICS OF CARE AND MUNICIPAL POLICY 73

Childcare commons as vector of political change 75

Laboratories of interdependence: Self-organised nurseries 85

Aporias and precedents 101

Schools of care 115

III. COMMONING POWER: THE MICROPOLITICS OF MUNICIPALISM 127

Starting points for micropolitical enquiry 129

Minor genealogy III: Power from the streets to the institutions 139

Municipalism and social movements: Anatomy of a relation 159

Institutions without bodies: Rhythms, affects, embodiments and subjectivations 175

Lessons for collective practice 191

IV. BY WAY OF CONCLUDING: STRUGGLES FOR CARE, STRUGGLING TO CARE 203

Both interdependence and autonomy 205

Care networks and ecologies: A mapping exercise 211

Acknowledgements 219

Bibliography 223

FOREWORD: COMPLICATING CARE

Joan Tronto

All comprehensive social and political theories, since they are about care-needy and care-giving humans, must contain some account of care. In much of modern Western thought, though, the account of care is tacit. After a thinker has bifurcated the world into public and private life, much of care is left in the private sphere and the result is that care hardly appears in such theories. Feminist scholars in the past generation have led the way to assert the centrality of care as the most vital aspect of human life, and, for that matter, for all forms of life and existence on earth. Once we acknowledge this alternative starting point, though, the questions multiply. How should we make judgments about good forms of care, how shall we carry out a politics of care?

This text begins from new questions. Manuela Zechner advances our thinking about care not by asking about its fundamental value and role, but by asking a different question. Once we agree about the importance of care, how do we bring this theoretical insight about the centrality of care down to the practical level of figuring out the best way to live and organize our lives in common? It is easy to say that care belongs at the center of our existence, but how do we make this happen? There are, clearly, good ways to care and bad ways to care. But: how do we know how to sort them out? Rather than try to address this question at a theoretical level, Zechner follows an approach that scholars of care ethics would endorse: go down to the details of people's real lives and practices, and build up from there.

That is what Zechner has done in this text. Doing so does not require that one accept people's views of their circumstances. As Zechner observes, many people are fooled into thinking that the disorder of their ways of care is their own fault, when, in reality, it is a function of the times in which we live:

> Neoliberalism functions via a trick of inviting us to 'resolve' systemic issues via personal strategies, to think care without thinking reproduction. To do so, it mobilizes and depoliticises ethics, and evades systems thinking. This leads to an individualisation of collective problems, and to a perpetuation of systemic injustice. (Introduction)

And yet, even once we have decided to tackle such systemic injustice, the problem remains: how best to counteract these effects? Based upon participant observation and collaborative research, Zechner provides us with a rich and complex reading of political practices surrounding the provision of childcare in Barcelona from 2015 to 2020. She focuses on two main tendencies: to believe that progressive politics should remain autonomous from political institutions, and to believe that the way to progress is to engage on "the long march" through institutions. These two tendencies are evidenced, but also complicated, by this book's stories and genealogies of municipalism. The end result is that Zechner provides us with a nuanced and ambiguous account. She uses the analytic tool of phases of care to explore the arguments and practices from different sides. And, in the end, she reveals the important truth that this is complex, requiring new approaches and vocabularies.

Placing care at the center of our lives does mean that we need to be able to conduct analyses from the standpoint of

care. This careful study helps us to do that. But noting the importance of care and reproduction offers no automatic route to utopia, it remains a realm in which people will be divided by political judgments and commitments as well as by other deeply human disputes about needs and how best to meet them. This welcome book allows us to begin to chart out similar care disputes as we struggle collectively to improve and transform how we care.

PREFACE: THE CONDITIONS OF STRATEGY

Bue Rübner Hansen

Since the political, social, and feminist revolution of the 1930s, and the reactionary war against it, the global left and feminist movements have looked to Barcelona as a laboratory of social struggle. In the last decade, a great number of books and articles have drawn up the lessons of the key movements and actors in post-2011 Spanish politics: the housing rights movement PAH, the 15M movement, Podemos, municipalism, and Catalan independentism.

For all the specificities of this context – the history of revolution and fascism, the extreme real estate boom and collapse, the tenuous unity of the Spanish state – the situated experiments of Barcelona help us pose much broader questions of struggle and transformation: how to build and sustain popular power, how to fight financialized real estate capital, how to create a feminist mass movement, how to sustain a productive dynamic between movements and party, and so on. Manuela Zechner's perspective on this laboratory is new and refreshing, guiding our attention to the hidden abodes of care and micropolitics, whose power or weakness profoundly condition and shape the heroism of social revolution and riots, the grit and cunning of electoral experiments, and the contradictory quest for national liberation.

The focus on micropolitics may appear to remove us from Barcelona's highly-publicized lesson of strategy and policy, and throw us back to less significant questions of ethics and conviviality. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Dealing with the aftermath of May 1968, Alain Badiou has stressed the centrality of "fidelity to the event", as the basis for the subjective continuation of the event and the truth it produced. Manuela Zechner proposes another, less idealist approach to the question of the continuity of the event: that it is within relations and territories of care that the people and potentials of an event – here the uprising of May 15th 2011 – were tested, nurtured, and given longevity.

Zechner shows how the space of experimentation opened by the 15M and its feminist commissions was kept open by self-organized childcare groups in the Barcelona neighbourhood of Poble Sec, not just to respond to immediate needs of childcare in a crisis of social reproduction with its austerity, unemployment, and precarity, but as a way to build resistant communities through which parents, children, and carers engage in a continual process of democratic self-education. Tracing the questions of the relation of such care commons to city politics, Zechner demonstrates how the neighbourhood politics of care helped keep open the horizon for an institutional politics of the commons.

In her profound case study of the micropolitics of municipalism, Zechner points to how, despite their mutual tension, the "feminisation of politics" and "politics in the feminine" worked to overcome the macropolitical crisis of legitimacy. It did so through a transformation of the practice of politics, which it opened to the protagonism of subjects who refused to perform the white male subjectivity so dominant in Spanish politics as elsewhere.

The story told by Manuela Zechner is a complicated one of breakthroughs and reversals, failures

and inventions. As such, it is also an urgent call to take seriously care and micropolitics. The capacity of Spanish municipalism to break through the deep political cynicism of large sections of the population – rested to no small extent on its capacity to do and perform politics differently, through feminist ethics and transversal, participatory policy-making. It did so with affective intelligence and an intelligent embrace of affects usually excluded from politics, with expressions of doubt and questioning, care, and empathy. Similarly, Zechner's account of one of the central difficulties and common failures of municipalist platforms – to engage social movements and parties in a continual process of mutual learning and tension – testify to the organizational and political importance of feminist practice.

Zechner's careful ethnography and theoretical elaborations attune us to the political importance of care and micropolitics as conditions for transformative strategy, both as they nurture spaces of social experimentation and resistance, and as they maintain the subjective and collective refusal to accept subsumption to the rules and norms of the games of institutions, political parties and the media.

More than a complication of the question of care, and the 2011 cycle of struggle and institutional experimentation, this book is a vital contribution to the creation of a feminist "culture of precedents". Feminist precedents do not center on the much-publicized successes of movements and parties, but on the work to overcome care impasses and their characteristic separation between the macro and the micro, between production and reproduction, between caring and "getting shit done", and between "independent individuals" and

the web of social and natural life. The precedents in this book allow us to learn from hypotheses and experimental protocols to deal with the care impasse that defines the unfolding age of disaster. Care, micropolitics, and the commons emerge as foundational rather than sideshows to the macropolitics of movement building, institutional transformation and ecological transition.

INTRODUCTION: TO CARE AS WE'D LIKE TO

This book is, in many ways, a book about how we care. How we struggle *for* care: for needs to be met, for care work to be recognised and paid, for our infrastructures of care. How we struggle *to* care: for the recognition of needs, for building relations and ties, for ways of depending on one another. Some may say struggles *for* care are political ones, whilst struggles *to* care are ethical ones: perhaps. First and foremost, however, these -struggles are entangled – and they are individual and collective at the same time. In this book, struggles for care are embodied in accounts of self-organised childcare in Barcelona (part II), whilst struggles to care are narrated through the lens of new municipalist politics (part III). Both set out to link autonomy and interdependence in new ways, starting from feminist subversions of the commons (part I).

Covering the period between 2015–2020 in Barcelona and other municipalist cities in Spain, my account here narrates a time of powerful change in institutional dynamics as well as in neighbourhood fabrics and struggles. Its transformative horizon of commons bears the signature and fruits of Spain's new feminisms, of Southern European struggles for welfare and Latin American struggles for commons, as well as of the global feminist movements and strikes for care. This book traces genealogies of experiments and experiences that draw their strength from networks of care, mutual aid and collective learning. To do so, it looks at the neighbourhood and municipal level, across different registers of community and politics.

The cities and neighbourhoods at stake here, stacked into one another, have seen the emergence of a myriad interconnected initiatives, networks and infrastructures in the decade following 2010. Self-organised childcare groups, feminist mutual aid networks, commons social centres, and municipalist platforms are the main ones this book deals with. My account of them is based in complicity, accompaniment and conviviality, as someone who has been close to these struggles from afar, trying to report and translate their inventions to other movement contexts abroad, as well as from up close, being based in Barcelona's Poble Sec barrio as a mother and feminist for many years. My analysis of municipalism is based on experiences in Barcelona *en Comús* working groups in Poble Sec and at a city level (the migration and international commissions in particular). I write this book out of a desire to understand and with the hope of generating useful knowledges for struggles.[1]

My account here reflects my positionality, situatedness and entanglements, yet looks to collective subjects and thinking. The 'we' this book speaks and thinks from is that of movements and groups, those looking to grasp what happens to 'us' as we go along. Who is, who was, and who came to be the subject(s) of our politics – and how this came to be reflected in practice at grassroots as well as institutional levels. 'We' is always also a

---

1 Academic post-doctoral employment has been one precondition for drafting these pages: they have been crafted from the research report I produced in the context of the *Heteropolitics* project, a research process on commons in Mediterranean Europe that was based at Aristotle University Thessaloniki from 2017–20. My extensive research report on *Childcare Commons and the Micropolitics of Municipalism in Barcelona* is the basis of this book (Zechner 2020b).

question, to do with 'the potential of going on to find our own lights, that will allow us to trace the contours of our collective body' (Carrillo Vidal & Manzi Araneda 2020: 95, my translation from Spanish).

Care and micropolitics are key anchoring terms in this account. They open towards an understanding of ways of becoming, learning, relating, organizing, sustaining, embodying and subjectivity formation. As they offer two different perspectives on collective reproduction and organisation, care and micropolitics set up a vibrant field of tension. Their criss-crossing and articulation gives rise and depth to notions like *reproductive commons*, *care commoning*, *rearguard feminism*, *movement ecologies, institutions of the commons, caretizenship*, *politics in the feminine*, *public-commons partnerships, communitarian weaves, transversal struggles, commons municipalisms*, *cities of play*, *schools of care, power-with, caring-with,* and so forth.

To care as we'd like to

In my account here, there is necessarily an interplay between the terms 'reproduction' and 'care'. This concoction derives from bringing social reproduction feminisms together with different care feminisms. 'Reproduction' designates the systemic aspect of sustaining life in both individual and collective terms, while 'care' often points to the more intimate, relational and ethical dimensions of life-sustaining. We cannot grapple with how we care without understanding how our lives are reproduced, and vice versa.

Neoliberalism functions via a trick of inviting us to 'resolve' systemic issues via personal strategies, to think care without thinking reproduction. To do so,

it mobilises and depoliticises ethics, and evades systems thinking. This leads to an individualization of collective problems, and to a perpetuation of systemic injustice. In this sense, 'care' has become a buzzword of advertising and arguments that de-politicise collective matters. Similar to its past function for legitimizing the paternal politics of the church and charity, care is now key to the neoliberal politics of choice and consumption. To reclaim its power, we must bring care back together with perspectives on social reproduction.

Such reclaiming is at stake in feminist redefinitions of economy, in the formulations of politics of care (Molinier & Laugier 2009) and the notion of placing life at the centre of our politics. These start from a political subject that is interdependent and vulnerable – not the white-free-male ideal type of independence – and open towards lives in common. Countering depoliticizing formulas of care, feminists have insisted that care must be thought in relation to power, privilege and politics, knowing it matters not just for our chances of collective transformation but indeed also of collective life and survival, not just for humans but for how we relate to all life on earth. In this uptake, care is not a synonym for goodness or benevolence, but rather a field of practice and tension. To care is not something we merely choose, like an item in a shopping cart or a lifestyle, it is something we struggle over. Every day, in many ways.

To grasp care in its proper political and ethical dimensions, we have to differentiate between its many different modalities and expressions. Joan Tronto's five phases of care take us in this direction, distinguishing between:

1. 'Caring about' as the dimension of attention, worry and concern (in terms of childcare, often also referred to as 'the mental load').

2. 'Taking care of' as the dimension of caring gestures and tasks.

3. 'Care-giving' as the continuous, dedicated and labourious activity of looking after someone.

4. 'Care-receiving' as the being on the receiving end, a role largely mystified as exceptional and 'weak' yet crucial and inevitable to all life (Tronto 1993).

5. And, finally, as Tronto added later on, 'caring-with', which is more akin to solidarity and indeed probably also with commoning care (Tronto 2009a; 2013).

Tronto points out that ideally, these flow into one another, as phases of larger processes. Yet in our societies they tend to be increasingly segregated. This differentiation of phases or modalities underpins much of my thinking here, as I look towards transversal forms of care and struggle.

Care impasse

In contemporary societies, those of the Global North in particular, *caring-about* seems to be omnipresent. It takes the form of worry and concern that relates to crisis, catastrophe and injustice. Social media is often the stage and marketplace of this virtual care (Zechner and Rübner Hansen 2020): it's easy to loop on worry, anger and anxiety, when all we seem to be able to do about an urgent problem is to like, share, comment, read. This is part of the *impasse of care* I address in this book: a situation where many of us are set up to worry without accessing the meaning of care as labour, collective force, force of reproduction.

Our care impasse is characterised by the difficulty of creating passages and links from one phase/form of care towards another. *Caring-about* doesn't necessarily translate into *taking-care-of,* towards action. Collective action in particular, like organising and campaigning, protest and strike, boycott and sabotage, don't come easy in contexts of individualisation. What comes easily, incessantly, are choices and gestures marketed as actions: buy this or that, sign here, use this instead of that, wear this, post a selfie with this. The problem is of course not the existence of small acts – on the contrary – but their capacity to lead into collective subjectivation and agency. So when we remain isolated in our *taking-care-of*, in our actions and gestures, feeding only into abstract communities (like some of those that interpellate us online, but also like those of the nation or the state), we mostly do not build collective agency and embodied power.

But collectivity and embodiment matter a lot. Still thinking with Tronto's phases, this is where *care-giving* comes in: as sustained labour and practice. Care work is eternally assigned to women as mothers, wives, maids and nurses, ever more outsourced to migrants and poor women via transnational value extraction chains. Stuck at opposite ends of care chains, women are often alienated from one another, and from caring where they might most like to, if they could do it with autonomy: with their communities and families, their homes and territories. Women who employ nannies to pursue waged work for a better income or career, women who migrate to work as nannies and make money to send to their families back home: their decisions are never simple choices (or worse even, moral choices). They are perhaps better understood as complex struggles to care,

conditioned by heteropatriarchal, capitalist, postcolonial factors, by the lack of support by men and social systems. Because even if as women we care a lot, with bodies and minds, we don't necessarily care as we'd like to. These kinds of struggles are what this book sets out to map, in relation to childcare as well as unlikely places like institutions.

Our care impasse is also to do with how we deal with vulnerability. To do with those of us – all of us – who receive care. Children, the sick and elderly may come to mind, but don't be fooled – it's all of us, a lot of the time, who receive care. If we can't see the care we receive, it's often because we didn't look carefully enough, lured by the idea of our independence. *Care-receiving* is devalued and rendered as taboo or shameful, based in the notion that vulnerability and precarity are an exception. We keep thinking that only some have needs, or that some have more needs than others. That's not true: it's just that some have their needs more taken care of than others. This inability or at best clumsiness in dealing with needs is a grave problem for our capacities to engage collective care.

This leads us to *caring-with* as what might allow us to bridge some of our alienation and distances, as solidarity. This fifth phase of care concerns our capacity to let ourselves be affected by others' suffering, an embodied matter not just in that it can leave us trembling, sweating, crying or sleepless, but also in that it can build concrete, bodily, material bridges across worlds. In global capitalism, we are far removed from people that provide our basic goods, and cut off by walls and fences from those who reproduce our lives next door (be they the walls of kitchens, the fences around fields and

slaughterhouses, the walls around waste depots or prisons). How can our care become a source of collective power? We have more questions than answers in this matter, and that's ok if we keep asking them. One thing is clear: c*aring-with* needs to be practical, rather than just mental.

The ways in which we are blocked from caring, at one level or another, are not just ethical but also political. To care as we'd like to, where we'd like to, is not just a matter of (good)will, but of material and social conditions. Care is stratified along lines of gender, class, race, ability, age and so forth. For many people, the care impasse leaves them stuck with care-giving and care-receiving only, as they are objectified as care-workers or people-in-need. In this context, struggling for care means to fight for dignified conditions, infrastructures, visibility and rights: struggles *for* care. At the same time however, we all face struggles *to* care, as struggles for access to one another, to reclaim our interdependencies. Overcoming our care impasse implies work on both fronts, learning to intertwine our struggles. Thinking care and reproduction in tandem helps.

These pages concern themselves with how people invent dynamic and open modes of shifting between different phases and registers of care, nourishing cultures of transversal care. They bring different struggles to and for care into dialogue and tension, showing the kinds of conflicts and contradictions they can imply, but also the kinds of collective intelligences and powers that spring from them. Childcare commoning and municipalist micropolitics involve very different struggles and modalities of care, each ranging from the embodied to the abstract. And yet they are driven by the same desire to

build new forms of interdependence, to subvert the politics of independence and sovereignty in favour of autonomous care and reproduction.

As I look from the 15M movement towards the municipalist present through the lens of childcare in the first two parts of this book, interesting things emerge. Childcare is an aspect of feminist politics often taken to be unrelated – or worse, irrelevant – to social movements or indeed institutional politics. As a concrete instance of care, childcare here emerges as a kaleidoscope that allows us to see dynamics of collective power, commons and micropolitics in new colours and from new angles. As a key condition, an embodied challenge and an enabling constraint, childcare is all but anecdotal for politics – not just for policy, but indeed also for politics itself. In this story, women's voices, feminist solidarity and the songs of extended and queer family networks set the tone of political practice in new ways, as murmur that can turn into a roar.

The connections between childcare and municipalism also emerge as being very concrete. Beyond the question of including children in political- organisational spaces – a matter taken up strongly in the municipalism of *Barcelona en Comú* – these connections concern the lived relations of interdependence within and across bodies, neighbourhoods, social movements, parties, and institutions. They open onto the question of who can do politics, who can be present. From children to pregnant bodies, from ill to healthy ones, from frail to lonely ones, from overworked to disabled ones, to all kinds of othered bodies: they all play a role in configuring the new politics of care wherein feminism and municipalism align in refusing to ignore bodies.

Politics cannot just be for those who don't have care responsibilities, or who can afford to not make their needs known – politics cannot be a game of those who only *care about*.

Care, commons and collective power

All this sets up questions about building collective power as well as commoning power. Building collective power happens at – and across – many different scales. Across these pages, and particularly towards the last section of this book, I pick up an analysis of transversal ways of building power that we developed together with Bue Rübner Hansen in 2015 (Zechner and Rübner Hansen 2015), in the context of escalating crises of social reproduction and new left electoralisms. I draw on this for mapping out not just how municipalism's power was built in movements, but also how movements build power. Collective power has many dimensions: embodiment, relation, inhabitation, organisation, representation, mediation... and there's not one way of articulating those, but many. Building power transversally always means building singular pathways and connections. Collective intelligence and sensibility, rather than roles or rulebooks, matter for building collective power – whether it is in moments of 'that negative potency that allows us to go and deepen historical openings' (Carrillo Vidal & Manzi Araneda 2020:93, my translation from Spanish) that we now find in the massive feminist opposition to patriarchal violence and in its strikes, or in the struggles with institutional cultures that feminists took up. While this book focuses more on instituent moments, the destituent is always there in the background, as a grounding force.

In the background, feminism and municipalism also learn from – and are challenged by – anti-racist and ecological movements, themselves pushing for radical notions of care and a rethinking of who we define as legitimate subjects of politics. This influence, with all its tensions, comes to define the vibrant and fruitful political cycle narrated in this book. Not all stories are success stories, but learning from absences and failures is as important as looking for those uplifting moments – or 'best practices' as they are called in policyspeak. Stories and studies of commons and municipalism have too often focussed on the latter whilst evading the former, often for lack of feminist perspectives and patience. As such, *commoning power* is a matter of trial and error, of learning.

This book posits that commoning care and commoning power need to be thought in tandem. One way of thinking about this is through building interdependence and autonomy at the same time, working through tensions rather than oppositions. This means reckoning with autonomist-feminist genealogies of commons and the ways in which claims to self-organisation and self-constitution can come to be articulated with – and subverted by – claims to care. At their most beautiful and powerful, commons bring together caring-about, taking-care-of, care-giving, care-receiving and caring-with. They may do so as care commons (to do with the reproduction of everyday lives, bodies) or as commons that care, whatever their practice focuses on (housing, culture, the city...). To be sure, crafting such commons is a major task at *any* scale in societies that privilege individualism, nuclear families and the outsourcing of care.

But building commons that care is also a most promising task in my account, since commoning is about

the (re)production of subjectivity. When we 'locate reproduction as the strategic site from which to build and sustain power' (De Angelis 2019: 220) we look at two dimensions at least: on the one hand, the generation of collective interest and mutual bonds, relating to the possibility to reproduce one's own conditions and means of survival, and as a way to delink from capital's measure of things, from its values, from its line of command. On the other hand, we look at modes of collective care, desire, imagination, relation and memory that can ground commons, allow them to endure, or to emerge and falter through processes of learning. I keep returning to the question of subjectivity across these pages, as a precondition for meaningful and sustainable change.

The tension between autonomy and heteronomy in commons functions like a push and pull, between depending on others and claiming self-constitution. Autonomy is not to be confused with independence here: in liberal political thought, independence is key, implying an emphasis on not needing others, rooted in masculinist sovereignty. In the commons politics at stake here, on the other hand, it's autonomy that grounds thought and practice, meaning self-constitution and self-government. The feminist struggles I trace here work to shift autonomy away from independence, allowing us to reclaim it from a new place, one where care, interdependence and life itself are at the centre of politics.

Sadly, democratic thought still dwells on the independence/autonomy nexus without having much incorporated interdependence and care. If we knew how to value our interdependency as much as our powers of self, we would be in a very different place today vis-à-vis the communities and ecosystems we are part of. Such valorisation would

imply powerful alterontological shifts, as well as undoing ideas of citizenship in favour of imaginaries of 'caretizenship'.[2] Those who sustain and safeguard life, rather than those who accumulate, would be the central subjects of our politics – and to democratise would primarily mean to involve everyone in this care, rather than merely in decision-making. These would no longer be negotiated as purely human or social matters. New articulations of ecology and care thus become possible.[3]

The city is an important place for such redefinitions of political subjectivity, as the site where other ways of inhabiting, communing, reproducing and deciding are most direly needed. But shifting to a politics of care also means to de-centre the city as a space of politics and to reconnect, in non-extractivist ways, with the land, the forests, the countryside, different ecosystems, with the forces of reproduction. It would mean to engage restorative justice across all that connects the rural and the urban, from fields to farms, mines, dams, factories, highways, airports and prisons – and build new modalities of reproduction and care across those realities. Such new ecological awareness is germinating in cities like Barcelona and can point to hopeful horizons, if its radical roots are nourished. This book's conclusion (part IV) offers a mapping exercise for tracing and imagining such articulations of care and reproduction, the ties that link us to others and elsewheres, for personal or group use.

---

2 This term, *cuidadanía* in Spanish, was coined by the Precarias a la Deriva collective. See Casas-Cortes 2019, and also the entry on 'Caretizenship' in the precarious Lexicon: https://caringlabor.wordpress.com/2010/12/14/precarias-a-la-deriva-precarious-lexicon/

3 For such articulations see for instance Bärtsch, Drognitz and Eschenmoser 2017, Zechner 2021, Puig de la Bellacasa 2017 and Papadopoulos 2018.

I. COMMON STRUGGLES: FROM AUTONOMY TO INTERDEPENDENCE AND BACK AGAIN

No commons without community and care

> What happens when what we call care is a commons and takes place in more collective contexts? What happens when care is a commons and is done in common? What dilemmas and difficulties do those who share it face? What's its relation to other environments and dynamics (Vega Solis, Martínez Bujan & Paredes Chauca 2018: 17; my translation from Spanish)?

Collective care is most powerful when it creates forms and infrastructures of commons and commoning. Commons: those places, spaces, forces, referents and riches that must escape the logics of property, that belong to us all. Not resources, but living systems, worlds and entwined things. Commons can be concrete and dynamic, like soils, gardens, forests, rivers, seeds, servers, schoolbooks, social centres, institutions or more cultural, like stories, chants, maps, rituals, programmes. They can be a lot of things, but they are always driven by communities, of whatever kinds of living beings. We call their ways of operating and relating *commoning*, a verb. So, if we ask: how can we common as we'd like to? Then community and care are a key part of the answer.

The relation between the commons and community has been the subject of many discussions and experiments. Ecofeminists and feminist Marxists insist that 'there is no commons without a community' (Mies 2014), and that 'commons require community' (Federici & Caffentzis 2014). They see commons as social systems (De Angelis 2016), or put differently, as made up of communities. Social systems make us think of rules and maybe hierarchies, whereas community points us to

other logics, like interdependency. A more fruitful place to start thinking commons perhaps.

Recognition of *needs* is a key part of such commons thinking. Care commons emerge from shared needs and from the subsequent creation of relations – not from the mere availability of a specific 'resource' (space, money, etc.). To politicise needs is to break with the politics of pity and false autonomy that underpin patriarchy and capitalism. So in thinking commons with needs and relations, we envisage communities not as non-conflictual, homogeneous wholes, but as diverse and metastable assemblages. In this sense, neither communities nor needs are pure or absolute, rather, they are in an interplay, akin to how Gilbert Simondon describes the moment of the collective invention of solutions:

> ...the accumulation of people blocked by a rock, one after the other, progressively constitutes a simultaneity of expectations [*attentes*] and needs, and so a tension towards a simultaneity of departures when the obstacle will be removed; the virtual simultaneity of imagined departures returns to the simultaneity of efforts, where the solution lies. Anticipation and prevision are not enough, because each traveler is perfectly capable of imagining by themselves how they would continue walking if the rock were displaced; this anticipation still has to return towards the present, in modifying the structure and conditions of the current operation; in the given case, it is the collective anticipation that modifies every one of the individual actions in building the system of synergies (Simondon 2008: 140; my translation from French).

Commoning, and particularly the creation of commons as dispositifs, is such an act of collective imagination

and invention. With care commons we may say that the commons and community are often co-emergent, rather than one coming first. What tends to come first is bodily needs, as shared needs that thus become a social matter. When we speak of social reproduction commoning (Barbagallo, Harvie & Beuret 2019), we refer to activities and projects that address our basic needs: for shelter, food, water, care, etc. In this context, needs are starting points for reproduction commoning as a way of building community not on the basis of identity or status but of shared material and life conditions – and indeed also, but not primarily, of desires.[1]

Poor people, women and migrants have been they key protagonists of struggles around social reproduction. Women, carrying the everyday responsibility of caring for their families and communities, have led many resource struggles – for water, food or land, for instance – and developed a myriad of organisational forms and strategies in this arena. Practices of collective shopping, gardening, cooking, squatting, farming and resource pooling, setting up autonomous healthcare or childcare centres are some examples of care commoning. They tend to be strongest in Latin America, Asia and Africa, given the relative absence of state provision, but they exist throughout all societies.

The protagonism of mothers in social reproduction struggles is considerable. Like their care, women's commoning is neither driven simply by self-interest nor by

---

1 On the relation between need and desire, see the reading group on 'Social Reproduction between Need and Desire' that I co-facilitated with Bue Rübner Hansen and Paula Cobo-Guevara in 2015 https://murmurae.wordpress.com/proyectos/social-reproduction-between-need-and-desire-reading-group/

altruism: it is driven by the corporeal, affective and material entanglements that hold life together. As political subjects, women and mothers use and subvert their own positions in various ways, adopting different strategies for carrying the social and historical weight of being assigned care on the basis of gender. In the practices we will follow here, women and mothers (whether they are hetero, lesbian, gay, trans or other) seek to both affirm and to undo their own role,[2] embracing contradictions as well as multiple identities and desires. This contradiction characterises all struggles for care as they claim more interdependence and more autonomy at the same time. We set out here to understand this tension better: as something productive.

This is not just about commoning care, but also about thinking care as commons. Like the seas, the wind, the air, rivers, soils, sunshine and so forth – common conditions to life on earth – we may see care as common to the life of communities on earth. Care is not altruism but what communities – no matter their size – do to sustain life in common. This vision of care co-emerges with concrete questions of self-organisation across these pages.

Commoning the public

Commoning care isn't limited to places with little state provision. Care commons aren't merely anecdotal in places like Europe and the US, and that's not just

---

2 Mothers and care-givers in this sense must be understood as political subjects (Merino 2017) not just when they address themselves to the stage of politics and protest (like the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* in Argentina, or nurses on strike), but also in their everyday activity of weaving networks of care and community.

because there are plenty of people and communities excluded from state provisions there. It's also because public institutions are a sort of common in the Global North, shaped by struggles and the notion that everyone should have access to them and a say in them. Many of the practices at stake here work to reclaim this vision of the public, to make the public common(able). Childcare commons and municipalist commons are two sides to this same story, though with different takes and stakes.

As (eco)systems of social reproduction, commons bring forth their own practices as well as ethics and politics of care. Their micropolitics of race, class, gender and age relations are instances upon which we can examine their functionality and politics. At the core of this matter is the question of resisting enclosures and recuperating spaces for anti-capitalist, decolonial, anti-patriarchal modes of relation and conviviality: not as isolated islands but as sympoietic zones within wider contexts. De Angelis, Federici, Caffentzis and many others emphasise this anti-capitalist aspect of commoning and note how cooperation can and often does become captured by capital or the state. A tension runs between the public and the state, then, whereby claiming what's public isn't necessarily the same as affirming state power.

The experiments with 'commoning what's public' at stake in this book set out to (re)claim municipal public services and infrastructures, and social rights, dealing with the state in a very specific local form. Here 'the state' comes in the form of new municipal institutions, themselves shaped by older municipalist experiments and struggles like those of 20th century republican anti-fascist municipalism. The period in question is characterised by a breaking-open of the relations between the

commons and the local state, a moment of broad shifts of social as well as institutional power.

The stories you are about to read tell of building commons with care, and of building care commons. The micropolitics of municipalism, of *Barcelona en Comú* in this example, is about building commons and commons municipalism with care. The childcare commoning in Poble Sec is about building care commons as concrete collective infrastructures. To be sure, crafting care commons is a major task at *any* scale in societies that privilege individualism, nuclear families and the outsourcing of care. Thinking with care and micropolitics allows us to appreciate the complexities and embodiments this implies.

This implies narrating minor genealogies, not grand stories of success. Understanding how commons come to be captured is important as a matter of learning and experimentation in social movements. Rather than render commons as a matter of (good, bad, ugly) governance or inscribe them into modernist accounts of progress, commons are always an immediately practical, embodied and collective matter, and a matter of experimentation. Their failures are not a tragedy so much as an occasion to reflect and learn.

Defining commons for practice and policy

Which criteria should need to be met in order for a childcare project to qualify as a commons infrastructure? Is self-management sufficient, or are accessibility and democratic structures and processes also criteria? What about continuity, and political engagement with its surroundings? The ecosystem of childcare projects in Poble Sec – which certainly constitutes a community

– breathes the contradictions and tensions that come with these questions. Childcare commons, though not named as such by *Barcelona en Comú* and allies, were on the rise when *Barcelona en Comú* came to power in 2014/15, and since then the municipal government has tried to support them, with a helping as well as critical mindset. Can they legitimately count as commons, do they merit public support? There are no easy answers.

In 2017, the city commissioned a study into commons by the Hidra cooperative[3], in order to arrive at more precise definitions, protocols and legal and administrative frameworks for urban commons[4] (Ayuntamiento de Barcelona 2017a; this later led to the urban commons framework of La Hidra Cooperativa 2021). These drew on existing social movement criteria for the definition of common goods, such as from the Observatorio Metropolitano Madrid, a grassroots urban research group:

> - Universality (open access)
>
> - Inalienability (they cannot be alienated/expropriated or sold to third parties. By nature, their value resides in use value)
>
> - Sustainability (the conditions for the reproduction of the good itself must be guaranteed) Democracy (the community governs, establishing the democratic conditions of its management)
>
> (Ayuntamiento de Barcelona 2017a: 27; my translation from Catalan).

---

3 La Hidra Cooperativa, Barcelona think tank for urban commons and policies of participation, that co-evolved with the Fundación de los Comunes: https://lahidra.net/

4 See also the repository of documents in the 'Citizen Participation' department of Barcelona City: https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/participaciociutadana/ca/guies-materials-i-altres

... and also, from the Charter of Principles of Social Economy, promoted by the Permanent European Conference of Cooperatives, Mutuals, Associations and Foundations (CEP-CMAF):

> - Primacy of the Person and the object over capital
>
> - Democratic control by its members
>
> - Conjunction of the interests of the user members and the general interested
>
> - Defense and application of the principles of solidarity and responsibility
>
> - Autonomy of management and independence from political powers
>
> - The majority of revenues are destined to the achievement of objectives in favor of sustainable development, of the interest and service thereof, and of the general interest
>
> (Ayuntamiento de Barcelona 2017a: 28-29; my translation from Catalan).

These definitions are relevant because, rather than merely drawing on academic literature, they are based in the self-definitions and guidelines that commons initiatives have come up with in the Spanish and Barcelona context.

... and feminist redefinitions

How do commons come to be altered and subverted via feminist politics? The politics of care involves powerful new forms of practice and organisation, but also radically different notions of political subjecthood. It enables us to ask 'who cares?' not just in a sociological

or anthropological sense, but also through a feminist alterontological lens (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017; Papadopoulos 2018). This means to question ascribed notions of who the subject and object of politics is, across a range of levels: institutions, social movements, self-organised nurseries, mothers' networks and children. It implies a focus on a transversality of connections, efforts and intentions that offer a complex picture of agency in care, looking across different phases of care (Tronto 1993). So more than just reconfirm who cares – women, the subaltern, racialised people, poor people, migrants, etc. – I also push towards seeing children as subjects – rather than just objects – of care here.

Minor genealogy I: Commons between autonomy and institutions

In Spain, since the turn of the millenium, the notions of commons/common/commoning have been pivotal to a number of social movements. Far from trying to provide a full list of those, my endeavour in this chapter will be to provide a genealogy of commons-related movements in the Spanish state, an important backdrop to understanding the commons experimentations at stake in this book. There are three major moments worth mentioning in this context (1) the first debates and movements around digital commons, anti-copyright and free culture, via the notion of the *Procomún*, (2) movements and ideas about *institutions of the commons* as bringing together knowledge and spatial commons in relation to the right to the city, and (3) discourses and practices '*in common*' [*en comú/n*] as relating to the municipalist candidatures emerging in 2015.

The 2000s & the Procomún: Against copyright, authorship and the privatisation of knowledge

In the early 2000s, in the context of increased debates about the commercialisation of culture and of copyright, notably the wealth of new and collaborative cultural production enabled by the internet, the 'commons' becomes a key concept to a growing movement of cultural producers and online activists. Starting from around 2006, the discourse of commons appears in relation to cultural production in Spain, via the notion of the *procomún*. Initially, procomún appears as a direct translation of 'commons', meaning something akin to a public utility, an *Allmende* in German. The term, however, soon takes on

a life of its own and becomes the keyword of cultural producers' claims around free culture, public licensing, creative commons and collaborative culture in general. New cultures of collaboration question the paradigm of individual authorship, genius and the figure of the artist, with a myriad of collectives and networks of cultural workers and hackers emerging.

In dialogue with and in relation to the EuroMayDay movements (2006–10 roughly, see Zechner 2013a), Spanish groups such as *Atravesadas por la Cultura* emerged and put forward new and collective forms of (cultural) workers' inquiries that lead to the formulation of militant research, as a method of collective knowledge production that runs counter to the privatisation of knowledge. Based in Madrid but in close dialogue with their counterparts in Málaga (*Creador*s Invisibles*), Barcelona (*Yporductions*), Italy (*Chainworkers*, *Serpica Naro Collective*), London (*The Carrot Workers Collective*) and elsewhere, they ran inquiries in cultural workers' conditions and the increasing exploitation of digital labour (from teleworkers to artists, museum vigilantes, writers, interns, etc.) as well as reviewing cultural policy and funding in Madrid. A debate and experimentation flourished, thus, with non-proprietary, radically collective and critical forms of knowledge production, which took its spread across different areas of work and research.

After the financial crisis of 2008: From the Procomún to institutions of the commons

In 2008, a severe financial crisis hit the world, with Spain badly affected due to its mortgage bubble. Monies for culture dried up and the boom of creativity subsided as economies suffered. Movements around

precarity and digital labour, going strong since the EuroMayDay 2001, were transformed and a new phase of struggle announced itself. Financial neoliberalism, austerity and gentrification came to require new concepts, bringing problems of social reproduction to the fore. The notion of the *Procomún* slowly gave way to *comunes* or *común* and the concrete critique of creative industries in Spain soon came to be articulated as a question of cultural governance and autonomous infrastructures for self-management, income-generation and the reclaiming of urban space. Social centres took on a new importance as spaces of autonomous cultural production, research and social reproduction.

The *Casa Invisible* in Málaga, occupied since 2007, played a central role as a prototype of a 'monster institution' (Universidád Nómada 2008, transversal 2008) or 'Institution of the Commons' in Spain. The Universidad Nómada collective and Traficantes de Sueños publishing cooperative co-facilitated this shift from autonomous knowledge to autonomous infrastructure, alongside many other groups and initiatives. Promoting the right to the city and grassroots forms of creation and research, commons-based institutions set out 'to work on the collective intelligence in projects that seek the self-organisation of social creativity and the production of critical knowledge connected with experiences of struggle against precarity, for the freedom of movement and access to knowledge' (Museo Reina Sofia & Fundación de los Comunes 2009; my translation from Spanish). The horizon was opened for a new kind of institutional critique that stemmed from a critique of authorship and property, bridging the gap between the immaterial and the material by articulating cultural production with autonomous spaces.

Thus, a first window of addressing institutional actors was opened from a very autonomist position, and a broader debate on the city was inaugurated. The notion of 'institution of the commons' came to embody a double claim: a recognition of the institutional dimension of autonomous spaces of creation and organisation beyond the public, as a 'commons' of the city; and a becoming-common of existing public cultural institutions, addressing ways of enabling cultural programming, research and education that are in touch with social struggles rather than representative of the state. A key historical reference for this vision was Italian autonomism, particularly the work of Antonio Negri: Negri and Hardt had just published *Commonwealth*, generating debates concerning self-government, commons and institutions and drawing on exchange with Spanish and Italian social movements.

The 15M movement of 2011

In 2011, an event changed the horizon of the commons and of the political in Spain: the 15M movement. On May 15th, 2011, after the conservative, austerity-bound and corrupt *Partido Popular* of Mariano Rajoy was reelected to parliament, thousands of precarious and declassed people took to the streets in Spanish cities. They opposed austerity and called for real democracy, first establishing encampments to occupy main squares and then moving into neighbourhoods with their newly formed organs of struggle and mutual support. A myriad of commissions and new groups sprang from this moment, leading to the development of a wave of new social syndicalism around education, healthcare, immigration, water and so forth, called the *Mareas* (tides), as well

as bolstering a wave of new cooperativism, feminism, youth struggles and so forth. Difficult to sum up in a couple of paragraphs, the 15M was an extremely powerful movement that changed subjectivities and fundamentally reoriented several generations of people in relation to politics, embracing self-organisation and contesting the status quo, in a spirit of solidarity and empowerment. While young people – particularly those recently educated, whose prospects of work and dignified life were crushed by the austerity regime – kicked off the protests, this was also a truly intergenerational movement, involving pensioners as well as students and unemployed people of different ages.

In the 15M context, debates and practices of the commons found fertile ground. Commons never quite came to be a key term of the movement, yet ongoing debates and practices around urban politics and alternative institutions found powerful articulations with this huge movement. Spain's urban and social fabric became receptive to new forms of experimentation and instituting, as some 62 camps stood firm in large cities (with over 100,000 inhabitants) and many, many more sprung up in smaller places (Monterde 2016). A broad desire to invent another kind of politics sustained new forms of grassroots organisation. From assemblies to working groups, from horizontal online collaboration to inclusive facilitation tools, to safe and accessible encampments, from a politics of care in urban conviviality to a politics of joint, radically horizontal knowledge production, the 15M brought a new political spirit to flourish, inspiring a myriad of struggles in other countries ('Occupy') and itself inspired by the previous uprisings of the Arab Spring.

The spatiotemporal development of the 15M is significant for understanding the entanglement of commons, care and municipalism.[5] First there was an online call for protest, echoed and shared widely across social networks (then still quite novel): *toma la calle* and *toma la plaza* led from demonstrations in the streets towards occupations of squares. After some months in encampments, the experiments in the squares had become too difficult to sustain as autumn arrived and people got tired of the intensity of outdoor life and organisation. The 'indignados', as the 15M is often referred to in the Anglophone world,[6] slowly decided to move into the neighbourhoods, where their struggle was to be articulated with everyday life and local social networks. Thousands of neighbourhoods across the country soon had their own assemblies and local committees. This led to the movement broadening and becoming more sustainable, connecting with people's everyday lives and spaces in the neighbourhoods. It also led to a new sensibilisation to urban politics, bringing forth new demands and campaigns in relation to local policies, resource allocations and urban planning. This laboratory of learning prefigured the municipalist turn, a learning that turned from a focus on the state (as a locus of democracy, austerity and corruption) towards the city and its institutions.

Estimates say that in August 2011, around 8.5 million people in Spain supported the 15M movement (El País 2011) – probably a conservative estimate. Yet still

---

5 For an exploration of this through maps, see De Soto 2017.

6 The term is a bit of a misnomer, reducing the affective range of the 15M to the notion of indignation, when this initial rage was soon complemented and overtaken by collective joy, creativity, experimentation, trust and solidarity.

all this left the regime and government unchanged. For some, this brought on a sense of futility. Many returned to their lives, and participation in assemblies decreased. Others debated how to take the struggle forward, and soon arguments for moving to a new level emerged. Might it be possible to subvert the system from within? Some activists strongly disagreed and found this to be a dangerous proposition, yet others preceded to experiment along these lines. Podemos and the new municipalisms were bids for trying to change democracy from within, in very different ways: where Podemos stayed focussed on the state, arguing that now a party organisation was necessary, the new municipalisms built on the local dimension and the power that had been built there. A tension between the strategy of Podemos – more classical and abstract in its quest for building power – and that of new local electoral campaigns more rooted and embodied in concrete practices and collective processes – was unavoidable, but often also productive. Yet this narrative often forgets an experimental step.

Both Podemos and the new municipalisms were preceded by experimental party prototypes that emerged out of the core of the 15M. The first significant anti-corruption party to come out of the 15M was the *Partido X* (formerly *Partido del Futuro*), running for European elections in 2015. It emerged from hacker and online activist networks close to where the initial online call for the 15M protest came from (the original *DemocraciaRealYa* collective). The Partido X was not a membership organisation but proposed, rather, forms of 'Wiki government' and similar protocols, meant to radically reinvent the way politics functions via online technologies, to enable radically new forms of participation

and debate, in the spirit of the 15M (Zechner 2013b). Their running for elections was highly experimental, a test for determining some possibilities and limits within the party form. Whilst many quarrels and splits ensued across the newly forming initiatives coming out of 15M, there was also exchange and collaboration across platforms like the hackers' camp of the Partido X and the more Laclau- and Trotsky-inspired camps of Podemos (parts of the online strategy of the former came to be adapted for the latter by its makers).

The closest ties were, however, arguably those between Partido X and the new municipalisms, as these emerged from broadly the same activist ecosystem in Barcelona – where the original DemocraciaRealYa had also in large part sprung from. The common denominator of these practices is experimentation, rather than strategy or party line. Speaking of micropolitics, this common local grounding and its shared biographies and collective struggles are significant, as they enabled trust and agility built on a shared political-activist culture, and a situated politics. This background to the new municipalisms is often ignored or underrepresented in research, which tends to focus on Podemos and the grand narratives of the state (particularly in anglophone literature and political theory). It is however key to understand the experimental, transversal and situated politics that leads from the 15M into municipalism – a matter of micropolitics. Micropolitics means not just the socio-affective politics of relations between individuals or groups, but also the tactics and strategies derived from embodied and situated experience, in their connections with local and translocal histories and struggles.

This conception of changing the source code, the proper 'DNA' of politics and institutions, was fundamental to the spread of a desire to take on capital-P politics. This led to a myriad of initiatives that prepared the ground for grassroots candidatures. The model for those was never the political organisation, the party, but rather the social network, the neighbourhood assembly and the social centre. There was a belief that there was enough social force and intelligence present not just to take power, but to invent new forms of political and institutional organisation. Across the 15M's local and thematic commissions, the various protosyndicalist *Mareas*, the powerful PAH housing movement, the Citizen Bailout Plan (*Plan de Rescate Ciudadano*,[7] a name later ironically adopted by Podemos as part of an electoral campaign), the DemocraciaRealYa/DRY networks, the *Juventud sin Futuro* networks of precarious and emmigrant youth, the *Yayoflautas* pensioner's movement, and many other key 15M actors, there was a world of new practices and approaches to learn from. This logic of learning and experimenting is what enabled the innovative and processual capacities of municipalism, wherein government was always imagined as self-government.

After the 15M movement: From institutions of the commons to candidatures of the commons

Let us now look more closely at the debates and conceptual productions that made a municipalism of the commons possible. Around 2013/14, the self-education platform *Nociones Comunes* ran many courses

7 Zechner, M. (2012) Für einen zivilgesellschaftlichen Rettungsschirm. Kulturrisse, IG Kultur. https://www.igkultur.at/artikel/fuer-einen-zivilgesellschaftlichen-rettungsschirm

prefiguring questions of urban governance in relation to commons, municipalism and the relation between social movements and institutions:[8]

> When we speak of commons, we speak of resources that are managed by communities and that generate collective benefits; of processes that are not exempt from elements of management, control or regulation, but that rest on principles of social justice. [...] In order to build an alternative narrative to that of Barcelona as a space of elites and as a strategic scenario for taking over social wealth, in order to recuperate a history that has been deleted because it was considered unproductive and annoying, a way of living in the city that today re-emerges in different processes and social movements, we thus started a reading group... (Observatorio Metropolitano Barcelona 2013; my translation from Spanish).

These spaces of debate were crucial for the development of autonomous knowledges and practices of the commons in Spain, also providing the ground for some important feminist and anti-racist discussions. They carry the legacies of militant research towards alliances of self-education projects, in autonomous bookshops and social centres where Nociones Comunes courses have their home. Nociones Comunes has been organised, since 2011, via the Fundación de los Comunes, a transterritorial network of activist projects that sets out towards 'thinking the commons as a space that does not grow and stop at the local, but that has the capacity to

---

8 To see some of the titles and access the recordings, see the archive of Nociones Comunes courses (which span Madrid, Barcelona, Zaragoza, Málaga etc.) https://traficantes.net/nociones-comunes/cursos-realizados

be lived in a distributed in other territories. For this we need federated institutions of the commons, processes that can walk side by side, sharing their codes and transferring robust experiences.' (Observatorio Metropolitano Barcelona 2013; my translation from Spanish). In 2014, the Observatorio Metropolitano Madrid – one of several groups of the Fundación de los Comunes – published a book entitled *La apuesta municipalista*, disseminating the idea of running popular municipalist candidacies. While the electoral debate had revolved around the EU and state level and centred around Podemos until then, a new horizon for taking over institutions had now opened, one that seemed much more compatible with the logic of proximity of the 15M.

Out of the circuits linked to the 15M, notably the PAH and the Fundación de los Comunes, municipal candidacies were proposed, and received massive popular support – first in Barcelona, soon thereafter in other cities. Their initial names and mottos were *Guanyem/Ganemos* (let's win), echoing the upbeat mottos of the PAH (*Si se puede* – yes we can/yes it's possible) and of Podemos (which itself means 'we can' in English). Following the launch of these experimental candidatures, a period of vivid social creativity and composition ensued, building singular grassroots campaigns that set up powerful debates and imaginaries of change in many cities. One of their premises was to build massive popular support: the idea was to win, not to form new oppositional parties. In 2014, an initial signature campaign set itself the margin of having to reach at least 30,000 signatures of support in Barcelona, a target that was amply achieved.

Soon, however, the platforms renamed themselves *En Comú/En Común* meaning 'in common'. This was in

part due to a fortunate problem: a conservative mayor had registered the party name to *Guanyem* before any municipalist activists thought about party registry formalities. But it also pointed to a shift in register, from 'what' to 'how', a qualitative emphasis that also began to differentiate municipalist outlooks from the populism of the state-level Podemos party.

The renaming soon made a lot of sense, however, as the logic of the political work being done in the neighbourhoods and across thematic areas came to open a processual horizon about reinventing institutional politics from below, building structures and horizons that were no longer just about winning. A collective force had been set loose through common, open processes of elaborating electoral programmes, through joint research and discussion, as well as joint campaigning and reaching out (Zechner 2015). Appropriately, *En Comú* pointed to a *how*, a way of doing things, rather than to a *what*. More on this process in the section on municipalist micropolitics – for now I will conclude this genealogy of commons by pointing to similar genealogies beyond Spain.

Previous and parallel developments in Latin American institutions

The experiences of the new Latin American Left, from the early 2000s through their ups and downs in the next decade, have been eagerly observed in election-bound circles in Spain. There, thought on the commons and their relation to governance and electoral politics was more ripe already, having generated not just new horizons and processes but also a series of failures and critiques. Particularly those countries where new, non-party

movements swept a new political class to power (as in Bolivia and Ecuador) have yielded some lessons on the potentials and pitfalls of running for government. But Argentina, Mexico, Brazil and Venezuela, too, have produced rich debates about the new Left *gobernismo* ('governism') and its relation to social autonomy. Key Latin American thinkers from these debates on commons and governance include Raquel Gutiérrez, Bolívar Echevarria, Alberto García Linera, Rita Laura Segato, Colectivo Situaciones and Maria Gallindo. Raquel Gutiérrez, who has been to Spain for conversations about and with new electoral movements (Gutiérrez Aguilar & Reguero 2017), from Podemos[9] to municipalisms, bases her analysis in social struggles rooted in commons – water movements in Bolivia, for example, with strong indigenous protagonism. From the viewpoint of these struggles, she interrogates and documents social movements and political processes in several countries in Latin America (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2017a, 2008) and insists that building power through commons hinges on a collective capacity:

> When we speak of the production of the common, we don't just speak about a way of managing or a kind of access or some such thing, we are talking about unfolding the collective capacity to generate material wealth –autonomous in some form – that can allow us to conquest fields of political autonomy (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2017b; my translation from Spanish audio recording).

---

9 During her visit to Spain in 2017, Gutiérrez also debated with Pablo Iglesias in his TV show: 'Otra Vuelta de Tuerka – Pablo Iglesias con Raquel Gutiérrez,': https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NtAETkGTOfI

Contrary to more technocratic and formulaic notions of commons management, which have found a place in some Latin American popular governments, Gutiérrez thinks about building power as a collective, embodied and material process. Building power involves transversalities and strategies that reach across different social fields as well as the production of subjectivities. Commons entail a form of material and subjective production that must be autonomous, argues Gutiérrez. This does not mean they do not 'talk to' state agencies or negotiate with institutional actors, but that they determine their own meanings, uses and framings.

The *Colectivo Situaciones* in Argentina, too, are interested in micropolitical and collective subjective processes that come with crisis, rebellion and Left institutional politics. In 2009, they made a book to reflect on the political 'impasse' engendered by Kirchnerism in Argentina (Colectivo Situaciones 2009) and its implications for social movements. One key aspect of this concerns a crisis of language:

> In the *impasse*, the word 'politics' enters into crisis in a precise way: the 'factory of meaning(fulness)' is displaced towards the mediatic-managerial sphere, in detriment of collective thinking. ...We thus confront a paradox, where, whilst all kinds of political discourses circulate, a progressive *depoliticization* of the social and of language occurs (Colectivo Situaciones 2009: 35; my translation from Spanish).

This process of becoming void or becoming catchphrase of political language can be observed in a myriad of contexts where institutional or commercial actors appropriate the language of social movements. The 'common/s'

has been used in an enormous amount of political and institutional initiatives in Spain, from party and candidature names that vary from *Barcelona en Comú* to *Catalunya en Comú* to *En Comú Podem* to the denomination of *Los Comunes* as a general term of this political camp, and so forth. Largely speaking, the municipal candidatures did not banalise the term to the extent that it becomes void or depoliticised, but as the name gets replicated, it does become a brand name of sorts. Yet it is not broad use that makes for banalisation, it's the careless appropriation of political terms by those who no longer have any stakes in them. In those municipalist circles with an open ear to local as well as remote genealogies of electoral politics and social movements, there is a struggle to keep 'the commons' politically charged. They do not always succeed. Still, my hypothesis here is that it is useful to look at intentions, processes, relations, outcomes and effects in relation to one another, through a micropolitical lens, in order to understand where things go right or wrong.

Minor genealogy II: Feminist subversions of the commons

In this chapter, we follow a second line of genealogies of the commons in Spain, as rooted in feminisms of social reproduction and care. These take us past the 15M movement and towards the municipalist present of 2020 in yet other ways. I focus this genealogy on childcare, as an aspect of feminist politics often taken to be unrelated to social movements or indeed institutional politics. As a key condition, an embodied challenge and an enabling constraint, childcare is all but anecdotal for politics – not just for policy but indeed also for politics itself. Here we will see how and why childcare shapes politics.

The 15M, new feminisms and struggles for reproductive rights

The 15M was a powerful catalyst for feminist movements, leading to the development of practices and debates that left a legacy from the streets to the neighbourhoods to the new municipal governments. The powerful work of the feminist commissions of the 15M and the work of a large number of feminist collectives that fought against precarity, racist and sexist labour regimes, restrictive abortion laws, the invisibility of care, and political machism set the scene for a broad social debate on care, care work, interdependency, vulnerability and social reproduction. Feminist groups such as the *Feministas Indignadas* and *Feminisms commissions* of the 15M, the *Territorio Doméstico* migrant domestic workers' collective, the *Precarias a la Deriva* and *Agencia Precaria* collectives of precarious female labourers, the *Escalera Caracola* social Centre in Madrid, and books

such as *Nuevos Feminismos* (Gil 2011), *Economía Feminista* (Pérez Orozco 2014), *Caliban y la Bruja* (Federici 2004) and *Cojos y Precarias Haciendo Vidas que Importan* (Foro de Vida Independiente and Agencia de Asuntos Precarios Todas a Zien 2011) facilitated a broad and very lively debate on new feminist horizons, practices and struggles in common. Those that preexisted 2011 found new force and inspiration in the 15M, while new generations of feminists were politicised via the groups that sprang from the 15M.

In 2013, the feminist forces of the 15M were propelled by the attempt of the conservative minister Gallardón to illegalise abortion in Spain. The Partido Popular government approved a law that would undo 30 years of feminist institutional struggles and achievements, bringing back memories of the Franco era and sparking large-scale outrage across society and its movements. The new conservative affront was part of an anti-feminist neoliberal political package that included drastic cuts to healthcare and education, seeking to enforce a model of society where people would again rely solely on their families for their reproduction. The link between precarity, women's rights and reproductive labour came to be blatantly clear and massive counter-mobilisations ensued. As is often the case, reactionary attack summoned forces that were to outlast it. Gallardón stepped down as a minister in 2014, and his law went into the dustbin of history: at the same time, the streets, squares and neighbourhoods were still vibrant with feminist debates and organisation. The renewed anti-abortion movement was questioning reproductive rights in broad terms, drawing on second-wave feminist demands of reproductive autonomy, as well as developing

new viewpoints in relation to care and interdependence. A new feminist cycle had begun.

The 15M engaged not just younger feminists, but also a generation of activists that had been struggling against precarity and patriarchal political cultures in the years prior (as well as many older generations). Many of them were women now in their 30s, questioning models of activism and confronting challenges concerning sustainable setups of home, care networks and families as well as work (Zechner 2013a). For many, this came with questions about parenthood. Thus, there began to be murmurs about the need to claim reproductive justice not just in relation to abortion, but to also fight towards new horizons of social reproduction and care, against the precarity and isolation of women and feminised subjects (those deemed vulnerable, essentially). Multiple jobs, temporary and underpaid contracts, informal work arrangements, lack of labour and social rights, rising rents and instable housing arrangements, all played their part in a crisis of social reproduction that was affecting people's lives. Too much for capital, too little for lives.

How to even imagine building a family? Whether it was singles, couples or larger nuclei of people that were asking this question. Whether they were heterosexual (the majority), queer (many), lesbian, gay, intersex, trans (many) and so forth, the sustainability of lives in common, and the possibility of building cross-generational alliances and homes came to be a key concern. Family should be a matter of choice too, to the extent that people can embrace one another and set limits as well as spaces for themselves: many young and not-so-young people were forced to move back to their parents' homes due to the financial crisis and its unemployment,

in Southern Europe in particular. Conservative politics was to set people back to having no choice but to stick with their families, no matter how abusive that might have been, for children and mothers in particular. The rate of machist gender-based murders and violence was and is high in Spain (as in many other countries), increasing in times of crisis when people are confined to the home. New feminist and LGBTQI+ movements picked up on this since the financial crisis, bringing new demands to the fore: against gender-based violence but also for autonomous networks of care and reproduction (including demands to do with assisted reproduction, same-sex marriage, safe spaces, combatting transphobia and more). In this way, care and reproduction came to take on new significance in feminist and allied movements.

As the 15M grew and matured, alliances were increasingly forged across feminist groups and domestic workers' struggles (with the *Territorio Doméstico* collective at the forefront), disabled people's groups (with the *Foro de Vida Independiente*, for instance) and pensioners (the *Yayoflautas* movement), all of whom were vulnerable and acutely threatened by the PP's policies. The question of vulnerability and sustaining life – always as a matter of dignity and solidarity, not of pity and charity – had become common in the face of the brutal cuts that impacted millions of people's lives. These debates and struggles emerged in the same manner as those around childcare: slowly, at times timidly, gaining confidence and visibility as they drew strength from one another. The politics of care was collectively developed in bouts, by mothers with young children who had their hands full, by migrants and disabled people who had yet to

strengthen and connect their platforms, by LGBTQI+ people making new claims and experiments. Still, the politics of care was new territory for feminism, and even more so for social movements in general.

A new politics of interdependence: The case of childrearing

In this often invisible but powerful way, the 15M movement was a key catalyst for the emergence of a series of projects and practices that seek to politicise care and address the increasing need for alternative infrastructures of reproduction, in the face of drastic cuts to public services and soaring unemployment[10]. Those articulations brought a wealth of new notions, practices and alliances to the fore. Let's take the neighbourhood of Poble Sec in Barcelona, on which I will dwell in my account of childcare here. Poble Sec is one of those more organised, radical neighbourhoods in Barcelona, with lively grassroots movements and neighbourhood politics. It is worth the attention in this account of childcare commoning because it brought forth not just one of the first radical projects in town, but also a singular alliance of self-organised childcare projects, as we shall see in the following section of this book. Sticking with 2011 for now, we return to the vibrant energies of the 15M and the feats, feasts and festivals of collective intelligence and experimentation they brought forth. Like any neighbourhood that wasn't totally desolate in 2011,

---

10 In 2014, with compañeras of the Electrodoméstica feminist social centre and of La Hídra, we organised a Nociones Comunes course about this in Barcelona. Its title was: 'Cómo COÑO se sostiene esto? Cuidados, ciudad y infraestructuras de lo común.' [How the fuck can this be sustained? Care, the city and infrastructures of the common] (Nociones Comunes 2014).

Poble Sec had its local 15M assembly. Meeting regularly in squares, this is where neighbourhood problems and projects were discussed. Feminists of different inspirations were part of this, too.

Some of the feminist activists of the 15M were pregnant at the time, looking to build sustainable arrangements of care across their mono- and duoparental units, to build multi-parental constellations of queer, hetero and activist spirits within which to raise their children. They had met in the post-partum classes of the local health centre and in the local 15M assembly, key spaces of intersection for conversations and complicities. Sharing precarious living conditions, a desire for change and the need to collectivise childrearing somehow, alongside many questions about motherhood, parenthood and families, these full-bellied beings got talking and thinking. The Poble Sec 15M assembly was criss-crossed by a loose mothers' network that stemmed from post-partum classes, allowing for a new political-vital thing to be dreamt up: childcare commoning, as I call it here. This took many forms, as we shall see later on, from different mothers' networks to self-organised childcare projects in Poble Sec, the first properly collective of which emerged in 2011 already: *Babàlia*. What started as a mothers' network providing mutual aid and care, sharing spaces and taking turns in looking after children, grew into a more solid structure as the children moved from being babies to toddlers. Babàlia soon came to include a pedagogue and fixed schedule, and a space where pedagogues and parents work together to raise children. A *grupo de crianza compartida* – shared childrearing group – with a distinctively activist, feminist ethos. Rethinking care was on the agenda.

Babàlia is not the first parent and educator-run childcare project in the history of Poble Sec, but it is special because it is fully collectively run and comes out of social movements.[11] Babàlia inaugurates a new phase of experimentation that runs parallel to feminist and commons movements, spurred by a moment of intense questioning of capitalist and patriarchal modes of social reproduction. Babàlia's proposal was to question patriarchy and capitalism not just in word but in practice, by developing an affordable, collectively run, feminist space for rethinking childrearing. This meant coming up with a model of childcare that wasn't centred around wage labour: one where children weren't immediately handed over to public or private institutions so that mothers could rejoin the labour market,[12] nor left to the home alongside their stay-at-home mothers so that daddy could work – one where children could be subjects, and indeed mothers and fathers, too. Though Babàlia did not literally self-describe as a commons, it brought the very question of alternative models of care, and of *grupos de crianza compartida* as childcare commons, onto the horizon in Poble Sec. An anticapitalist reproductive commons, much in line with the analyses of Silvia Federici who came to Poble Sec, too, in 2014,[13] having been widely read by local activists, to share thoughts and discussions with feminists struggling around social reproduction.

---

11 Previously in Poble Sec, a project called M*onstre de Paper* had been set up by a mother, and in the neighbouring working class barrio of Sants, a group called *Tatànet* began in 2008.

12 In Spain, statutory maternity leave only lasts 4 months only.

13 Link to the event on Babàlia's website: https://associaciobabalia.wordpress.com/2014/05/05/debate-con-silvia-federici-miercoles-7-de-mayo-19-00h/

Due to cuts, public access to early childcare institutions was very limited, and so the emergence of alternative infrastructures of reproduction was born of need as much as conviction. The mix of unemployment and public cuts meant that parents had time for organising on their hands, but also children: a situation that invites for rethinking the relationship between care and politics. As feminists of the 15M took up questions of reproduction, maternity and childrearing, different experiments of collective thinking as well as of organisation emerged. The *grupos de crianza* are part and parcel of this history, as are feminist social centres as loci of experimentation, and feminist self-education spaces. The course *El ADN de la Vida. Cuidados, crianza y comunidad* of the Nociones Comunes platform took place in 2013 in Madrid, connecting and continuing debates and practices on collective childrearing and social movements. Facilitated by feminists and other activists, the course set out to map and debate models of childcare and subjective, collective and social dynamics that occur with care and childrearing. How can we rethink and re-value reproduction and childcare, beyond the binary trap between conservativism and the nuclear family? This meant starting from experience in relatively unchartered territory:

> We will stop to reflect on the question of care and interdependency, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, we will get into the debates about different childcare models. Two questions that, once explored, will bring us to look deeper into the dichotomies, solidarities and possibilities that childrearing [*crianza*] opens up in debates on public and private space, also between the strong

> contradictions and the challenge that proposing childcare between the familiar and the communitarian means. Our questions will be 'how to articulate models of childrearing that don't relegate childcare back into private space? How to crisscross and affect [*atravesar*] the common and communities with childrearing? How can we approach community-related debates in this field?' And the key question 'What is the political and social meaning of a construction of collective, community childrearing?' (Nociones Comunes 2013; my translation from Spanish.)

A string of books and articles shedding light on the matter appeared from 2013 onwards, penned by recent mothers. The bestselling book *Where Is My Tribe?* ('Dónde está mi Tribú?', Del Olmo 2013) reflects on raising children in individualist societies and facing a lack of support networks, as well as on the tensions and contradictions between feminist demands of various generations in relation to the experience of raising children today. Similarly, from the viewpoint of sex-positive, post-porn feminism, activist Maria Llopis published an edition on *Subversive Maternities* (Llopis 2015). The bibliography continues, with books such as *Trincheras Permanentes* (León 2017) reflecting on the intersections between politics and care (via social movements and parenting), *Maternidad, igualdad, fraternidad: las madres como sujetos políticos en sociedades poslaborales* (Merino 2017) looking at mothers as political subjects, and so forth. All these books are authored by women who were active in the 15M movement. Like Babàlia, they share a desire to rearticulate babel with babble, to find new ways of speaking, thinking and relating that abolish the centrality of white, independent males as political subjects.

Care autonomism and the 'feminisation' of politics

Let me briefly outline two main tendencies in the years after the 15M and municipalist entries into town halls. These are institutional feminism and care ethics, on the one hand, and autonomous and community-based care politics, on the other. This is not the story of a simple split however, as we shall see below: it's more like a tale of differentiation and new affinities.

The former current, embodied in the most solid way by Barcelona en Comú, was led by a number of women from the municipalist movement, who came to take on political roles – from mayor to councillors and sectorial leaders, researchers and campaigners. The list of prominent feminist figures in Barcelona en Comú is very long: some of those that we hear about (and from) in the following pages are (mayor) Ada Colau, (disctrict councillor) Gala Pin, (area leader) Laia Forné Aguirre, (neighbourhood councillor) Carolina López and (party coordinator) Kate Shea Baird. Coming from many different struggles and feminist currents, these people set out to change politics from within – in a feminist way. To question the rhythms and modalities of institutional politics, its hierarchies and roles, institutional and spatial architectures and relational codes. The role that care plays (or doesn't play) in politics is a central point in this endeavour.

Those struggles of municipalist feminists across the Spanish state are often referred to as a 'feminisation' of politics (Roth & Shea Baird 2017a, 2017b; Roth, Zugasti Hervás, interview Alejandra De Diego Baciero 2017). The term points to a becoming-woman in terms of identity politics and quotas as well as to radical demands about becoming-vulnerable and caring. These

are often mingled in the complex manoeuvres and alliances feminist municipalists build, with differing outcomes. What is clear, however, is that municipalism has kick-started a new cycle of institutional feminism (reflected somewhat less favourably in the state-level feminism of Podemos, which takes abolitionist stances on sex work, for instance). Whatever we may make of the struggles of the women and trans persons at the forefront of this current, theirs is undoubtedly a highly challenging and interesting feat, as it reveals a great deal about how political institutions work and may (or may not) be changed. Grappling with this is another key intention behind these pages, in ways that are not merely critically removed but that try to relay stories and lessons from embodied experiences. We might say that the subversion of institutions is the target of this feminist current.

The second, powerful feminist current coming and continuing out of this phase of post-15M commons politics is that of autonomist care politics. Strong and steady in Latin America, and partially reflected in Spanish movements, this approach is based in community and self-organisation. The politics of care here relates more to subversion of community, as described in MariaRosa Dalla Costa and Selma James's influential 1975 pamphlet *Women and the Subversion of Community*. Rooted in feminist self-government rather than government, and learning from women's struggles and self-organisations of social reproduction notably, this feminism is sometimes in dialogue with different attempts at forging feminist policy, but stays out of the institutions. It is driven by activists and community leaders who frequently engage in debates with institutional feminism, incorporating stories and lessons of institutional work and

negotiation. This allows them to return to perspectives of autonomy anew, grounded in experiences of interdependence.

Needless to say, it is not just the differences but also the interplay between institutional and autonomous feminisms that is of interest in this book. And so is the 'back again' that follows the shift from autonomy to interdependence in commons thinking. Mapping out a complex political cycle, the following pages trace incremental feminist learning processes that keep shifting and reinventing the articulations of interdependence and autonomy.

II. CHILDCARE COMMONS: MOTHERS' SYMPOIEISIS, THE NEIGHBOURHOOD POLITICS OF CARE AND MUNICIPAL POLICY

Childcare commons as vector of political change

> 'The mother's chat group is faster than the health-care hotline' – local urban wisdom in Poble Sec.

Defining care and childcare

What is childcare? Right before and after birth, *childcare* is about learning to care for small humans, and childcare groups are about mutual support and advice, as babies are strongly attached to their primary carers (mostly mothers). As babies grow bigger, *childcare* also comes to refer to the care that another person or group can provide a baby with as parents (mostly mothers) go do reproductive or waged work. Both aspects of childcare are preserved in Poble Sec's mothers' networks and *grupos de crianza*: their aim is to keep practical, ethical, pedagogical and organisational matters of care together, as much as is possible and desirable. They aim to hold the care cycle, as Joan Tronto describes it, together: to avoid alienating separations between *caring-about, taking-care-of, care-giving, care-receiving*, and indeed also *caring-with* (Tronto 1993, 2009).

But different aspects or phases of care are neither distributed nor valued equally in our societies. In raising children, the emotional and organisational aspects of care – as *caring-about* – are mostly left to mothers as the infamous *mental load* (planning meals, birthday parties and gifts, doctor visits, playdates, observing well-being, minding and sustaining relations, etc.). This mental, emotional and relational labour is very intensive and requires continuous movements of *taking care of*. Thirdly, the very material, physical and skin-to-skin/hands-on

aspect of care – as *care-giving* – is also highly invisible and undervalued while mostly performed by women and indeed migrants (mostly women migrants as nannies).

When sustained and naturalised, these crucial phases of care, whether for children or other beings, remain underappreciated, unlike the sporadic and public declarations or gestures of care that can come from people (often men, often white persons) with power. Think of the visibility of the person who 'takes care of the wine' for a dinner versus the unspectacular labour of the person cooking, the generosity attributed to the person who buys a fancy birthday gift versus the respect for the person organizing the party, or the admiration for the dad taking his child for a walk versus the public attitude towards mothers walking with prams.

The politics, ethics and organisation of care, in its different phases and manifestations, is thus the touchstone to which we will refer in analysing childcare commoning. Tronto's description of care cycles matters greatly to mapping out the subversive as well as sustainable potential of collective models of (child)care provision, in that it allows us to detect power inequalities and divisions of labour, visibility and valorisation. Her added emphasis on *care-receiving* and *caring-with*, as the moments of vulnerability and solidarity which are often ignored in speaking about care, urge us to also consider *the other(s)* in care, adding a crucial ethical dimension. Alongside analyses of global care chains (e.g. those of Hochschild, Lutz, Gil & Pérez Orozco), feminist economics (e.g. Pérez-Orozco, Vega Solis, Knittler & Haidinger) and women's commons (e.g. Federici, Mies), care ethics provide a powerful feminist toolkit for analysis.

Childcare within, against and beyond neoliberalism

Contemporary childcare commons emerge and exist in the context of neoliberal social and economic organisation. The conditions this implies are very different from those that, say, post-war or boomer mothers faced. As Carolina del Olmo (2013) notes, the generations of women who grew up in neoliberal economies and are now parenting are well aware of the triple burden they face: housework, waged work, and childcare all at once. They are also aware of their slim chances of gaining stable employment in today's economies of precarity, particularly as women and mothers. To embrace motherhood and childrearing via networks of mutual support is a political act that also reflects a refusal of precarious labour and triple-burden exploitation, and a collective desire to invent and defend other ways of caring and living. Del Olmo writes about how new forms of motherhood ('*nuevas maternidades*') question narratives that equate waged labour to empowerment, and label 'staying at home' to care as regressive:

> Some go home to be care-givers, others choose professions of less prestige and less salary that leave them more free time. [...] for sure one has to ask why some do this and others that, but it's not enough to pose that question whilst taking for granted that the ones over here win and the ones over there lose, that the ones over here are being submissive whilst the other ones choose (Del Olmo, 2014; my translation from Spanish).

Questioning discourses of choice in childcare and neoliberal contexts is an important labour that feminists are mostly left with (Barbagallo 2016). Mothers are all too easily patronised and underestimated. The approach

to reproductive and waged labour that Olmo describes above shares much affinity with some theories and economies of the commons, privileging the creation of autonomous – and interdependent – circuits of value generation over the integration into existing job or financial markets. Autonomism is given a feminist overhaul in these spheres of practice and theorization, as advocating for organisational models that transcend the state and the market yet are solidly based in affirmations of mutual dependency and vulnerability (Gil 2011).

Childcare commoning thus emerges in the context of a new wave of feminism based in affirmations of interdependency, care, diversity and post-work imaginaries that point to mutual aid and defense networks (*Ni una Menos*, see Mason-Deese 2018), community and commons (see e.g. Guiterrez Aguilar, Federici, Vega Solis), new social rights (basic income, care income[1]), and feminist economics (e.g. Pérez-Orozco 2014). These have brought forth new politicizations of care, childcare and feminist motherhood (e.g. Del Olmo 2013; León 2017; Llopis 2015; Merino 2017; Vivas 2019). The political focus thus shifts from work to life, from integrating women into existing systems to redefining those systems altogether, and from addressing the state at large to addressing municipal and regional institutions more in particular. As we shall see in the examples of the *grupos de crianza*, this allows for some aporias around care to be overcome, opening up to new contradictions and challenges.

---

1 See: A Care Income Now! https://globalwomenstrike.net/open-letter-to-governments-a-care-income-now/

'It takes a village to raise a child'

There is one dimension that connects and underpins all the childcare-related organizing in Poble Sec: the more or less informal networks of mothers (and, to a very limited extent, fathers).[2] These networks emerge through different encounters and shared spaces: pre- and post-partum classes, nurseries, everyday encounters on playgrounds and in the neighbourhood generally, as well as local events and workshops. This sociality has its nodal points in playgrounds, in streets and squares, in childcare centres (public, common, private) and in Whatsapp groups. The mothers' networks are spaces of commoning that create lively links between public institutions and spaces (health centres, playgrounds, nurseries), commons spaces (grupos de crianza, social centres, cooperatives) and the private spaces so pivotal to childcare (the home, the family).

These networks, though informal and non-committal, often end up being stronger spaces of reference than both public and family systems. Women trust and seek each other for advice and help. Digital communication technologies like Whatsapp make this mutual support very instant, immediate and dialogical: unlike advice from a single source, as might be a doctor or family member, mothers chat groups provide a myriad of viewpoints and recommendations on any single issue. They are sociotechnical assemblages (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017: 14) that, like the *grupos de crianza*, take the loneliness out of parenting and motherhood in particular:

---

2 In the Whatsapp group of 86 members, there is one cis male member who has, in the course of two years, sent three messages; all other correspondence has been between mothers.

> The current rise of the *grupos de crianza compartida*, created and self-managed by women, is a response to the loneliness that many urban mothers suffer from, but also to the model of society and city that liberal capitalism imposes. Those groups that health centres or associations of different kinds promote, are conceived in order to give support to women around the first months of a baby. Yet the connection [*vínculo*] between the participating mothers is so intense that it comes to transcend this period, and establishes itself as a support for childrearing, with the spirit of what we ancestrally could have identified as tribe [*tribú*] (Puerto 2019; my translation from Spanish).

The Spanish version of 'it takes a village to raise a child' is '*para educar a unx niñx hace falta una tribú*' – one refers to the village while the other refers to the tribe. The notion of *tribú* is often used to affirm broad solidarity and care, and radical mutualist networks that in fact transcend the family.[3] *Tribú* and *village* are connected. In Poble Sec, parent activists often refer to the grupos de crianza and other care networks as their 'tribú', a very extended family existing in relation to a specific common territory and revolving around the care of its young as well as elders.

In 2018, we tried to tackle what enables us to make childcare a matter of commoning, in the context of a colloquium that asked '*Hace falta un Poble Sec para criar?*' (does it take a Poble Sec to raise a child?)[4] My writing

---

3 A more recent example of this – one of many – is the pandemic neighbourhood solidarity network *Somos Tribú VK* in Vallecas, Madrid. https://somostribuvk.com/

4 '*Comunes y Crianza. Hace falta un Poble Sec para criar?*' Colloquium held at Poble Sec's Sortidor Civic Centre in October 2018 (Comunes y Crianza Colloquium 2018).

here contains many of the ways in which we ended up answering this question, feeding on the great collective intelligence of Poble Sec's childcare commons.

It takes a generational process to raise a child

Generational consciousness is strong in these commons, leading to a development of organisational intelligence about the cycles of ageing, institutional passage, health, relationships and groups, all of which are part of what's collectively discussed and responded to in these care commons and networks in Poble Sec. Family trajectories are criss-crossed by breakups, rent raises, moves, job loss and search, illnesses, moments of depression, displacement, and so forth; the ties they build fluctuate, vary, weaken.

By accompanying the emergence and (dis)continuities of ties, childcare groups and mothers' networks come to be rich in knowledge and an understanding of different rhythms, cycles and generational processes. This is a dimension much overlooked in commons research: the ways in which bodily, seasonal, economic, political, and many other kinds of rhythms intersect (Michon 2007) with processes of generation and resurgence. Generation doesn't only refer to biological reproduction here, it implies collective precedence and resurgence of many kinds.

It takes mothers' chat groups to raise a child

The mothers' networks renew every half year or so, with generations overlapping:

> Every half year more or less there's a new Whatsapp group; summer and Christmas holidays are natural moments of generational change, though there is always a continuity of people and

> some groups even keep meeting during the holidays without me. (Interview Pepi Dominguez 2018; my translation from Spanish.)

Through online chats, mothers exchange advice, things, information, arrange meetings, joint walks, playdates, talks and workshops, organise or join baby blocs, disseminate campaigns and events, and discuss all sorts of matters from medical to political to personal. Not requiring moderator functions, these groups are inclusive of anyone wanting to join (within the technical limit of 256 participants) and refuse any regimentations of political, personal and practical debate. To the subjects involved – mostly women – this doesn't amount to chaotic or un-rigorous communication but to the conscious embracing of a politics that does not cut out the background noise of life (far from Arendtian notions of political rigor). Chat groups act like a digital background or murmur that nourishes and sustains everyday encounters and lives.

They don't just make the personal political but also bring the political down to the embodied level, reflecting on ways of being affected, situated and response-able in relation to different problems or policies. They don't just channel concern or 'caring about' but also organise action as 'taking care of', 'care-giving' as sharing care work and practice, the sharing of moments of vulnerability and the affirmation of interdependence as 'care-receiving', as well as 'caring-with' as feminist or neighbourhood solidarity.

This 'reproductive networking' functions on premises well opposed to those of neoliberal networking for jobs or status. It is reproductive commoning par excellence, as diffuse, multilayered and multitasking

cooperation and collective care. Reproductive commoning thrives on addressing multiple and changing needs, rather than centring on a single resource or task.

Moreover, there is no strict separation between digital and material, giving and taking, friendship and family, reason and sensuality, individual and collective in mothers' networks. Bodies are not just objects to be looked after or self-cared-for, they are agents of connection and becoming. Their rhythms give connectedness a texture, structure and meaning. As spaces of care, love, resonance, inspiration and empowerment, in such feminist circuits 'the body gives the spirit its pulse, its beat [...]' - bodily rhythms also structure counterhegemonic forms of perception and sensation, eroticism, proximity, kinship, connectedness, in this sisterly universe. 'So rhythm is an essential element of embodied knowledge [...]' (Rolnik & Bardet 2018; my translation from Spanish), and a key to grasping the generational as well as generative nature of feminist care networking.

Rearguard frontlines

Across Spain, a movement of the feminist *rearguard* or *retaguardia* (Fernández, Malo & León 2012) is stirring, politicizing life and enlivening politics. Childcare commoning is one of its powerful vehicles, initially resembling a 'social nonmovement' (Bayat 2010) but soon turning out to be articulating a new feminist politics of mothering. This emerges as a response to female precarization, the loneliness of nuclear family and solo parenting, and the neoliberal fragmentation of care, space and time (see Del Olmo 2013).

Silent and barely visible to the public eye, like most movements of reproductive commoning and care, this new wave of childcare commoning is well aware of itself and the predicaments it struggles to overcome. Debates on Poble Sec mothers' networks are often overtly political, and always feminist. They integrate new members on a running basis, extending the politicisation of motherhood. From economic, material, social and subjective phenomena to the shortcomings of second wave feminism's orientation towards wages and labour market integration, this mothers' movement wants to build different relations and scenarios of reproduction.

> How do we make the revolution starting from the rearguard? The mothers alone. Criss-crossed by the crisis, by the generalised looting of all that's public, but also by a social awakening that's more pressing each time (Fernández, Malo and León 2012; my translation from Spanish).

The struggle for public infrastructures and institutions is as much part of these new feminisms as the invention of new modes of commoning care. With the new municipalist governments in Spain, feminist actors also bring these anti-neoliberal struggles into public institutions – as we shall see below. For now we move on to look at the more formally organised childcare commons that emerge out of mothers' networks, with a special focus on the *grupos de crianza compartida*.

Laboratories of interdependence: Self-organised nurseries

Poble Sec's childcare groups initially grew out of the boost in neighbourhood and feminist self-organisation that came with the 15M movement of 2011. In a context of economic crisis after 2008, high unemployment meant people had more time to organise, care and experiment. At the same time, harsh austerity measures affected the accessibility and quality of public nurseries. Austerity and precarity thus produced an increasing demand, capacity and desire for self-run childcare projects that could provide alternative support networks and forms of education. To avoid childcare falling back onto mothers, isolating them and reinforcing nuclear family structures, communitarian alternatives were needed.

Who looks after kids in the neighbourhood?

Poble Sec had 40,358 inhabitants in 2017, of which approximately 1,200 were children 0–3 years old. Roughly half of them were taken care of by their parents or informal care arrangements, some 20% went to local public nurseries (there were about 209 places in 3 local publicly run nurseries: 20% is the legally prescribed quota [Sindic 2015]), about 18% went to private nurseries, and 8% (some 100 children) were part of *grupos de crianza*.[5] The self-organised childcare projects – *grupos de crianza compartida* – thus account for a considerable proportion of early-age childcare in Poble Sec.

---

5 For more details, see the report and recordings of the Comunes y Crianza Colloquium 2018 in the bibliography.

Another way to answer the question about who looks after children is to say, again: mothers. In Spanish-Catalan society in general as well as in the *grupos de crianza* in particular, mothers are still the main protagonists of childcare. Maternity leave lasts only 4 months in its statutory form in Spain, leaving women with a short time frame to establish modalities of childcare and mutual support to fall back on when back at work. Fathers or co-parents can barely make use of parental leave, leading to a focalization of childcare with mothers.

Starting from the strong support networks built around birth and baby care, many post-partum mothers invent minor dispositifs of childcare-sharing. These often give rise to a desire to create more integrated, intimate and open options of continuous early-age childcare, especially as public and private childcare systems fail to offer places or affordable rates. From there, *grupos de crianza compartida* emerge as more stable institutions of the commons, becoming powerful platforms of mutual support and care-sharing in the neighbourhood.

Grupos de crianza compartida, groups of parents forming a shared vision and defining shared needs, usually find a trained educator to accompany them (an '*acompañante*'), then find a space for their group (to rent usually), constitute an association, and begin an initially experimental routine of daily childcare. Groups might shift from being more parent-run to being more teacher-run and vice versa, and involve different degrees of sharing the work of childcare as well as organisation. Their ethos is that parents, pedagogues and children work together and constitute a strong care network or *tribú* – recognising that modern urban parenting is a very individualising and precarious matter that requires the invention of new support structures.

These self-organised groups combine and articulate matters of pedagogy, care and organisation, in ways that can transform all these dimensions, and build sustainable alternatives (to the public and private nursery systems) for bringing up children and creating community. In the terms of Joan Tronto's ethics of care, they combine concern (caring-about) with action (taking care of) and with labour (care-giving) in reciprocal ways that centre on children as subjects and agents (care-receiving), as well as solidarity-based relations to the neighbourhood and beyond (caring-with).

As such, they constitute ecologies of care in the neighbourhood, linking the different phases of care with one another in dynamic ways. They may be seen as social-familial-local ecosystems that shape reproductive commons – in ways that are necessarily imperfect and impure, yet that try to 'stay with the trouble' (Haraway 2016) and support one another in the daily struggle to extend their families beyond the nuclear family and other alienated forms.[6]

Life, work and struggle mix in the *grupos de crianza compartida*. They are part and parcel of post-work, care-based feminisms that centre on politicising care as work *as well as* 'placing life at the centre' (Pérez Orozco 2014). As Christel Keller Garganté – mother, activist and childcare researcher in Barcelona – puts it:

> The *grupos de crianza compartida* are indeed useful for socially valuing care, which in this sense is a claim that many different feminisms have made, about the visibilisation of care work and so on. The *groups de*

6 'The nuclear family is radioactive!' the 15M feminists used to say. https://madrid.tomalaplaza.net/2012/05/20/la-familia-nuclear-es-radioactiva-2/

> *crianza* indeed *do* work when it comes to making this a common matter [*ponerlo en común*] and, therefore, to give it [care] a central space in social life – which also has to do with their given capacity of weaving community networks [*hacer tejido comunitario*] (Comunes y Crianza Colloquium 2018; my translation from Spanish).

What makes *grupos de crianza compartida* especially relevant in sociopolitical terms is they also engage Tronto's fifth phase of care, *caring-with* (Tronto 2009). They are spaces of neighbourhood as well as feminist and childrens' solidarity. Invisibly yet powerfully, they are linked into local mothers' networks and chats, picking up problems, needs and wider social affectivities. More visibly, they participate in the feminist strikes of the 8th of March and activities of the local social and solidarity economy networks, as well as neighbourhood assemblies and protests. They push for children's rights and spaces for free play.[7]

Interlinking of different phases of care serves not just as a definitional criteria for speaking about radical collective care practices, but also for speaking about commons. How radical or transformative can commons or indeed care be, if they don't articulate reproduction and care work (care-giving), the sharing of vulnerability

---

7 In 2016, a large old building on Montjuic adjacent to the Poble Sec and Font de la Guattla neighbourhoods was occupied, led by activists of Babàlia, la Rimaieta and the social centre *La Base*. The plan was to negotiate with the city to make this a space for self-organised education. However, for various complex reasons, the building wasn't renovated and the plan was abandoned. This was one of the first attempts by activists to articulate childcare commons with municipal policy; activists lamented insufficient agility on the side of city councillors in this instance (Interview with Javier Rodrigo 2018).

(care-receiving), caring-with as solidarity, alongside concern (caring-about) and taking-care-of (action)?

Dual neighbourhood powers of care

The origin of Poble Sec's childcare groups has to do with the dual power of feminist neighbourhood politics, combining the level of grassroots movements and that of institutional actors. At the level of the grassroots, it was feminist debates at Poble Sec's neighbourhood assembly within the 15M that led to the organisation of a workshop for discussing childcare-sharing groups in 2011. This in turn led to the formation of the 'Poble Sec network of community-based childrearing' (*xarxa de crianza compartida Poble Sec*) that sought to federate different collective childcare initiatives. It brought forth two collectively run nurseries: one based on a more family-driven model (*Babàlia*), and the other on a more educator-driven model (*Petit Molinet*), inspiring a new generation of childcare groups.

At the institutional level, it's the work of midwife and educator Pepi Dominguez that opened the path way for the *grupos de crianza*. Dominguez works at the local public health centre of Poble Sec (CAP Hortes) and runs pre/post-partum classes there, as well as being part of a feminist cooperative of midwives. Thanks to her initiative, the public health centre provides pre/post-partum classes as an open and engaging space of encounter and collective interest formation. She plays a key role in shaping mothers' networks. It matters that the origin of commons-based nursery alternatives also lies in the public system: like many others, Pepi encourages fluidity rather than opposition between commons- and public organisation.

Indeed, she contributes to the public healthcare centre also functioning as a commons.

With the *grupos de crianza*, a new generational process of politicising care was inaugurated. Poble Sec went from having 1–2 parent-run daycare projects after 2007, to having around 5 after 2011, around 7 in 2016, and again 5–6 in 2019. Some groups come and go, others remain stable, traversed by complex social, economic and political processes in the neighbourhood. In 2017, taking up the spirit of the *xarxa de crianza* again in the face of new municipalist experimentations, the majority of existing childcare commoning projects formed the PEPI platform together, a new network to provide each other mutual support and gain political leverage vis-à-vis the local policies of *Barcelona en Comú*.

By 2017, there had been two years of new municipalist government. Many local activists in Poble Sec (as well as elsewhere in Barcelona) had been involved in the movement-driven electoral campaigns of *Barcelona en Comú* in 2015 and continued to be accomplices and observers of the municipalist governments.[8] Many had young children and were part of *grupos de crianza*, eager to put childcare commons on the institutional agenda, too, to defend and claim spaces and new models of care and education.

The name PEPI is a pun in reference to Pepi Dominguez, as well as standing for 'Platform for Education and Participation of Infants'. Pepi's role as

---

8 Many of my collaborators in the 'Comunes y Crianza' colloquium in Poble Sec in 2018 were working at the intersection of neighbourhood activism, public pedagogies, care feminism and municipalism: of those quoted here, Lucia Zandigiacomi, Javier Rodrigo, and myself included have shared such political spaces.

'meta-mother' and enabler of childcare- and mothers' commons is of prime importance and is widely recognised in the neighbourhood. Pepi weaves relations and transversal connections between institutions, the private lives of families, and initiatives of commoning – a kind of female leadership that also inspired municipalists, like councillor Carolina López who we will hear about below. As translators, traffickers of knowledges and resources, and matchmakers or mediators, these kinds of women play an important role in a social ecosystem like the one described here.

Creating fluidity between the public and the commons is an art, but not one that's practiced in isolation. It depends on the strength, claims and resilience of self-organised initiatives (such as the PEPI and the *grupos de crianza*), which allow public-based agents to open spaces and resources up to commoning. The childcare commons in question here defend linking public and commons-based systems, as a political exercise that requires ongoing negotiation. Radical municipalism brought an opportunity to undo the contraposition of *either-or* narratives and led into ways of valuing and encouraging commons and public to enrich one another.

Within, against and beyond the economies of capital

The micro- and macropolitical dynamics of childcare also interplay in relation to specific neoliberal dynamics, having an impact on the neighbourhood. Between the economic crises of 2008 and 2020, rents went up and up – and with them, many families had to leave the neighbourhood. Together with a shortening of the obligatory duration of rental contracts, this led to a harsh dynamic

of displacement in Poble Sec, as well as to a powerful struggle against evictions and real estate speculation: via the neighbourhood union [*Sindicat de Barri*], the PAH, and the renters union [*Sindicat de Llogaters*].

Real estate speculation made it hard for childcare groups to find and afford appropriate spaces (shopfronts for rent). To be sure, rent rises have also led to a greater influx of families with more disposable income into the neighbourhood, which sometimes join *grupos de crianza* and can trigger complex dynamics. Less precarious middle class families are able to pay higher fees, meaning they can pay educators more fairly but at the same make general fee rises seem more legitimate, as well as rendering the demographic of groups more privileged in terms of their class composition. Between 2014 and 2020, unemployment went down in Catalunya, and Poble Sequis found more waged work – reducing time available for self-organisation.

This is one of the most significant factors in how much self-organisation and transversal care the *grupos de crianza* are able to muster: the level of employment and income of families, as well as the kind of employment – public sector workers tend to engage with the politics of childcare commoning more than workers used to private sector hierarchies and ethos. The situation of families, as well as the composition of childcare groups, can change within short timespans and reconfigure groups drastically. Since the *grupos de crianza* are entirely self-funded via fees, they are very volatile to such shifts. Should they receive public funding to become more sustainable, fair and accessible?

Synergies (and aporias) between the commons and the public

Do commons initiatives merit public funding? When? How? These are the million-dollar-questions (or more likely, within given budgetary frameworks, few-thousand-euro-questions). The networks of childcare commoning of Poble Sec have given these questions, and related municipalist strategies, a fair amount of thought. There are no easy answers: the vibrant social and political climate in Poble Sec averts polarisation and a sense of disempowering contradiction through ongoing shared debate, between activists, parents, councillors and educators.

Within the *grupos de crianza compartida*, there are different tendencies as regards demands to the city council and the question of whether it should grant free use of spaces or give funding. Marc Alcega Alcivill from the network of free education in Catalunya (*XELL*; of which some *grupos de crianza* are a part) was interviewed by the *Tribú en Arganzuela*[9] project about his network's 'demands towards the administrations, such as granting the use of spaces, give some kind of subsidy, etc':

> There's a debate about that. In our surroundings there are movements that absolutely want to do without the state and its mechanisms, and others that say 'no, we're part of society, the state also represents us'. In this case, what can we ask of them [the state]? For now we'll get them to not persecute us, that they leave us in peace and help us with things that don't cost them money. This is where licenses come into play: to find one that serves us for regularizing the spaces of our

9 See: *La Tribú en Arganzuela Project* https://tribuarganzuela.tumblr.com/

> schools (Alcega & La Tribú en Arganzuela, 2016: my translation from Spanish).

For some however, there are problematic and possibly insurmountable contradictions when it comes to the relationship between commons and the state in childcare. Raquel Gallego, head of the IGOP policy research centre in Barcelona and co-coordinator of various projects on care provision, institutional and non-institutional models of early childcare (0–3 year-olds), says of 'innovative' non-institutional models like the *grupos de crianza compartida*:

> The problem is that if they don't want to be regulated, how will they demand public spaces, [...]? That's contradictory: you can't demand to make use of public resources if you don't accept to be regulated; it's contradictory because if you're not regulated then you're outside. [...] On the other hand, if the government – the local one for instance – regulates it [self-organised childcare], then it's taking on responsibility, and we also don't know if it wants to take that on (Interview Raquel Gallego, 2019; my translation from Spanish).

In the case of Poble Sec's groups and the PEPI, the notion that childcare groups would not want to be regulated in any way is questionable. The closeness of many activists and parents to the commons debates and policies (before, within and beyond *Barcelona en Comú*) means that there is a critical openness regarding possibilities for municipal support and regulation. A sense of potentiality and invention prevails, based on public-commons partnerships in other areas. As Laia Forné Aguirre, working on participation in Barcelona's city hall, puts it:

> One of the challenges of municipalism is to build a new form of public institution that's based on trust and commitment between the institution and citizens, for the development of a framework of *public-communitarian* collaboration. A collaboration that maintains and respects the autonomy of communities, while, at the same time, guaranteeing the public function of resources via criteria of access, sustainability, social returns, territorial rootedness and democratic governance of common goods (Forné Aguirre 2019; my translation from Catalan).

The 'Urban Commons' policies (Ayuntamiento de Barcelona 2017a and 2017b) that 'regulate' spaces such as the Can Battló community centre, for instance, show that public-commons agreements need not pass via total control and permanent audits. Spaces are being handed over rent-free to local communities (as associations) and new modalities of accompaniment and ongoing evaluation are being elaborated: this model could also work for childcare groups. Yet from another viewpoint, there are also concerns about the use of public municipal resources for commoning experiments:

> It's very curious because with experiences like those of social innovation we realise that they don't help with the problematics of people who really suffered from the crisis. Rather they answer to the aspirations of people who have a high educational level, that have a medium but sufficient socioeconomic level. [...] Not just that, I think it [alternative economies] isn't even known [to this most affected population]. And I doubt that if they knew it, they would choose it (Interview Raquel Gallego 2019; my translation from Spanish).

For Gallego, who has followed a host of research projects on solidarity- and commons-based economies at the IGOP research centre (a hub of social movement-related policy research in Barcelona), this problem of the accessibility of self-run childcare projects reflects a broader problem with social and solidarity economies. She argues that the term 'economía social y solidaria' might be misleading, because this economy is not for disadvantaged people. This contradiction can indeed also be seen in the social, cultural and ethnic composition of Poble Sec's childcare projects. They are largely made up of white people with a relatively high level of education and lower-middle income. This is self-critically confirmed by Poble Sec-based cooperativist and activist Xavier Latorre Tapis, speaking about his many years of working in the social and solidarity economy networks in Poble Sec:

> We also have a self-critique... in our spaces the majority are *blanquitos* ['whities'] [...] we always say that our networks are having trouble opening to more of the cultural diversity in the neighbourhood. We're conscious that we're not reaching all the diversity that exists in the neighbourhood, we're mostly white people (Interview Xavier Latorre Tapis 2019; my translation from Spanish).

Here we encounter a blind spot of much commons theory, which often fails to address questions of race, class and gender. If commons are to be transformative social practices that lead to not only more democracy but also to more equality, then what basic requirements must they meet? Is it enough for commons initiatives to practically (not just discursively) address only

one of the great axes of inequality – bringing justice in terms of class, gender, race, age or ability for instance? These questions are at the forefront of municipalist debates on the use of public resources. They point to a problem that's unresolved in many social movements and institutional contexts alike.

Barcelona en Comú's ambivalence over self-organised childcare groups

How, if at all, should childcare groups feature in municipal policy? Carolina López, the local *Barcelona en Comú* councillor of Poble Sec, recounts the troublesome path this question led her down. The struggle around policies of the commons as regarding childcare happens between three major areas of municipal politics, as López narrates:

> The ongoing debate is basically about a confrontation between [the] Education and Economy [municipal departments], but then comes a moment where Feminisms [as a municipal department] also come into the debate (Comunes y Crianza Colloquium 2018; my translation from Spanish).

López recounts how childcare groups end up being caught in a field of tension between different policy areas, narrating herself as defender of these groups who fought hard to have them included in the electoral programme in 2014 and now finds herself very frustrated:

> When Education comes into play and tells us that they won't support, under any circumstances, the *grupos de crianza compartida*, [...] we decide to talk to Economy because that's the cooperatives, it's

> the community economy [*economía comunitaria*], it's the economy of care, it's feminism and economic feminism. So we thought to tackle it from the viewpoint of furthering cooperatives, of promoting the associative culture [*asociacionismo*] around this issue, and we made a lot of headway because in Economy we are putting all our possible efforts into creating cooperatives and into creating community economies [economía comunitaria] [...]. Feminisms also stop us and say that we can't do anything whatsoever until we have clarity about what can be done, something that again stalls the processes (Comunes y Crianza Colloquium 2018; my translation from Spanish).

For the Department of Education, the *grupos de crianza compartida* are a threat to the public system, looking too much like private initiatives. For the feminist working area, they are too marked by traditional gendered divisions of labour and a lack of cultural and ethnic diversity. So they end up in the 'economy' category, where commons policies are developed in relation to the social and solidarity economies and urban commons. A continuous point of orientation for childcare commons are the policy pilots around 'urban commons and citizen heritage' (Ayuntamiento de Barcelona 2017a and 2017b). Local parent activist Javier Rodrigo cannot see any reasons why these models should not be expanded towards childcare:

> The city of Barcelona, to put it simply, promotes that there are long-term agreements with organisations to which it grants the use of an infrastructure. [...] The question is: Why can this model not be applied to a model of childcare when there are already these other models? The city of Barcelona has some 50 neighbourhood community centres

> and playspaces, of which 80% are managed by citizens: it's not such an unusual thing. The problem is that when we talk about education we're very quick to generate a binary between the private and the public (Comunes y Crianza Colloquium 2018; my translation from Spanish).

It is the activists and parents themselves who are pushing for change and new policies concerning early childhood, and it's often them – still close enough to *Barcelona en Comú* after many of them have participated very actively in drawing up their electoral programme in 2015 – who expect a municipal government with a claim to the commons to innovate. Rodrigo emphasises that if people in neighbourhoods and social movements 'generate dynamics of commoning that bring forth politico-technical solutions, the local administration must support those and find legal and normative frameworks for them'. This is not, he insists, what happened with the Pepi, which ended up being a mere dialogue that 'lacked political capacity, since we [the grupos de crianza] were defined as private spaces' (Email Rodrigo 2020). Rodrigo senses appropriation of grassroots innovation by discourses like those of López, since proposals for new frameworks mostly came from activists in the case of childcare commons.

Beyond public vs. commons

There is sometimes a clash between the temporalities of human reproduction and care, those of neighbourhood organising and community formation, and those of institutions. Here again a rhythmic-temporal and generational gaze is crucial. A child goes through very different phases and needs in its first years of life; a rent contract runs between 3–5 years in Barcelona; a legislature lasts 4 years; these can intersect and overlap in

various ways. The families who pioneered radical collective childcare infrastructures after 2011 are now organizing around primary schools. The parents who forged and furthered the political-institutional debate during the 2014–19 mandate of *Barcelona en Comú* are now moving on into other phases, some are forced to move out of Poble Sec due to rising rents. There is a challenge for the transgenerational transmission of childcare commons and their practical knowledges, which require structures like the PEPI as well as continuous spaces like those of the actual *grupos de crianza compartida*.

But reducing the debate around self-organised childcare to a polarity between private vs. public is to miss out on a lot of things. Firstly, as Javier Rodrigo notes, *grupos de crianza* are spaces of democratic learning and experimentation, and their 'direct governance is very efficient, with commissions, democracy: it's a school for mothers and fathers' (Comunes y Crianza Colloquium 2018; my translation from Spanish). Secondly, the practices and knowledges produced in these groups spill and cross over into the public system, influencing their democratic politics with grassroots methods of self-management. Most children go from the *grupos de crianza* into the public school system with 3 or in rare cases 5 years, bringing habits, expectations, alliances and knowledges that also transform the public schools.

To grasp self-organisation as a sympoietic matter, we must try to understand and reimagine the ecosystemic relations between the commons, public and private spheres.

Aporias and precedents

Facing internal limitations

As we have seen, there is plenty of (self-)critique circulating within and around the self-organised nurseries in Poble Sec. From a gender perspective, as Keller-Garganté points out, we can 'question the capacity of the *grupos de crianza compartida* to redistribute the work of care' (Comunes y Crianza Colloquium 2018), because the vast majority of work within them is done by women. From a feminist viewpoint, this can lead to different assessments. As Cristina Vega Solis points out, 'We are living a moment of indetermination and transit between familialism, (neo)subservience, social handouts [*asistencialismo*] and precarised professionalisation' (Vega Solis 2009: 1, my translation from Spanish), which makes multi-layered and open analyses necessary.

On the one hand, joining a *grupo de crianza compartida* can be seen as a step in the mutual empowerment of women, who reject being bound to the house and gather to socialise their work, in the sense that Federici describes in relation to many cases of women's commoning in Latin America and Africa:

> historically and in our time, women have depended more than men on access to communal resources and have been most committed to their defense.... Women have also led the effort to collectivize reproductive labor both as a means to economize on the cost of reproduction and to protect each other from poverty, state violence and the violence of individual men (Federici 2013, my transcription from video).

This analysis is also pertinent to the childcare groups insofar as they strive to enable temporalities and divisions of care that escape the brutality of short maternity leaves. The irony in the *grupos de crianza compartida* is that while participant mothers can find this mutual support, the mostly female educators do not have any paid maternity leave at all if they work without a contract, and thus cannot access this support network in the same way.

An affirmation of women's collectivising care, as per Federici, posits that the possibility of change lies in the production of other ties, linkages and common force. The *vínculo* that Pepi Dominguez speaks about is part of a claim to subvert social structures at large, and to build collective power, rather than to dwell on achieving freedoms and privileges within the given heteropatriachal and capitalist system. In this view, in order to overcome segregations along the lines of class, race and gender, what matters is collective strength and transversal struggle. Whether childcare groups are indeed emancipatory would thus depend on whether they pursue forms of connection and struggle that look outwards, beyond their immediate self-interest, to build solidarities. In this sense, in the terms of Joan Tronto, they also engage in caring-with, the fifth dimension of care (Tronto 2009). Some groups in Poble Sec do that more than others, but the claim is there in most.

On the other hand, from a perspective more akin to feminisms of equality, such women-driven childcare commons reproduce the divisions of labour that feminists have long sought to overcome. As long as men do not engage in them on an equal footing, they will fail to produce profound change in gender roles and subjectivities. This

view remains idealistic and ideological in the sense that it fails to see and value the steps in a process of emancipation, rather projecting all-encompassing change, which, without a step-by-step transformation of relations and subjectivities, can, however, only be imposed vertically.

As limited as they may be in this aspect, the *grupos de crianza compartida* do function as experimental sites for the involvement and re-subjectivation of men as carers, since they do constantly interpellate and involve male subjects as equals. Fathers are part of the cooking and cleaning commissions, the assemblies, the Whatsapp groups of *grupos de crianza*. They are not as active as the mothers, which is a problem, but they are learning: a set of skills, knowledges and sensitivities traditionally passed on to women. They are being challenged, interpellated. As the parent-activist Javier Rodrigo says, the *grupos de crianza compartida* are 'democratic schools for the parents' (Comunes y Crianza Colloquium 2018). Particularly so for fathers.

Critique of self-organised nurseries is largely constructive, with the horizon on improving and radicalising the model for future generations. Imagining and forging intelligent interfaces and deals with the public and private dimensions are key for this. The 'Crianza y Comunes' colloquium explored possible alliances of public, commons and informal-private initiatives and actors: those of parents and particularly mothers, in the first instance; those of parents and *acompañantes* (accompanying adults/pedagogues) in self-organised childcare groups and the PEPI network; those of parents and teachers in public kindergartens and schools; and, of course, in as much as possible those of children, via their presence and also parents.

The debate on relations between formal and informal politics is mostly characterised by an awareness of interdependency in this context. This is thanks to the culture of encounters, celebrations and debates in the neighbourhood, aided by the fact that the municipal government of Barcelona en Comú also seeks intelligent and careful articulations between the commons and public systems. As we shall see below, this municipalist strategy takes various forms, such as attempting to make commoning possible within the public system (at organisational and micropolitical levels), to create common-public cooperations (at legal and administrative levels), and to strengthen the commons in relation to the public (at discursive and policy levels).

By and large, we can say that the *grupos de crianza compartida* manage to effect real change in the forms of relation that permeate society, particularly when it comes to collective organisation, democratic engagement, gender relations, local community – it is not just children who learn sharing and caring. These groups are pedagogical spaces in a very expanded sense. In this way, the potential of the *grupos de crianza compartida* lies in micropolitics. They transform (some) relations but they largely remain unable to subvert larger economic and political dynamics. Accepting this partial transformative power as a challenge rather than defeat means positing commons and commoning not as a utopian sphere or activity but rather as ongoing material-embodied struggles that require us to 'stay with the trouble' (Haraway 2016).

We mostly do not care as we would like to. This is true in the sense of our capacity to care across the five phases defined by Tronto (1993), indicating that we

should understand care as a struggle, rather than as a natural disposition or fact. We must not see our struggles *to care,* as struggles to build dynamic and radical modes of transversal care, as opposed to our struggles *for care*, as our defense of systems and infrastructures of mutual support, provision and welfare. Our subjective struggles (whether they are on an individual or collective level) and our objective struggles are connected.

Indeed, there are also some major fallacies when we speak about choice and childcare. Terms like 'option,' 'decision' and 'choice' allude to a level of autonomy and voluntarism that often does not truthfully represent how people go about finding childcare, how they negotiate life and work. The marketisation of childcare does not provide us with more choices necessarily. Constraints and desires are tightly entangled in the search for viable options in childrearing and childcare, and for many parents the 'ideal' option never comes to materialise. Moreover, 'while choice is central to feminist politics, it is via the discourse of choice that neoliberalism enters the domestic sphere and reorganises the practices and processes of reproduction and the subjectivity of motherhood' (Barbagallo 2016: 1). The production of guilt in mothers has a long tradition and is still very much alive today. We must take care to avoid moralising arguments of choice here as in many other domains.

'Choice', seen as a quasi-sovereign act, often negates interdependency and obscures power relations. It is associated with market-based actions, in classist ways: sending your kid to a public nursery is often not regarded as a choice, but sending them to a private one is. What about commons-based projects? 'We're the great convinced ones', says Javier Rodrigo sarcastically

(Interview Rodrigo 2018). Unlike choice, conviction is characterised not so much by possibilities but by a persistent will and desire. Still, those vocabularies of power and privilege resonate, and building commons should never be merely about choice or conviction. Commons are about building possibilities for making new kinds of decisions – involving risk, insecurity, vulnerability, and becoming.

Learning from precedents

Though often overlooked, self-organised childcare was as key a part of second-wave feminism as the demands for good public provision. Radical cooperative projects often emerge from moments of great social mobilisation – in 1968 with the *Kinderläden* in Germany (Binger 2018, Sander 2008), in the 1970s women's movements in the UK and in 2011 with the 15M movement in Spain, to mention but a few. Struggles and tensions between community and public care provision are nothing new, and yet we can learn from each historical instance.

One interesting referent for the g*rupos de crianza* are the *Kinderläden* of post-68 Berlin. As parent-activist Lothar Binger writes in his account of the early Berlin *Kinderläden* (Binger 2018), these groups were initially radically feminist and saw an active and relatively equal participation of men (though sometimes also a usurpation by men in theoretical and representational terms). The then-active women's movements and the women's central council (*Zentralrat der Frauen*) played an important role in these projects in Germany, politicising and socialising care. These spurred childcare commons in a way perhaps similar to the role that contemporary

feminist movements (from sex- and domestic workers movements to the women's strike) play for the *grupos de crianza compartida*. When Binger seeks out a *Kinderladen* for his kids again in the 1970s, he finds the *Kinderläden* to be more depoliticised and operating on the basis of a more strongly gendered division of labour. This is no doubt of the effect of complex micropolitical processes as well as of precarisation and the triple burden.

In Berlin, the *Kinderläden* also became syndicated in 1986, forming the *DaKs* to represent their interests – not unlike the PEPI network set out to do. The story of this movement shows a striking amount of similarities in the debates, conflicts and contradictions to what the *grupos de crianza* face. Many of the questions of organisational models, gender, class, inclusion, pedagogy, alliances, and the relation to social movements resonate with the experiences of Barcelona. Such referents and first-hand accounts like that of Binger can be sources of strength for movements. Like many commons activists in Poble Sec affirm, it's important to not have to reinvent the wheel constantly, to draw on sources and experiences other than one's own.

Specific past debates also shine a helpful light onto current struggles and aporias. The tension between affirming the choice between different forms and models of childcare, versus affirming a unitary public model of education accessible to all, for instance, is not at all new in feminist debates. Barbagallo, in her study on feminist demands around childcare since the 1970s (focused on the UK), notes that

> The tensions, both practical and ideological, between, on the one hand, demanding more childcare provision so that women could choose to

> work and, on the other, conceiving of childcare provision as necessary to transform the sexual division of labor by changing not only who provided care, but also how and why caring activities took place, exposed a faultline that existed in the women's movement. It was a faultline that existed primarily along the divisions of class (Barbagallo 2016: 12).

In contemporary Poble Sec, this faultline certainly also exists, but the *grupos de crianza* do not uniquely set out from feminist demands. They also embrace self-organised childcare because of alternative pedagogies, reflecting a key demand and perspective of the post-68 anti-authoritarian education movements, for instance, such as those around the *Kinderläden* in Germany (Binger 2018). The contemporary childcare groups are akin to the more anti-authoritarian experiments post-68 and the more feminist experiments that gathered force in the 1970s in that they try out alternatives without, for the most part, focusing general critique on the public system. They share class consciousness in their understanding that the public system is a vital part of rendering care and education accessible to all, and that their own experiments are limited in this sense. In 1970s Germany, with little horizon of transforming public systems towards the commons, the focus is more strongly anti-capitalist and anti-state. But as we shall see again later, anti-state politics does not necessarily translate into a rejection of public systems; on the contrary, as we see with the *grupos de crianza* of the 2020s, public institutions are a key horizon for making pedagogical and organisational innovations accessible to all. In tune with the contemporary political culture, the *grupos'* style is less ideological, yet they spring from similar social

movements, if we might say the 15M was a kind of '68, giving rise to enormous self-organisational invention (and eventually, also organisational formation and institutionalisation).

Talking childcare politics

Broadly speaking, we can identify four positions in relation to childcare, as concerning its situatedness between the home, the community, the state and the market. Putting it simply, they tend to demand, sometimes exclusively or in articulation:

1) More home /*conservative and anti-systemic liberal values*. This is the domain of conservative family politics that seeks to maintain tradition, familial and often patriarchal authority, to keep economic and social life centred on the family, often as advocated by the church. Yet this domain harbors conservatives as well as (to a much lesser degree) anti-systemic liberals. Homeschooling, the building of alternative families and the transformation of the home into a place of extended families and egalitarian relations may also be part of this domain. The 'attachment parenting' current, advocating a very strong bond of care between mother and child particularly, is very popular today in progressive circles, yet it emerges from the evangelical thought of William Sears .

The attachment approach has been embraced by some Christians and ecofeminists whilst being frequently rejected by feminists who advocate for equality, particularly in Anglo-Saxon debates. The 'immersive mothering' it encourages demands that women dedicate themselves exclusively to their children, and promotes an education that is very labour intensive,

child-centred (largely ignoring the mother's needs), expert-driven, emotionally absorbing and financially demanding.

This touches on some of the core contradictions that the self-organised childcare groups face, who largely embrace a (more or less) attachment-based, labour-intensive, child-driven, emotionally and financially challenging approach. Indeed, some equality-feminist critiques ignore the fact that in countries like the US, but also Spain, where maternity leaves are very short (4 months) or virtually nonexistent (the US), mothers' struggles to get more time to rest and be with their children is indeed a struggle for self-care and an emancipation from work.

2) More community. This brings us to a second set of feminist influences on childcare commons: *community, anarchist and libertarian feminisms.* This is where most examples and references in this study are located, as they call for the strengthening of community and neighbourhood ties, for an increased porosity between families and communities, as well as a community appropriation of institutionalities. Comunitario refers to communalising resources, work and institutions in the sense of making them both community-run and commune-run. This current is particularly relevant in the context of a rising municipalism, giving rise to new city politics in places like Barcelona of Barcelona en Comú. It often goes hand in hand with communal and commons-based notions of economy and labour as well as politics. Where it tends towards the 'more market' argument at the same time, this approach touched partially upon the neo-communitarian current, which seeks to privatise care through voluntary community work.

Here, it is the community and collective that is at the centre of politics, as Núria Vergés puts it:

> The state and market have to be as small as possible: self-management, collective responsibility, also with reproduction, with the body, the family... the kids within the community: 'my daugther is also everybody else's daugther, in a certain sense'... I've seen that this demands a lot of time and I didn't have that much, because I had to go on with my job (Comunes y Crianza Colloquium 2018; my translation from Catalan).

This too is a labour- and time-intensive option, but in the sense that it (ideally) involves everyone's labour. To be sure, strictly state- or market-based provision of care indeed is equally time- and labour-intensive. It is impossible to rationalise time or effort in major ways when it comes to care, without stripping it of its key characteristics, which are time-based as they involve attention, sustaining, growth/development/healing (see Molinier & Laugier 2009). The difference with state- and market-based provisions of care is that the work in these domains is naturally allocated to precarious, subaltern women, without much discussion about gendered divisions of labour, triple burdens or indeed class- and race-based exploitation.

3) More state. This is the domain of *socialist as well as some Marxist feminisms*, which sometimes join a call for a simultaneous strengthening of community ties and transformation of the state towards less centralised entities. It is the domain of claims for getting women out of the home, for enabling more equal gender relations through subsidies and leave. In many cases, these claims go hand-in-hand with a push for women

towards the labour market and for the remuneration of care work, in a broad affirmation of wage labour and economies based therein. This approach tends to be endorsed mostly by gender equality feminisms, who seek to decrease the difference between female and male roles in care. But gender equality is far from realised in this domain either, where it's mostly female workers on relatively low wages. Also, outside their function of harbouring children, public childcare centres remain quite closed to the community, and care remains specialised.

4) More market. This tendency aims at the marketisation of care in the broadest sense, meaning the privatisation of domestic, auxiliary and care work, arguing it will greatly increase the volume of national economies and GDPs. *(Neo)liberal feminisms* have promoted the so-called glass ceiling approach in this vein in order to get women into the labour market, convinced that waged work will lead to women's liberation, and striving for women's access to male roles. This approach tends to be driven by feminisms of gender equality that seek to assimilate women to men. Similar, and sometimes, going hand-in-hand with the argument for more state involvement in care, this approach demands for economically accessible care to be available to all via subsidies/redistribution. Alternatively, it argues that the use of cheap (and mostly informal) migrant labour is legitimate for women's liberation and that this ultimately also benefits poor women at the centre as well as at the end of global care chains.

These four approaches tend to overlap in the different experiments and approaches to self-organisation, commons and care that exist in the social ecosystem of Poble Sec. There is plurality, fluidity and also articulation

across different feminist lines of thought, in ways that often seem messy, but ultimately attest to a lively political culture that dares to imagine itself in different ways. Complicity, listening and debate are key assets to experimentation. The approaches above rarely exist in isolation or pure form, and yet they come to be recognisable as debates and policies on childcare take different directions. Renegotiating and reimagining ways of bringing together feminisms of the commons and the public, they bring forth different solutions, some of which resemble classic public investment (into care infrastructure and salaries) whilst others test newer models of organisation.

Schools of care

A 'school' can be an institution; a group of people sharing ideas, methods or approaches; or a large group of fish and sea mammals that swim together. A *school of care* can hence either be a place, a group, or a collective movement. We have seen how all these dimensions intersect in Poble Sec, from mother's networks and swarms, to places for learning and care, to collectives sharing care and approaches to care. The *grupos de crianza* are as close as we get to a school of care in the sense of an institution. They are sites of focalised and self-organised learning about care and reproduction – not the only such places (think of health coops, self-managed elderly homes, mutual aid groups...) but definitely significant ones. They are supported by collective processes and movements, to establish new kinds of institutions.

Imagine we were to institute schools of care. Imagine a municipal government, driven by feminists and commons activists, for instance, gets the idea that care needs to be central in our society and that everybody, from now on, should be encouraged to learn about it. And to learn not by way of books merely, but by doing. Imagine they have beautiful ideas about pedagogy, understanding that the time of disciplinary schooling is over. And that they need to lead their *cuidadanes* (their caretizens) out of capitalist impasse and the binary between privatisation and state management, that they want to create and support commons institutions, for instance, schools that function on the basis of self-management, because they know that learning by doing and self-organising are usually the most powerful ways of producing and

sustaining useful social knowledge. Imagine, perhaps, that they have implemented a city-wide basic income, also known as care income, that allows people to participate in those schools without being stressed for time or money – that anyone can join these schools when they have kids.

The *grupos de crianza* would be schools that any parent and member of an extended family (of biological ties or queer kinship) goes to. Everyone goes to such a school because no one ever stops learning, and, because these schools are go-to places for understanding care. In these schools, it's not just adults that learn – but also children that care.

In our imaginary schools of care, there are lots of workshops and discussions about how we care. Joan Tronto's phases of care are much debated and played with – through exercises from the theatre of the oppressed (embody a sculpture of care!), care network mapping exercises, bodywork, excursions to other care centres, reading groups, play groups, and so much more. Everyone gets to be teacher – even the smallest ones.

Children as subjects of care

Children teach in particular ways. Never with books or lectures, always in very embedded, embodied ways. They take us by the hand to show us what their bodies can and can't do – a constantly shifting terrain – and by extension, what our own bodies can and can't do. They are masters of teaching limits, and creative ways of overcoming them. They look after us by making us engage, feel, respond in new ways – they increase our affective spectrum and our capacity to act, as well as compelling

us to stay with the trouble. But is that valid? Do they do that by volition, or just because of their needs? Are they proper subjects, making decisions?

Imagine that childcare shifts from being a matter of merely having children looked after, to one where children co-care for the world we inhabit in common. Can children care? Of course, they can. How? About what? They care about their parents, their home, their friends, their toys, about flowers and insects, animals and so forth. Care about, as concern and worry, requires empathy, and children are quite capable of that. Do we need to be capable of seeing ourselves as separate beings with our own will and interest, in order to care? Is care a moment of altruism, or of interdependency? Is it based on volition or reflex, instinct, nature – whatever you like to call it? Children may not feel concern on the basis of their individuality, but rather by virtue of their connectedness: is that not care?

We think of children as needy, as if they always take and never give. On the one hand, that's untrue because children can take on tasks, help, even work properly – for centuries they worked alongside their parents, even in waged economies, like coal mines and shops. Many still do so today, a child's hands might even have co-produced your phone or shirt. We don't want children to have to work, to protect them from exploitation and cruelty, because they are especially vulnerable to abuse – their bodies are smaller and weaker, their minds can't argue with adult logics often. But do children always take and never give? Are they incapable of taking-care-of and care-giving? Clearly they are not, but due to their bodies, stages of development, the worlds we keep them in, they care differently. Within their limitations and

possibilities, they do care and give a lot – particularly if we enable them to – just pay attention to how children play, interact, protect and respect others.

In the school of care, it's clear that everyone cares according to their ability and their needs. Those whose bodies or minds are different, younger or less usual, are not considered incapable, non-subjects, needy. They are helped and encouraged in their care: to know themselves as care-receivers, of course, but also as care-givers, carers-about, care-takers, and of course care-withers. The school of care works against all the things that disable people to care – children as much as people with special needs, people strongly socialised as males, elderly grandparents, and so forth.

In this way, *child-care* can transform how we think about learning. The school of care, which of course also does research and publications, leads us to question the adultcentrism of much previous academic work, and to ask why 'children are not seen as competent social actors', even 'commonly seen as an obstruction to work' and seen as subaltern in the sense that they are seen but not heard, their speech acts not recognised (Kavanagh 2013). The *grupos de crianza* set out to challenge this via their double approach of self-organisation and pedagogy that centres on radical notions of care.[10] Including caring-with as solidarity is a key part of their process: they don't

---

10 I prefer this formulation to 'child-centred' or 'child-friendly', since the politics and ecologies of care at stake in this book go far beyond such notions when at their best. Their proposals are more radical than positing children as customers instead of subalterns, and they focus not only on the child but on everyone else around them, on creating social ecologies that take children's influences and contributions into account (and not just their supposedly wilful ones). For an exploration of this, see Zechner and Rübner Hansen 2019.

treat children as too small or stupid to participate in solidarity actions, demonstrations, political processes. On the other hand, they also don't expect them to participate like adults. *Grupos de crianza* are a place where people – of all ages – learn to create the conditions for shared learning and participation.

The school of care is prefigured by the *grupos de crianza* in a lot of ways. It challenges us to rethink political subjectivity and agency as guided by care ethics, towards more-than-adult politics and organisation as well as more-than-human ecologies (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017).

Speaking with Tronto's care theory, we must thus avoid seeing 'caring about' as linked to power and performativity: children too care about, indeed they are able to articulate this as soon as they begin to speak, yet they are not heard in their expressions of care. Coincidentally, children's expressions of care often concern plant and animal welfare, ascribing subjectivity to living things that are not just human: this sensitivity of children, this 'animism' that adults try so hard to exorcise from them, is a crucial element for social and ecological change.

Furthermore, care-receiving is often misconstrued as passive dependency, but there is much to learn from it. Those of us more reliant on care, whether old or young, know our needs best and are best placed to design processes and infrastructures of care. The childcare commoning of the *grupos de crianza* respects how kids want their needs met and encourages their collaboration in designing spaces, protocols, processes. In Barcelona's childcare groups as well as feminist municipalisms, children are drawn into processes of everyday collaboration

and co-design (of nursery or urban spaces, for instance), in dialogue with families, educators and planners.[11] Facilitating ways for children not just to co-decide but to co-care is a powerful way of nourishing liveable futures.

In a similar epistemic and ontological shift, self-organisation in our examples here has turned out to always be sympoietic. The 'self' that organises is always a larger, diffuse collective subject, rather than an autonomous unit. We will see this reflected again in the account of municipalist micropolitics that follows. In the co-care practices described here, there is no attempt at cutting out the noises, affects, complexities or 'others' of everyday life, in order to arrive at a more pure or efficient political subject. This realisation is part and parcel of feminist epistemologies based in interdependency and vulnerability, moving beyond adult-centric and indeed also anthropocentric views towards alterontologies that reach far beyond the liberal ideal of white, independent males.

In this context, autonomy isn't a fantasy of separateness or sovereignty, reminiscent of independence, but means to deal with various interdependencies and processes of co-emergence as one tries to self-govern. As ecofeminist Vandana Shiva put it recently in a dialogue with indigenous feminist Moira Millán: 'autonomy is

---

11 Examples in urban space include children co-designing their playgrounds in 2018 as well as the participation of children in designing the Barcelona Zoo in 2017. Those are part of the larger vision of the Ciutat Jugable policy, based in redesigning urban space to make the city 'playable' and safe for children. Lucia Zandigiacomi, who I cite above, has worked on this policy via the urban planning cooperative of which she is part. https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/dretssocials/es/innovacion-social/ciudad-jugable

not isolation, it's relating to everything around you'.[12] This is the kind of autonomy feminists and ecologists claim, and the one that underpins the schools of care. Interdependence isn't seen as an inconvenience but as enriching, in this view.

In the schools of care, self-organisation or commoning aren't assumed to happen beyond the realms of the public or private, nor do they seek to abolish these realms, but to engage them in empowering relations. Taking care seriously, in its different phases, allows commons to avoid mystifying their own reproduction and allows them to develop solid micro- as well as macropolitics: to think and work across the spheres of inhabiting, relational, organisational and representational power. Imagine a city full of schools of care and translocal networks of schools of care, organising exchange programmes, cooperations, international solidarities.

The city of play

Now imagine a city where it's safe to play in most public spaces – and by virtue of that, to care (there is a connection between play and care, as we will see shortly). This is another strategy for democratising childhood and care, one that was embraced by Barc*elona en Comú* with less hesitation than the *grupos de crianza*: the 'playable city' policy (*Ciutat Jugable*) (Ayuntamiento de Barcelona 2018). Operating at the level of habitational and relational modes of building power, this is a simple but radical urban planning approach.

---

12 Conversation organised by the *Movimiento de Mujeres Indígenas por el Buen Vivir,* 15.05.2021 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1pY25wOqcLw

Ciutat Jugable builds on a concept taken from the pedagogue Francesco Tonucci (Institut de la Infancia 2016), and centres on rendering urban public space child-friendly, or rather, 'playable' as a whole. This does not mean more gated playgrounds for children and their parents, but promotes urban planning that makes public spaces safe, accessible and potentially fun – as a whole, and for everyone. Combining urban planning and pedagogy, this model draws on studies that show that the presence of children in public space strengthens neighbourhood bonds, making people relate, communicate and rely on one another more. It focuses on the democratising force of children in public space.

Lucía Zandigiacomi, a mother, activist and cooperative urbanist of Poble Sec has contributed to drafting the Barcelona policy via workshops. She points to a possible policy shift from 'public' to 'community' spaces through this approach:

> There are studies that say that if there are kids playing in the streets then neighbourhoods are more thriving, the life and health of the community that lives in the neighbourhood is better, the relations between neighbours are better. This is an attempt to create unity in public space. I think upon first reflection we could exchange this idea of 'making a public space/making a space public' for 'communitarian space', as a place of encounter (Interview Lucía Zandigiacomi 2018; my translation from Spanish).

Space is a crucial element in creating fluidity between the commons, the public and the private. Reclaiming urban space for everyday life and sociality – removing commercial enclosures and toxic and dangerous obstacles like cars – is key for enabling resilient communities and

commons. The neighbourhood, as a vital dimension for the commoning of care amongst many other things, needs ample spaces for play, chatter, sociality, rest and slow movement. Poble Sec's lively social fabric thrives on its squares, streets, parks, playgrounds – thanks also to weather conditions that permit year-round outdoor socialising. Playgrounds are special in the sense that they enable encounter and dialogue between people of different class and ethnic backgrounds, because people linger there as their children interact, leading adults to interact, too. As such, playgrounds massively contribute to neighbourhood solidarity – and they are also nodal points of powerful networks such as those of mothers (and others).

But what if such safe spaces were not limited to small gated zones and to people with children? Extending spaces of play to streets and squares is a way of extending spaces of care, seen not just in terms of caretakers' responsibilities for children (and other care-receivers), but in terms of community more broadly. Playspaces usually have this in common: they are safe in that there is no imminent danger, violence is not tolerated, there are people looking out for one another, there are encounters and spontaneous conversations, there is no requirement to consume, there are benches, tables, play things and other furnishings that make lingering desirable for different people. Users tend to feel responsible for playspaces because/if they were made with them in mind.

Space plays a major role in enabling us to care as we would like to. Places carry within them a definition of who is a legitimate user, and as such can push the boundaries of patriarchal and capitalist orders in powerful

ways. The dominance of those driving personal motorised vehicles, for example, as it is set in asphalt across millions of cities, is not set in stone. In Barcelona, studies have shown that women are primary users of public transport, particularly of buses, and so feminist mobility must strengthen bus networks. It's not just about cars, though, but also about consumption: if public space as a whole invites people to linger and socialise, there is more care and solidarity. Barcelona's *superillas* are examples of traffic junctions turned into squares with benches, plants, and play elements for children and adults. A chess table or boccia area does as much for neighbourhood sociality as a sandpit or skate ramp.

Safety doesn't mean that you never find syringes in the bush behind the sandpit, that the guys who deal drugs at the far end of the park are gone, but that you might develop a relation to them, as you share a space. It doesn't mean the police keeps coming by, but that word spreads quickly if the neighbour's kid suddenly goes missing and the whole square and block goes on the search – that the gate of the park, or the door to the building, isn't where our interest and responsibility end. A city of care is what many have imagined in Barcelona.

III. COMMONING POWER:
THE MICROPOLITICS OF MUNICIPALISM

Starting points for micropolitical enquiry

> [...] how could it happen that, in our groups, the question of micropolitics is so foreign to us that we are more or less incapable of grasping problems like power, relations, low spirits, in a way that's not psychologising? What is that force that renders us insensitive to the very becoming of our groups, powerless in the face of understanding the bifurcations, changes, breaks that are at work in our bodies and in the processes we put in place? (Vercauteren, Müller and Crabbé 2007: 9-10; my translation from French.)

In their 2007 book, entitled *Micropolitiques des groupes*, a group of authors who shared an activist history in Belgium take it upon themselves to think through group processes. Aiming to create and honour 'cultures of precedents' they write stories and propose concepts that would allow people in groups and social movements to 'feel preceded, inscribed in a history that could make us stronger' (Vercauteren, Müller and Crabbé 2007: 8, my translation from French).

When looking at the movements that preceded us, stories of becoming and micropolitics are often hard to find, kept in small archives and oral histories, or tucked in between the pages of autobiographies. How are we to nourish 'ecologies of practices' – as Vercauteren, Müller and Crabbé call them – when we often know so little about the interdependencies, relations, tensions, troubles, bodies and struggles of reproduction within movements? We barely return to those processes with a careful view, to try learn and gain strength from them. We often brush aside past political projects that tried to

tackle institutional dimensions, with gestures of ridicule and judgement: we learn little from their failures and perhaps equally little from their successes. We often fail to learn from failures, those rich sources of knowledge.

Micropolitics and feminism have something in common: they often look where things are messy or uncomfortable. Looking to move beyond stories of success to also value stories of complicated common struggle, of contradiction and failure – all this is part of empowerment. Listening is a key aspect in this, in the sense of letting go of ready judgements and categorisations for a while, to take in new information and consider its tone and resonance. As the poet Anne Carson puts it, 'Reality is a sound: you have to tune into it not just keep yelling' (Carson 1998). This tuning is key for micropolitical learning, since we are interested in micropolitics not as a rulebook for practice but as a sensibility and modality of relation.

Micropolitics allows us to address subjectivity formation in collective processes, to try grasp – always in a way that involves affect, pathic knowledges – what kinds of shifts in subjectivity a movement or process implied. What we are looking at here, across municipalism and feminism, is a very profound shift in subjectivity. With feminist insights on embodiment, care, interdependency and the subversion of community, the following pages zoom in on some of the conditions, processes and dynamics that have shaped recent municipalism in Spain. This is never a neat account of conviction, thoroughness or success, but a dimension marked by ambivalence and very powerful personal and collective challenges.

Municipalism brought a myriad of processes and tensions within movements, groups, relationships,

individual lives and bodies. It was shaped by a series of struggles – mostly invisible, relational, personal, group-based, local – for ways of maintaining ties and trust across all those dimensions. These embodied, often intimate yet highly political struggles have barely been given account of or documented, beyond conversations in kitchens, parks or bars, and a limited amount of internal fora. These shape the fate of municipalism as much as party- and macropolitical dynamics, but are hardly accounted for. This is a problem for social movements, because micropolitical knowledge is not simply a matter of curiosity or gossip, but of vital learning – allowing us to understand the possibilities and limits, the individual and collective dynamics, the singular sensibilities and embodiments, as well as tools and tactics of movements. And micropolitics can teach us a lot about institutions, democracy, the state and building power.

The shift towards an institutional dimension in Spain soon revealed a lack of common knowledges, as technical knowledges – of political powers and competencies, temporalities, administration, etc. – but crucially also social, relational and affective knowledges. It was clear to many that municipalism had to develop a strong micropolitics or else it would be doomed to go the alienating, treacherous ways many political parties have gone. It seemed urgent to try to generate some conversations and produce and assemble some knowledges, no matter how modest, on this question of micropolitics. This is where we pick things up. With a lot of questions.

What does it mean to go from being a movement activist to being a party activist, or even an elected official? What social-relational dynamics does this shift of power imply? What relational and social-political difficulties

emerge within this new situation? What do the new municipalisms do to social movements – do they drain them of energy or control them, as many predicted? Or can a new electoral platform also find ways to energise and stimulate movements, from the right distance and in the right agonistic tone? How do individual and collective bodies – people, groups, families, neighbourhoods, parties – respond to the new sociopolitical topography that municipalism introduced? Is there a new way of negotiating the modes of relation, care, affect, embodiment and inhabitation to be found in municipalisms such as that of Barcelona en Comú?

Care, to be sure, is a key aspect of micropolitics. Looking at the micropolitics of the post-15M Spanish municipalisms, we find an ample incorporation of the politics of care and social reproduction. Might it make sense to speak of 'care municipalism' here? The examples this book gives point to some possible instances thereof, but avoid promoting another term like 'the feminisation of politics' that risks shifting weight towards institutional spheres without sufficiently pointing back to movement-based groundwork. Moreover, the question of micropolitics also touches upon questions of power and organisation that cannot be resolved by a care viewpoint only. It also requires us to look at different mechanisms of party and institutional politics vis-à-vis movement activism.

Social movements, parties and institutions are social and cultural spheres with their own logics, traditions, forms, languages. Across them, there are differences and similarities, and often surprising ones. Institutional culture can reflect activist culture more strongly than party culture can, in some cases. The protocols of a party can be more thought-out and radical than those

of an activist collective, depending on what initiatives one compares. There is no single, not to mention linear, way in which the relations between these spheres play out. They share tendencies, but also imply different – sometimes singular – ways of embodying and inhabiting politics. This is what we are interested in here: ways of embodying, inhabiting and thinking politics within and across different spheres of power.

The micropolitics of building & claiming power

A micropolitical account looks behind the scenes to find the sometimes minor, invisible or relational dynamics and forces that enable change. Group processes, transversal connections between struggles, modes of subjectivity formation, faultlines of tension and attention, forms of embodiment and inhabitation – all these are key aspects to micropolitics, as Félix Guattari and Suely Rolnik showed in their account of Brazilian struggles in the 1980s (Guattari & Rolnik 2006). Theirs is an account that narrates processes and provides precedents, with clear (schizo)analytical rigour and without prescriptiveness. In their, as in this account, the relation between social movements, parties and institutions is an important aspect of micropolitics.

To begin to grapple with this set of questions, this section presents a conceptual framework as well as a genealogy, to map out and narrate the changing relations between social movements, party platforms and municipal institutions. Genealogy is important because micropolitical dynamics and strategies vary greatly across the different phases of municipalism. Looking on from the social movements that provided the base for mass politicisation and the formulation of demands, we see

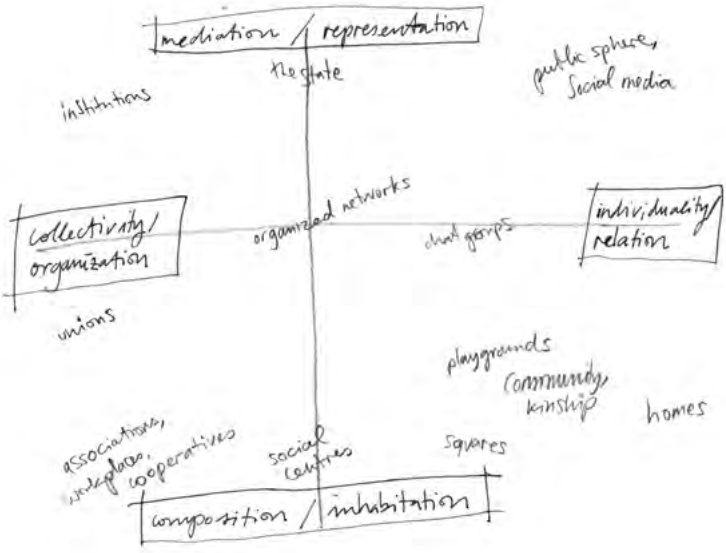
political imaginaries, hopes and proposals articulated and translated into a first and second mandate of municipalist platforms. Now shifting from the rearguard to also follow the stories of frontline agents of municipalism, we find a series of dynamics: a steep learning curve, vivid collective experimentation, struggles to situate oneself, tensions between confluence and unity, encroaching professionalisation, experimental engagement with the public sector, internal power struggles, exhaustion and declining forces, reorientations, maturations, and more.

Building power (2010–15)

The years and movements preceding the new Spanish municipalisms are incredibly rich in organisation, experimentation and prefiguration. They yield incredible processes of learning and building power, and are what enabled people to envision a new wave of municipalisms in the first place. The great intelligence and wealth of Spanish movements lay in their capacity to build power transversally: across inhabitational, networked, organised and finally also institutional social spheres.

At the height of municipalist becoming, Bue Rübner Hansen and I developed a diagram to help us analyse the processes of social and political reconfiguration that were ongoing (Zechner and Rübner Hansen 2015). It charts out ways of building power transversally. The starting point for this diagram was the ongoing crisis of social reproduction across different spheres of life (with effects like individualisation, unemployment, evictions, crisis of organised labour, crisis of representation), and the new strategies that social movements were inventing to address it. The diagram has two main axes: a

horizontal one marking a tension between relation/individuality and organisation/collectivity; and a vertical axis connecting inhabitation/composition with representation/mediation. Between and across these axes, different problems, experiences and strategies for building grassroots power and equality exist. The diagram shows us different spheres of social power.



Often movements remain concentrated in one area of this diagram for years: focussing mostly on social media and networked campaigns, for example (the right side of the diagram); or engaging mostly in squatting and neighbourhood politics (the lower part of the diagram); maybe focussing on union and organisational politics (the diagram's left side); or looking to electoral politics mostly. These spheres are places where we put energies and hopes, and invent dispositifs and tactics: none has primacy over another, and there is no given or 'good' way for movements to work within these spheres. Each political conjuncture requires a different approach, in tune with where social energies and concerns lie.

The pathway that the series of minor genealogies traces in this book is striking because it moves through different spheres of building power in a quite smooth and agile way. This pathway goes clockwise, starting from network politics and a social media call for protest in 2011 (*Democracia Real Ya*), which interpellates people as individuals; it leads to huge demonstrations in streets that become encampments and eventually also move into neighbourhoods (building inhabitational power). From those processes of co-habitation all kinds of new organisational forms arise, from assemblies to commissions and working groups in occupied squares, to neighbourhood assemblies and groups, to new media and publishing platforms, giving rise to a fresh wave of cooperativism, and also to the powerful proto-syndicalist *mareas* – social energy and struggle now focuses on the organised domain. Come 2014 with the European and Spanish municipal elections, this energy shifts again as new party-platforms are proposed, reaching into the domain of state institutions and representation.

There is a lot we can learn from this pathway and narrative, and yet it also matters to know that struggles always existed and persist across the social spheres. Many experiments prefigured this sweeping social process of building power and resisted going with the wave, building resilience and memory. All matter in the stories we end up telling. What is, however, most striking and inspiring about the times and places of this book's particular accounts is the capacity of initiatives to reach across the different spheres, to build alliances with other kinds of actors and sensibilities. We call this *transversality*, as a capacity to cut across and build singular pathways of alliance and mutual inspiration.

This transversality is probably the foremost virtue of the political cycle between 2010–2020 in Spain, being a decade where a multitude of agents across a myriad of spaces and spheres built ties and complicities to overcome the cruel politics of the ruling elite. A lot of the in-fighting, fractioning and competitive strategising of the traditional left were overcome, by a new generation of activists that had been socialised in a network age, far removed from party politics. They looked to reinvent politics, through mutual respect, listening, openness and care.

In other words, this was a time of building movement ecologies. Collective and thus political power derived not from this seemingly linear path towards electoralism – on the contrary. The combination of finding strong ways of reaching across social spheres of power, and of building continuity in learning and collective becoming, is what enabled many initiatives and movements to thrive.

As we have seen in the two minor genealogies on commons, the period around the 15M produced a

myriad of organisational prototypes and common notions. From the new social syndicalism of the PAH and the *Mareas*, to the translocal and digital networks of *Democracia Real* Ya and *Juventud sin Futuro*, to the 15M neighbourhood assemblies and commissions, to key concepts or common notions to do with democracy, commons, feminism, the right to the city, social rights and network politics, the transversal groundwork of social movements yielded all the good stuff that eventually led towards municipalist experimentation, amongst other things.

Minor genealogy III: Power from the streets to the institutions

Building electoral power (2014–15)

Municipalism, following this lineage, worked to build power from the streets, squares and neighbourhoods up (the inhabiting sphere) in its electoral campaigns, also mobilising via social media and viral campaigns that circulated across friendship and family chat groups (the networked sphere), at the same time tapping into the resources of different groups, associations, organisations and organised networks (organised power). It could only claim to reshape representational politics because of this path it took there: its source of real social power.

For most, as we shall see, municipalism was a wager to keep these four dimensions interconnected and mutually reinforcing the horizon for a radically democratic politics, and for mutual learning. What is today sometimes spoken of as 'social cohesion' was addressed here in a virtuous and radical way, grounded not in the kinds of sociological and abstracting political attempts that try to link different sectors of society as seen from above, but rather founded in the origination and mobilisation of forces across those sectors themselves. Hackers, internet youth and different social media platforms were active sites of shaping municipalist politics, as were neighbourhood assemblies and thematic working groups composed of different members of research projects, NGOs, institutes and campaigns. All those together laid claim to the institutional sphere in the sense of wanting to shape not just demands, representations

and policies but also structures and modalities of political decision-making.

With municipalist campaigns, came the labour of building power across the city, its neighbourhoods and organised movements. Gathering people around specific political as well as territorial concerns, Barcelona's municipalist drive entailed the formation of vibrant, open thematic as well as neighbourhood groups (*ejes* or axes) that collectively discussed and drafted policy proposals. 'If we are capable of imagining another Barcelona, we have the power to change it' was one key slogan of incipient municipalism, as it called everyone forth to reimagine the city. The enormous formation of collective intelligence, organisation and orientation this implied merits an entire book to itself, and has reshaped the city fabric.

Parallel to building grassroots power came a time of negotiating alliances, *confluencias*, which were eagerly distinguished from coalitions by municipalist negotiators. The emergent electoral campaigns were also keen to differentiate themselves from traditional parties. Many candidatures shifted from the mottos *ganemos/guanyem* (let's win) to *en comú*(*n*) (in common) and *ahora* (now). The commons had already been there in a lot of municipalist claims and imaginaries, and would now ground a more specific claim to how the city was to be reshaped: through a new institutional politics of the commons, the agenda of which was to be set by movements.[1] This refusal of old forms and models of social contract came with the

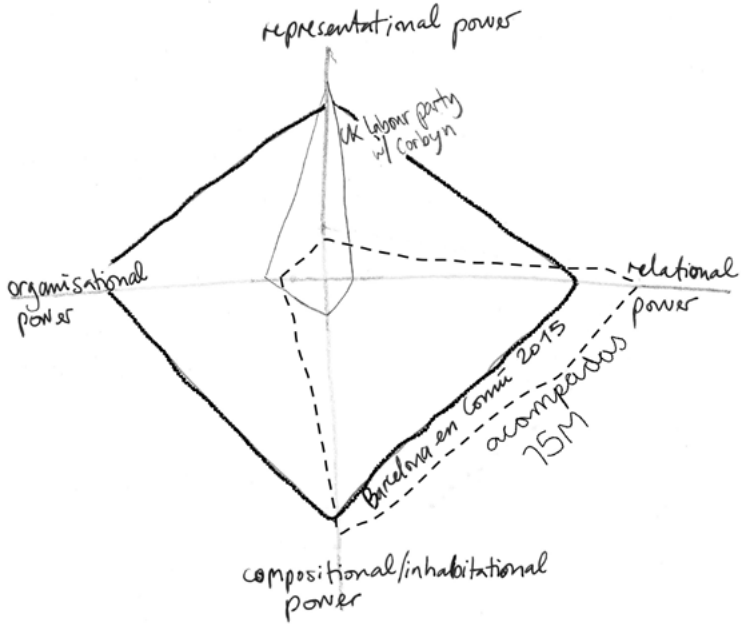
1 Amongst other things, new ethics codes were being drafted for municipalist platforms, through large collaborative processes (Guanyem Barcelona / Barcelona en Comú 2015).

invention of many new terms and names. Since this new language politics was carried by a broad movement, as a horizon of hope and desire that gave rise to a myriad of new forms and dynamics, this language politics was indeed performative, creating new worlds.

The municipal elections then decided the fate of each of the many candidatures,[2] with many winning the chance to form governments in big and small towns alike, many others entering into the opposition, and others failing to win representation. Whilst later in 2015, Spanish general elections (where Podemos obtained 12%) and autonomic elections in Catalunya (that saw independentism begin to rise), started to draw energy towards electoral spheres, the spirit and focus of Spanish municipalism remained with the streets. Unlike other Left party political projects of the moment that had ties to movements but were primarily electoral constructs (Podemos, Syriza, the UK labour party under Jeremy Corbyn), municipalism pledged to build on the embodied, situated, informal, inhabiting and compositional fields of social life and power.

---

2 For a map that shows the overlaps between square occupations during the 15M movement, municipalist candidatures, and municipalist electoral success, by analysing 63 cities across Spain, see Monterde 2016. There were, of course, many more than 63 municipalist platforms running for elections in 2015, just as there were many more square occupations than those mapped here: however, the 15 cities with municipalist actors in government do represent the main cities where elections were won in 2015.



Into the institutions (2015–17)

Then came the time of walking into town halls, taking up offices, formulating and advertising positions in the party as well as institutions, shaping relations between the new parties and the old institutions, as well as crucially: shaping and (re)imagining the relations between party-institutional municipalism and the city's social movements.

In their initial phase (2015–17), municipalist formations grappled with the ins and outs, the limitations and rigidities, of the institutional political system and

municipal administration. They also grappled with the fierce power struggles between parties, a political culture very far from trust-based movement habitus. Needing formal representatives was one challenge in both institutional and party politics, as was understanding political competencies, and processes. Being exposed to media coverage and campaigns was another. As Barcelona's new mayor Ada Colau said: 'We almost needed a year to properly understand how the administration functioned: it's one thing that you decide to do something, and another that it gets executed.' (Colau, Spegna & Forti 2019; my translation from Spanish).

In this phase, there was probably a first realisation within the institution – which perhaps did not fully transpire into social movements – that government and policy-making are also a matter of technical skill, not just leverage and will. As councillor Gala Pin said, 'the Left(s) [*izquierdas*] have a very dangerous habit, they think that because they are from the Left they are the good ones and they'll do things well, that's part of the human condition, but it's a mistake' (Interview Pin 2019; my translation from Spanish). This is one of the core discrepancies between expectation and experience that would remain, throughout the years, hard to address.

At an embodied level, newcomers grappled with the architecture of the town hall – its thick walls, long corridors, closed offices and doors, bearers of a hierarchised and secretive culture of politics and work. But town hall was not just walls: it was populated by a myriad of workers that had seen administrations come and go. Attempts were made at forging a new climate of

cooperation with municipal public sector workers, as *Barcelona en Comú* activists ran a number of seminars to address relevant problems of the institutional infrastructure: privatisation and externalisation, the relationship between citizens and workers, the relationship workers/politicians, and so forth. Imagine the conversations between veteran administrators and a bunch of younger and older activists-turned-politicians, with the latter formally in charge but also critically dependent on the former.

Another dimension to the institutional battlefield: gender. Repeatedly, during this period, women of *Barcelona en Comú* commented on the way institutional meetings were male-dominated and how they struggled to get respect from 'males over 40 and wearing ties' (Pin 2016). The need for a 'feminisation of politics' was not just about women getting their foot in the door, but more broadly about a transformation of political culture. In 2016, to build mutual feminist support within the institution, the city hall based women of *Barcelona en Comú* started a Telegram group with some 25 participants, which became an important space for tackling discrimination, sharing analysis and solidarity – an uphill battle.

But who should care about this? Why should anybody empathise with professional politicians who act of their own accord and receive decent salaries? Does the experience of municipalists in institutions have any relevance for social movements? If it does, then that relevance must go beyond the anecdotal and allow us to understand broader ethical, tactical and strategic matters.

In these first years of government of *Barcelona en Comú*, we can identify a series of knowledges and tactics being developed within the institution and party – but witnessed and understood only in part by municipalist activists. What's not perceived cannot be debated, and so micropolitical learning started to crystallise along personal lines, at best circulate in small groups. News of political and policy decisions, of structural and organisational processes, began to reach activists as effects they often couldn't grasp the cause of. A lot of the conflicts, tensions and tactical games that would need to be explained for transparency contained sensitive, personal information. And so the trickle-down of information was hampered, and mainstream media dominated the narrative of what was being done. In the absence of other channels, municipalists – especially feminists – would resort to friendly media in order to convey experiences and processes through occasional interviews and articles.

Platform to party, can you hear me?

Parallel to these institutional configurations, the very municipalist platforms themselves also began to configure themselves more stably, though reluctantly, as parties. One main aspect of this concerns the loss of the *ejes* (axes), as the grassroots working groups in different thematic and local areas. These groups had driven the electoral campaign, drafted *Bcomú's* program and were the heart of municipalism's social force. They could not persist in their autonomy in a context of government. Increasingly, news and proposals from city hall came via a series

of mediators and translations, filtering down across the emergent flat hierarchy[3] and causing a myriad of debates, misunderstandings, internal struggles and exits. *Ejes* that didn't have a cooperative councillor to take on their working area in town hall were cut off from information and power. This was the case of all but a few, since *Barcelona en Comú* only held 12 out of 41 councillor seats in town hall, and not all of those maintained a good working relation to the *ejes*.

Here we begin to see how the learning and relational processes of municipalists in the institutions and in the movements diverge. Through this process, *Barcelona en Comú* – like other municipalist parties – has seen a replacement of many activists with more professional types, leading to a professionalisation of the organisation and a more NGO-like culture. This in turn meant that strategies of mobilisation and communication often came to be more oriented towards what we may call civil society – seen as 'normal' people or 'citizens', the electorate, populations – rather than oriented towards social movements. This dynamic was not total at all, but it did entail a significant shift from the phase of building the municipalist movement and its campaign. A few years into government, this shift was palpable.

---

3 In 2015, after the *confluencia* phase of making electoral pacts, *Bcomú* entered into its 'Phase D' as an organisation, consolidating spaces and rules. The outline of the different parts of their municipalist project is as follows: Institutional Spaces (city hall municipal team, city and district councillors); Spaces of Bcomú: eleven large permanent spaces of participation (registered members, the plenary, the political council, the general coordination group, the sector-based coordination groups, the technical coordination commission, the coordination of territorial assemblies, the technical commissions, the thematic axes, the neighbourhood groups and the district assemblies).

What of the relation to social movements? The movements had been building dispositifs and platforms to keep laying claim to it as a social rather than merely political movement. The state-wide MAC summits (Municipalismo Autogobierno Contrapoder) were a key part of this, organised by movements that had helped shape municipalism. The third MAC gathering took place in 2017 in A Coruña. It brought together many analyses and debates across municipalism and social movements, with position papers from different cities (Barcelona, Madrid, Málaga and Aragón) and a series of workshops and debates.[4] At the micropolitical level, critical reflections on government, politics and power became more articulate and public. 'The municipalist experience has reached its equinox,' the meeting's framing text postulated. It was time to draw lessons and conclusions for social movements who had focused their energies on municipalism – preparing to move on. This withdrawal of attention and care was a complex process, involving many relations of friendship, comradeship, love, common dreams, shared infrastructures, moments of misunderstanding, alienation and resentment.

2017 may be seen as a moment of inflection for municipalism, macropolitically as well as micropolitically. The macropolitical climate had toughened substantially. In Catalunya, the independence conflict strongly polarised society. State- and nation-centred narratives dominated, and also brought the new far-Right party Vox to rise. Struggling against capture by state-centred narratives, municipalists lost protagonism and visibility in media. Meanwhile, facing up to the changing

4 MAC3 Meeting: http://blogs.traficantes.net/mac3/

relation to social movements, they devised new concepts and strategies from within the institutions. From the feminisation of politics to municipal disobedience and remunicipalisation, new municipalist horizons now focused on what institutions can do, what one can do within institutions. Not so much a defeatist but a pragmatic gesture to replace the previous identification of municipalism with movements, and find new ways of speaking about their relation.

This is also when municipalists caught their breath and launched different pedagogical and media attempts to give account of their institutional struggles and experiences. A key part of this was to reach out to movements in new ways. *Barcelona en Comú* released a short documentary called *Two Years Later*,[5] featuring reflections by members of its cabinet. This film follows in the footsteps of the *Alcaldesa* documentary of 2016 (Faus 2016), dwelling on contradictions and the 'clash of identities' (Jaume Asens) that came with entering office. Aside from rousing sympathy, those videos were also part of a continued effort to encourage and guide activists to put pressure on institutions. 'We want to be in tension, that movements keep interpellating us, and we need them to accompany us because otherwise our changes won't transform into profound changes' (Barcelona en Comú 2017a, minute 23; my translation from Catalan). The videos posited two different kinds of power (institutional vs. grassroots) and affirmed a necessary link between the two.

The institutional relation to movements is not a matter of morality or nostalgia, it is a vital strategic matter.

---

5 *Dos Anys Després* / Two Years Later. Documentary (multilingual): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HivzxLW_t6Q

Social movement support gives institutional municipalism leverage, on the one hand; and it protects it (to a certain extent) from getting 'into the elitist dynamics of a classical social democrat or centrist party upon losing the pressure of popular mobilisation, and then ally with other elites in a purely electoral and slightly reformist game' (Izquierdo-Brichs, unpublished, my translation from Spanish). With the 2019 elections approaching, awareness of the importance of movement support intensified again, particularly as polls increasingly pointed to municipalist candidacies losing seats. Outside pressure would likely be ever more crucial for enabling transformative policies. Or had one term in power been enough?

Moving on – 2017–19 – Málaga/Madrid

The pros and cons of investing in institutions were a matter of debate. In Málaga, in October 2017, the assessment of the first two years of municipalism was mixed:

> On the one hand, institutional presence permits us: access to information; time and means accessible for processing this information; [...] for spreading this information, and at the same time for questioning the model of the city, engaging debates and proposals; contacts and the possibility of establishing ties with diverse processes and everyday conflicts of citizens [...]; resources and means [...] for evaluating [...] and introducing public policies; to introduce new modes of political action in the institutional sphere, stemming from the social movement and 15M tradition [...] While on the other hand, the institutional presence has provoked: the diminishing of

> activity in social movement environments; the inevitable dedication of time/energy to institutional labours that are of little use, which persist though experience reduces them; the entry into alien environments, close to power and to the forms of old politics (parties), which attracts subjectivities, dynamics and practices that scare away the subjectivities of the 15M, of social movements, feminists, etc. [...]; personal and political ruptures in local networks occur due to this process [...]; institutional work wears [us] out due to the enormous personal and temporal availability it requires [...] (MAC3 Málaga 2017, my translation from Spanish).

This document is an example of the careful exercise of a double perspective and evaluation, taking into account both the movement and institutional side of the municipalist process, and as such it is exemplary of the extraordinary politics of articulation and experimentation that marks the new Spanish municipalisms. It undertakes a balancing act of evaluation and envisioning, concluding that:

> Barely two and a half years later, the conflicts, the wearing down of people and networks, as well as the ruptures, make it difficult to believe in the possibility of sustaining these spaces, unless this is done at the cost of sacrificing the model of democratic municipalism (autonomous and horizontal) initially laid out (MAC3 Málaga 2017).

Municipalism would no longer be a movement, autonomous and horizontal, if it continued along its path. In *Málaga Ahora*, this assessment coincided with a third internal split (involving a court case) and an increased disillusionment of activists from the movement side of the party. As in a myriad of

other cities and towns, the splits occurred between the newer movement-based parts of municipalist platforms and the more established and traditional Leftist parties with which they had formed coalitions ('confluencias'). Many of those who went from movements into institutions soon characterised careerism and backstabbing as a miserable but common condition in institutions (Interviews of Gala Pin 2019, Claudia Delso 2017, Santi Fernandez Patón 2018).

In Málaga, the vibrant social centre *Casa Invisible* suffered the disconnect between its grassroots and town hall-bound founders. Once the paradigmatic 'institution of the commons', it now suffered the aporias of commons municipalism having entered political institutions. Social centre activists lamented a lack of radicality in the municipalist visions of management of the commons, whilst the new municipal councillors lamented the lack of strong pressure, vision and organisation on the side of movements and the social centre. A climate of disenchantment and disappointment ensued, which left the previously united municipalist movement fragmented. A climate of increasing fragility and broken social ties seemed to point the way to the upcoming electoral defeat in 2019.

It was a similar story in Madrid, where the government of *Ahora Madrid* had gone through a series of splits and purges since its outset, and strong personalist tendencies in the politics of Manuela Carmena had alienated municipalists as well as social movements. In May 2017, pointing beyond the darkening horizons of electoral municipalism, grassroots activists occupied a large municipal building in central Madrid. They named it *La Ingobernable* – 'the ungovernable' – and made it

a hub of new movement. Rejecting the political games and splits that municipalism in Madrid had produced, a vibrant social centre was established in the tradition of autonomy, feminism and a radical politics of the commons.

The *Ingobernable* in Madrid, just like the *Casa Invisible* in Málaga, remained a model of movement-institution (Universidad Nómada 2008) or institution of the commons. The gap between two notions of institution and commons opened again, after having been successfully articulated in municipalist campaigns that drew on 15M. Now, it became clear that the '*común'* of municipalist governments could not be the same as that of the social centres. The question of the political subject remained crucial. The municipalist parties had adjusted their claims towards 'citizenry', a notion that per se excludes large parts of the subaltern, those without papers or citizenship, lacking the right to vote amongst many other rights. Yet those very groups of people are at the heart of the commons, and of movement-institutions. Places like the *Casa Invisible* or the *Ingobernable* resonated with autonomist, feminist, anti-racist and anti-fascist struggles, which centred on all those excluded from narratives of citizenship and normality: migrants and *sans papiers*, queers and trans people, precarious and informal workers, and so on.

Whose commons?

Social movement commons set out from those who were kept out, off and invisible, those who lacked rights (be they labour, social or citizenship rights). Meanwhile, institutional municipalism – conditioned by repeat electoral campaigns – veered inevitably towards addressing

subjects of rights: voters and citizens rather than just those who live here. *Everyone who lives here is from here* is a statement almost any municipalist would have endorsed in theory, but things looked different in practice. Interpellating people as 'neighbours', a widely used category in Barcelona, is inclusive in theory, but can be de facto exclusionary in a climate of independentism and anti-tourist xeno-resentment. In the latter, 'neighbours' are often the autochtone, or in any case 'those who've always lived here'. Independentism had pushed *Barcelona en Comú*, too, to use Catalan more than Spanish, addressing the autochtone more than those who had not grown up in Catalunya (most migrants learn Spanish first, and only slowly if ever master Catalan).

Municipalist discourse in Barcelona insists on calling migrants and non-white people neighbours, too, yet this interpellation is contradicted by *Barcelona en Comú's* failure to accommodate many non-white and non Euro-American people in either party or office. 'Migrant' organisations barely have any weight in public and political terms in Spanish societies; only the radical struggle of undocumented street vendors makes it into the news occasionally. At worst, migrants are seen as helpless victims, at best as people to be integrated as citizens, but rarely as people and communities in their own right and richness[6]. There is little space for the mobile commons or undercommons in the institutional municipalism of the commons.

---

6 The 'City of Refuge' policy of Barcelona reflects this, as despite improvements to services and the best of intentions it ended up reproducing a discourse of migrant victimhood and Catalan benevolence, which ended up asserting the contentious differentiation between refugees and economic migrants (see Rübner Hansen 2020).

This is the limit of the notion of democratisation itself: a notion that largely serves those entitled as citizens, inherently based on exclusions, of women and slaves in ancient Greek democracy, of the subaltern and migrants in contemporary democracies. Indeed, democratisation can perfectly reinforce divisions along lines of class, if it fails to take questions of wealth, access and rights into account:

> Improving infrastructures, or implementing plans for urban participation, even improving the sociability of a neighbourhood, can generate perverse effects. If urban conditions improve thanks to public intervention, the price of land can go up and give rise to the expulsion of those who can't afford higher rents. More urban improvement or more participation aren't always synonymous with more equality. Democratisation doesn't always imply redistribution. The property developers and stock markets of financial capital know this very well... (MAC3 Barcelona; my translation from Spanish).

Different elements within municipalism criticised this limitation of municipalism to certain classes, and lamented the focus of its politics on producing narrative (*relato*) instead of organisation. A differentiation along class and racial lines had more or less thoroughly affirmed itself by the second phase of government around 2017. In the 2014 municipal elections, the poorer *barrios populares* had been key, whilst in the 2019 municipal elections the same more peripheral neighbourhoods were largely lost to other parties. The limitations of the populist modalities of municipalism – 'governing for all' turned out to often (not always) be about governing for specific dominant sectors.

A second mandate: Staying with the trouble?

Elections, elections, elections. The amount of attention and energy that had gone into electoral struggles between 2015 and 2019 was enormous, not just because of municipalism's reign but also because of the surge in Catalan independentism and fierce power struggles at the state government level. By 2019, a sense of exhaustion with the dominance of electoral politics appears, as does another chance to claim power in municipal elections, to move into a second phase of city govnerments and consolidate what has been started and learned.

For *Barcelona en Comú*, the pre-campaign phase started in autumn 2018 and came with the challenge of winning popular support and elections without the massive trans-urban and neighbourhood movement that had heaved it into power in 2015. This meant launching new groups and platforms that could mobilise votes, as well as building door-to-door activism and campaigns. It was also the time for the drawing up of lists, and this opened into a second cycle of reflections on governance through the statements of continuity or withdrawal of councillors, as well as through a series of articles debating the success of *Barcelona en Comú's* first term and the desirability of continuing to govern.

This phase of re-evaluation, preceding the 2019 elections, offered reflection and self-critique, addressing itself to and involving the initial constituencies and activists. Half analysis, half electoral prod, texts from spring 2019 evaluate institutional politics by dwelling on realism, pragmatism and continuity. During that time, the renowned geographer David Harvey, too, was asked to comment on the advancements of municipalism in Barcelona and whether he was disappointed:

> No, I'm not. I think we have enough experience at the local level to know what's possible and what isn't. It doesn't surprise me, I don't expect a new administration to enter and magically do things. I might desire that things had gone better. But I hope they keep governing. It's very easy to critique from the outside. But quickly you realise that there's been a very strong opposition to Colau. That the media have not been on her side. That capital isn't on her side either. That they have no economic resources. That the regional government is not on your side and tried to boycott you (Harvey 2019; my translation from Catalan).

Spring 2019 is a time of a certain soberness and pragmatism, but also some new determination marks municipalist political discourse in Barcelona. Not the euphoria of *Si se puede* but nonetheless a solid 'We did this'. In other cities, the situation is quite different. Madrid is caught in stories of betrayal, splits and accusations, purges. In Málaga, disillusionment marks the process of digesting municipalist failings:

> [...] it's so hard to understand the people who evaluate political fights solely based on the rules of winning or losing within the institutional ring, when the real conflict is in life; in how we treat it, how we care for each other, in what desires we are capable of releasing, in how we relate. To change the city (and the world) is to change life (España Naveira 2019; my translation from Spanish).

Feminist upsurges had brought new attention and sensitivities to life in common, opening another cycle of struggles and becomings. In a myriad of cities, movements shifted their focus back to these renewed questions about life in common – battered but also strengthened and enriched by the municipalist experience.

The elections finally yielded very disparate results across the Spanish state. In most larger metropolitan areas, municipalist candidature seats were reduced to half, having been shaken by splits that usually involved Podemos breaking away from the 2015 'confluences'. In the two major cities of Barcelona and Madrid, results held (both obtained only one seat less than in 2015), but only in Barcelona – and only just about, with the help of a political manoeuvre[7] – did this lead into municipalist platforms governing. There were also some remarkable exceptions, like Cádiz, where Podemos sustained the mayorship, even growing from 8 to 13 seats by absorbing the smaller *Cadiz en Común*, or indeed smaller towns like Cárcaboso or Áviles that obtained the same amount of seats with the same candidature as in 2015. Overall, however, the municipalist grassroots candidacies declined by half or more.

More than a story of defeat, we can also narrate this as a story of learning. Gala Pin, who had decided not to run for elections again in 2019, expressed this aptly:

> If there's one thing I learned in these recent years...it's that politics needs to be done in a situated way, and from there, we must assure that politics knows how to inhabit discomfort. Our own, not that of others. It's not about making others politically uncomfortable, but about getting uncomfortable. We have to flee the spaces of comfort, because they stop us from advancing, progressing, transforming, challenging ourselves. (Pin 2019; my translation from Catalan).

---

7 *Barcelona en Comú* came in second to the republican independentist ERC by some 7,000 votes, but with the support of anti-independentist forces (the PSC, the Catalan social democrats) got to form a government, much to the anger of the independentist movement.

Looking ahead to a period of increased political instability, a steep rise of right-wing populists and adjacent fascist groups, ecological disaster and increasing violence against those who defend solidarity and the poor, this is a pragmatism which insists on going outside, getting unsettled and developing politics from there. This story of municipalism is also about staying with the trouble, and as Donna Haraway would put it, 'It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with' (Haraway 2016: 12). And so it matters that we think municipalism with situated, embodied, and relational accounts as much as with feminist-autonomist theory and the politics of care. The relation between social movements and institutions holds a lot of trouble, particularly when we open ourselves to think of it as a matter of sensibility, subjectivity, relation.

Municipalism and social movements: Anatomy of a relation

We can speak of the relation between municipalism and social movements in different ways. These ways of speaking shift, depending on the phase that municipalism finds itself in. Before municipalism took the form of parties and entered the institutional sphere, it was a claim to self-determination much like that of many other movements. Once it engaged with the electoral sphere and (co-)governed, its position shifted. In this phase, some still insist that municipalism is a social movement, emphasising the party and popular endorsement as its key components. Others prefer not to conflate the municipalist movement with other social movements, but insist on speaking of municipalism as a movement, too: something that bears a dynamic of self-organisation, linked into a broad social process.

But in its formal and representational modality, municipalism also relates to social movements as entities outside itself: the party relates to social movements in different ways, as do institutional actors, without positing sameness. Respecting the autonomy of social movements has been a touchstone of municipalist ethics and politics in Spain, at least in ambition. Here we will explore some weighty tropes and dynamics of the relation between movements and institutions, leading us into the story of a social centre and its relation to municipalism.

Subjects/objects

The new Spanish municipalisms arose out of social movements, retained social movement features, but also claimed forms and spaces that starkly differed from social movements, while negotiating and liaising with

social movements. Municipalism includes people in institutions and parties as well as in the neighbourhoods and streets: it doesn't require party allegiance or membership, yet it also can't quite claim autonomy from them. The kind of collective subject that municipalism implies is in flux, depending on the forms and practices it entails.

> What kind of collective becomings does municipalism imply? Beyond citizenship as defined by the bourgeoisie and the state, how can municipalism put another form of subject at the forefront of its politics? More than good policies, this requires a bodily, subjective hacking that can open onto becomings beyond the city as *Burg* of the *Bürger*. This is more a matter of micropolitics and care than one may think (Zechner 2016b).

Thinking of municipalism as a game, like soccer, we may ask who its subject is. The players on the field? The ball? The audience? The fans? The team? The powerful clubs? Sponsors? The media that transmit and report the matches? At its inception, municipalism was carried by a mass of people, a social movement. Then, with the electoral dimension activated and gained, its focus shifted to those in formal positions: the players. Meanwhile, it also entailed the formation of a party, a collective subject of a different kind, defined legally as a mode of association and bound to electoral protocols: a kind of team. Soon, mainstream politics shows us links to powerful clubs, sponsors and mainstream media are likely to follow. But to many of its proponents, municipalism was/is actually the ball: a common dynamic subject-object around which movement crystallises (Massumi 2002). Something that might be played across different fields, but can't play itself – a means to a collective process of defining and testing rules and moves, but not an end in itself.

Inside/outside

Here's another powerful trope of the relation between movements and institutions: inside vs. outside. Let us pause on the use of this topographical imaginary for a moment. Nearly all municipalist discourse, as well as academic and activist political analysis, charts the institution as 'inside' and the streets/movements/everyday life as 'outside'. This is an interesting tendency, given the question of who we posit to be the subject of our politics, stories, sentences. Even veteran grassroots activists recur to this imaginary, despite their political and subjective focus clearly being on the streets and movements. Do movements not have an inside, perhaps, because they have no walls – unlike institutions? Perhaps we best think of movements as wide open spaces, places of uncertainty, indefinition and freedom. Just as we speak of prison as an 'inside' sometimes, without ourselves being in prison or being centred on the prison, we may intuitively speak of institutions as 'inside' because of their thick walls. You can't just walk into political institutions, not even necessarily into public ones. Walls are very determinant for institutions, and what is walled has an inside – for better or worse.

Yet Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar proposes a powerful inversion of the inside/outside trope. She suggests that going into institutions is in fact 'entering the outside':[8] 'There are some that entered the outside. Well, let them enter the outside and respect what we are doing and let

---

8 Trying to trace this notion of 'entering outside' in practice, some researcher-activists coming from the 15M and following the municipalist processes with a slight difference and distance (in Madrid and Barcelona particularly) have been conducting a research project called 'Entering Outside,' where they look at some configurations of the relation between public and commons in community health practices in Southern Europe. See: https://entrarafuera.net/

them open up terms of dialogue' (Gutiérrez Aguilar & Reguero 2017; my translation from Spanish). Her 'we' is that of social movements. She points out approaching institutions from an assumed centrality of movements can avoid the compartmentalisation or diluting of social desires – into participatory protocols or policy areas for example.

> This, I think could be a fertile path for the longing for social transformation not to be transmuted into different levels of political change. Doing that [transmuting desire into different levels] would amount to packaging social desire into microdoses, it would amount to diluting them. When the energy of the 15M was here, that energy was made of the same stuff I think. It was the same energy that we unfolded in the wars for water [Bolivian struggles for water, which Guitérrez was active in] or that was unfolded in the Aymara blockades – it was the same longing but with another content. This spread-out human capacity, how can we convert it into a torrent that unsettles and disturbs the institutional [dimension]? That's my question – and let's not assume the opposite, let's not think about how we can channel this process of struggle based in a profound collective desire into a change that hinges on establishing terms for diminishing the radicality of words. This is what the comrades in Latin America did and it's going wrong [...](Gutiérrez Aguilar & Reguero 2017; my translation from Spanish).

Gutiérrez addresses a key problem and perhaps dilemma here, which is not just about a choice of terms, but indeed, as she points out, about the *energies* carried by

calls, cries, imaginaries and demands in social movements, and the way in which these link to social desire. Institutions are known to destroy, to fragment and weaken social longing, by 'blending it in' to rigid or inert institutional architectures (as Gutiérrez says of women being added and mixed into masculine political cultures), submitting it to rhythms and limitations that are not its own, by breaking its radicality down into many microdoses that in themselves no longer bear the strong energy of the collective process, demand and movement. Words, calls for change, expressions of desire, can come to be turned into electoral slogans administered by parties, into policy terms devoid of their original force or radical meaning.

On the other hand, Guitérrez argues, on the part of movements, there is often a treacherous imaginary of governments and institutions as homogeneous or bloc-like. This is an idea that not only betrays the complex realities of agonism and antagonism as well as of roles and responsibilities within institutions, but can lead to premature responses of rejection and misdirected critiques or requests on the part of movements. Asked what knowledge of institutions might be useful for movements to take into account, ex-councillor Gala Pin responds:

> [...] everything is attributed to this unit of action, but in reality the party or government has different layers, and it's important to acknowledge these layers - not to excuse them but in order to elaborate a strategy so that tactics can be much more refined in the movements. (Interview Pin 2019; my translation from Spanish).

Discourse/silence

A solid micropolitics of municipalism implies the undoing of habitual responses or stereotypes, as well as the creation of communicating vessels and modalities of storytelling and translation. The key point would be, with Gutierrez, that storytelling and translation would not imply taking away the parrhesic force of words uttered by those without institutional power. Not translation that neutralises by rendering things into technical, abstract, sociological language, not the production of *relato* as tactical narrative. But storytelling and translation that allow us to grasp the language, meaning and experiences of one another. Communicating vessels between movements and institutions would need to enable embodied, situated accounts and learning. They would need to undo, as such, the binary between discourse and silence, and open onto embodied, material, situated dimensions and ways of learning and articulating.

For this, the territorial – between land and soil is territory – and inhabitational dimensions are important, as it takes continuous, embedded and embodied dialogue and thinking in order to render the tension between movements and institutions productive. In other words, spaces and places, and movements that engage with the city as territory. Speaking of Barcelona, Laia Forné Aguirre names 'republican cooperativism, social struggles, the feminist movement and the associational and neighbourhood fabric' (Forné Aguirre 2019; my translation from Catalan) as key territorial actors that operate via collective spaces of debate and

encounters that build counter-power, and can act as communicating vessels to the city administrations.

Territorial rootedness allows these movements to make claims that are radical in the sense that they take complex local realities into account, starting from the everyday. And neighbourhoods are not just spaces where many movements build power from, but also where people at different sides of the institutions-movement spectrum coincide. Permanent spaces where municipalism is being tested not just in terms of its policies but in relational terms – those everyday encounters are also part of the micropolitics of municipalism. The inhabitational dimension matters a great deal for municipalism, as it can subvert and deflect the hegemonising, overcoding force of discourse and the representational dimension.

Social centres are focal points of territorial encounter and debate. They have the potential to concentrate, channel and de-centre municipalist encounters and debates: to de-centre them from official places and actors, and to channel them along non-mediatised and non-ritualised spatialities and temporalities. Many municipalist councillors, across different cities, came out of social centre experiences initially, having taught each other how to think and engage in the city there. They conceived of municipalism as a matter of permanent encounter and situated struggle, linked to the history of republican *Ateneus*, autonomous *Okupas*, feminist and commons spaces. So what may we learn from the relations between social centres and municipalism?

From the social centre to city hall and back again: A story from the Casa Invisible in Málaga

The *Casa Invisible* social centre in Málaga was such a site of articulation, having brought forth important early debates on municipalism but losing touch with Málaga's municipalist party (Málaga Ahora) after their election into the opposition in 2015. Several councillors of the platform were long-term *Casa Invisible* activists, and their 2015 municipalist campaign received strong support from the social centre. But with time, communication broke down and troubled relations ensued. The councillors that went from the social centre into the city hall – seeing themselves as institutional *ocupas* – were disappointed by the lack of incentive on the part of the social centre, having hoped for them to run campaigns and put pressure on institutional action.

Social centre activists, on the other hand, got lost and alienated by the tough climate and internal splits within *Málaga Ahora* (to do with Podemos), and found it hard to grasp the micropolitical affects and effects that occurred in the town hall. A lack of joint analysis of political conjunctures and an absence of micropolitical thinking led to estrangement and weakened both the social centre and municipalist platform.

Brainstorming key terms for municipalist micropolitics with people from *Casa Invisible* and *Málaga Ahora* in 2018,[9] this came up: *promise to*

---

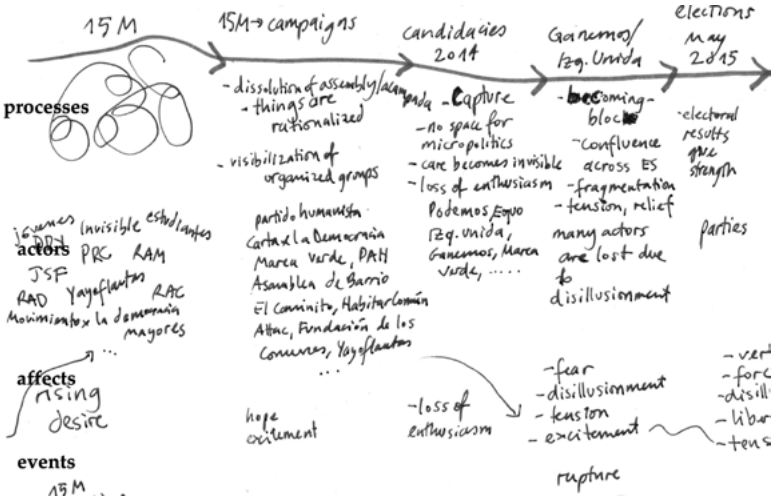
9 In the context of a workshop I facilitated there, on municipalism and micropolitics.

*oneself [*autopromesa*], ethics, meme-ification, integrity, opposition, transparency, inertia, velocity, privacy, intimacy, affinity, loneliness, incapacity to explain (processes or encounters), incommunicability [*incomunicabilidad*], distance, capture, change from within, to give nothing to the institution without changing it*. As well as these: *favoritism, corporativism, disconnection, lack of communication, lack of collective responsibility, opportunism, lack of micropolitical accompaniment [*acompañamiento*]*. Those are powerful starting points for a micropolitical vocabulary of municipalism.

We then drew up a timeline going from the 15M movement to 2018, along four key axes: time, space, bodies-affects and relations-networks. The idea was to chart out what modes of temporality, what spaces, what affects and forms of embodiment, and what relations and networks were most important at different stages along this timespan. We broke the timeline down to different phases, based on Malaga's specific trajectory,[10] and then proceeded to think about who the subjects of politics during these phases were. How did agency and subjectivity shift through these phases and their processes?

---

10 They were: the 15M movement; the moment of transition from the 15M to the municipalist campaigns; the first candidacies (*Podemos* in the European elections of 2014 and *Ganemos Málaga* for the municipal election of 2015); the rupture of *Ganemos Málaga* with *Izquierda Unida* (November 2014); municipal elections (May 2015); the rupture of *Málaga Ahora* from (parts of) *Podemos* (end of 2017); and the then post-rupture present (2018).



By 'subjects of politics' I mean: those who drive action and process. Along the timeline, we identified a shift from powerful collective subjects – movements, platforms, collectives, as they emerged from the 15M – to more personalised formations, to do with alliances, interest groups, splits, individual strategies that occurred with the course of municipalism. This problem is not reducible to a problem of participation or outreach, but reflects the very structures and subjectivations of the institutions. These are premised on the individual, the population or interest group as social actors.

The problem of participation reflects the difficulty of trying to produce a subject of politics: you cannot fabricate collective agency[11]. Málaga Ex-councillor

11 For a more detailed exploration, see the section on 'participation' in Zechner 2020b.

Santi Fernández-Patón notes that participation can lead to a twisted logic that fools both politicians and citizens into thinking that there is collective agency (Fernández Patón 2019: 41–42). It takes certain conditions – of mobilization, collective desire and intelligence, social-political conjuncture, etc. – for collective agency to emerge. Trying to produce it from 'above' may lead towards versions of manufactured civil society (Hodgson 2004), or to troll-driven engineerings of protest, but can never compare to the intelligence and agency generated through autopoietic collective becoming.

This is the aporia municipalism eventually faced, particularly in places like Málaga. Municipalism was never intended as a production of collectivity or consent from within institutions: it was meant to reach from everyday lives and social movements into institutions to try make changes, and not at all costs. As a tactical alliance at best, one that inevitably comes with limitations and expiry dates. It was born out of a collective micropolitical sensibility that grasped the importance of subjectivity (individual and collective) as what lies at the base of any profound transformation.

Micropolitics as such implies not just building shared aims and strategies but also a shared attention to processes of becoming. Such processes are open-ended and imply vulnerability. Lack of acknowledgement of shared vulnerability plays a key role in the alienation between movements and municipalist platforms, in Málaga as well as in other places. Silence, misunderstandings and animosities then take over. That's why a politics of care matters for micropolitics – so that collective intelligence can be built on the basis of acknowledging vulnerability, and interdependency can be negotiated on this basis.

This doesn't imply negating differences, avoiding splits and divisions, or eschewing aims and goals.

There is power in dissociation: The micropolitics of refusing to care

There is also that other place, of non-communication and dissociation from institutions. Some have come to adopt this stance gradually, over some years of watching things develop, others have been sure of it from the start. Autonomous movements (tendentially those to have adopted dissociation with time) and anarchist movements (tendentially for immediate rejection) hold their heads and hearts up high in refusal of formalised politics. Heads and hearts most apt at remembering, that never forget, and never forgive. Theirs is a historical and embodied memory that holds on to anti-fascist and class struggle's memories, and goes by what it trusts, avoiding ventures into murky waters of negotiation and compromise. Anarchism is the living memory of violence, and in the face of it, a commitment to keep caring. By refusing to care for those who take part in injury.

The new Spanish municipalisms are also grounded in this politics – not necessarily because many people directly identified as libertarian municipalists, but because they came from squatters, radical feminist, anti-war, anti-gentrification, anti-racist movements. Originally at least, they also carry the refusal to care for power in their DNA: the rejection of authority and control brings on a fierce and productive energy. Cultivated in times and contexts of oppression, repression, violence, this energy spans generations and continents. Spanish movements, with the memory of fascist dictatorship and

the civil war still in their bones – a memory that has been very well cultivated, and keeps giving, revealing, energising, uniting – have their fair share of this radical energy. Contemporary municipalists, particularly the majority that came from social movements, appreciate and respect anarchism and autonomism, as most precious historical and present forces.

> One thing I've been thinking these 4 years [in office] is that the libertarian, anarchist, autonomous sector – or whatever you want to call it – is super important. I've fought a lot with them in the movements, but suddenly they emerge as a sector that's capable of distinguishing between different layers of society... and can work with the sex workers, the lumpen, the middle class, that isn't middle class but wants to be middle class – with its disagreements and tensions, but it knows how to understand complexity and so on (Interview Gala Pin 2019; my translation from Spanish).

Pin appreciates the fact that anarchists have a global vision of the city and that because they don't need to prove themselves to the institution, they do not fear conflict. 'Because what conflict does is give voice or influence to people who usually don't have it' and because 'it's not all about recognition and things being super fun' Interview Pin 2019; my translation from Spanish). The role of conflict, antagonism and autonomy is also appreciated from within the institution: many of those stuck within the town hall walls crave seeing not just organised movements that make good demands for policy, but also fierce and intelligent opposition in the streets.

Anarchism refuses any empathy or interest to those in positions of power, and as such keeps its priorities

straight and to the point. The categorical refusal to care towards those in power implies a strong committment to caring with those without much power-over.[12] This refusal to care is a powerful act, too, and a legitimate one. From a feminist viewpoint, refusing to care is often important for self-care and self-preservation, and just as we choose our battles we also must choose our fields of care.

The fact that many people in Spanish cities cared about municipalism – and by extension, took-care-of it by helping with campaigning and similar activities, even practiced care-giving as a dedication to its organisation and process – stems from their faithfulness to an event: the 15M. The continuity many people saw between the collective subjectivation of the 15M and municipalism was the basis of this care, of recognising oneself as part of a collective subject.

Towards the end of municipalist's first legislature, that tie had been weakened: the disengagement from a collective process of becoming also meant people largely stopped caring. This isn't tragic or undesirable, but quite appreciable, as most people within the institutions themselves accepted. For municipalists to keep demanding a lot of care from social movements at this stage would amount to blackmail, to narcissistic demands for identification where there is no longer a strong collective subject. But to disengage from active participation in municipalism (as taking-care-of or care-giving) does not imply absence of caring-about, or indeed a rejection of care-receiving (receiving the fruits of municipal-

12 Starhawk, the radical witch, distinguishes between power-over, power-with and power-from within, noting that only the first tends to be toxic (Starhawk 1987).

ist work) or caring-with (as solidarity with those who remain in the institution). It means accepting a division of labour in politics – the end of a common dream of overcoming this division. That brings confusion and also pain, but does not necessarily preclude respect, appreciation or solidarity.

Institutions without bodies: Rhythms, affects, embodiments and subjectivations

> The rhythm of the electoral cycle is not the rhythm of life and its unforeseeable musicality, nor that of the city and its infinite noises. But for some years we have exceedingly adapted our rhythms to the monotonous electoral noise and its resonances in the media (España Naveira 2019; my translation from Spanish).

Municipalism has implied a dynamic of orienting actors across the spectrum towards the town hall and institutions. For activists in the streets and neighbourhoods, and above all for municipalists in institutions and parties, this meant grappling with the temporalities of policy, elections, media, often with a sense of becoming absorbed by them, losing the autonomous timeframes as well as conceptual and organisational production characteristic of the social movements from which municipalism emerged.

A determining factor for the micropolitics of municipalism is the way in which institutional architectures and temporalities separate those 'on the inside' from the everyday rhythms of neighbourhoods and movements – as well as from one another. Accelerated rhythms and a lack of spaces of socialisation make it impossible for councillors to develop shared imaginaries. Gala Pin says that, despite seeing other members of the municipal team frequently, and working with many fantastic people, the modalities of institutional work don't allow for the development of common notions or analyses. Once social movement comrades, who were very much in sync, now many of those in office come to be alienated from one another: 'our common understandings and sense,

which had been very close before, are becoming more distant instead of broadening together' (Interview Gala Pin 2019; my translation from Spanish). 'I have people around me on whom I can rely at different moments, but I don't feel there is a common vision…' (Interview Alessandra de Diego Baciero 2018; my translation from Spanish). Emotional and affective disagreements follow.

In these accounts we hear resonances of what Guitérrez speaks about with regards to activists entering institutions in Latin America: having to submit to rhythms and protocols that are not their own (individually and collectively), getting mixed up in alienating architectures that severely limit collective thinking and feeling.

Bodies and rhythms have a lot to do with the peak in collective intelligence and becoming that came with the 15M movement and the municipalist electoral campaigns. These movements had created networks as well as modes of thinking, feeling and acting that were hard to bring into the institution. They had created a political sensibility, or a politics of sensibility: of breathing together and conspiring, giving mutual force, listening and care. This was about more than sharing perceptions:

> The 15M created a *sensitive common* in which it was possible to feel others and [feel] with others, as fellow beings. This skin has peeled off or gone numb, weakened to a considerable degree by a 'verticalisation' of attention and desire, stored and delegated in the electoral promise of the new politics during the 'institutional takeover.' Captivated by the stimuli that came from above (TV, leaders, parties), at the same time neglecting what happened around us, the skin cracked (Fernández-Savater 2018; my translation from Spanish).

Finding back the lively rhythms and musicality of the 15M would largely be down to those drumming, chanting, walking and dancing in the streets, not least the feminist *batucadas* of #8M.

Struggling to care

What Savater describes concerns social movements at large, but new councillors and government teams were at the frontlines of this dynamic. Their struggle to remain open and connected to everyday local and social movements – as a struggle to care, to keep caring – yields some lessons on (micro)politics but also on the constitution of our skins. We may consider their struggle to have been misguided, naïve, idealistic, opportunistic – either way, theirs is a journey to the frontlines of our public system, a system that matters a great deal for our lives in common.

The experiences of those who took on institutional jobs are often ignored or ridiculed: they only have themselves to blame, they are privilieged subjects who now earn good salaries and climb political career ladders, maybe they never even cared for social movements anyways... those are often mystifications that can be as noxious as the belief that people in institutional politics are all-powerful. Such assumptions objectify people in official roles or within institutional architectures – understandable in the face of the institutional violence that so often objectifies people, but unfortunate for trying to grapple with the possible ways of articulating our common lives and decisions with the rather abstract public systems and architectures that govern us.

Our struggles to care have to do with what we define as legitimate needs. Do institutions meet preexisting

needs, or produce needs in the first place? The welfare state is an institutional-ideological construct of the post-Second World War period, an exceptional construct we relate to ambivalently today (Neilson and Rossiter 2008). It has also shaped, if not constructed, how we think about needs. And that thinking is now changing, as we confront capitalist ruin and reimagine articulations across autonomy and interdependence.

We don't want our institutions to negate our precarity, interdependency and vulnerability at the expense of others, as in the well-integrated exploitative workings of patriarchy, capitalism and colonialism (see also Lorey 2015). We don't want them to provide illusions of sovereignty and superiority, whether it's through welfare chauvinism or nationalism. We don't want them to turn us into good workers, good consumers, not even into good citizens, if this means making us think we are the norm. We want neither the paternalistic nor disciplining care of institutions, nor charity nor workfare. Institutions must learn to care otherwise.

Can we imagine public institutions that don't serve a particular class, gender or national interest, and offer accountability, transparency and participation? Such institutions must negotiate universalism with situatedness in intelligent ways. They must take our interdependencies into account and build new forms of collective intelligence and solidarity. They must allow for self-governance in as much as possible, whilst responding to broader and more global realities and committments. Those are the kinds of notions and aspirations that emerge from the common sense and sensibilities of the 15M and feminist movements in Spain, as well as Southern European struggles for welfare more broadly

(Pérez and Salvini-Ramas 2019). Institutions must be open to commons.

Those are also the ideas and aspirations that municipalist activists took with them as they went into public institutions. They were not so much ideals as collectively elaborated wagers – mobilised in conjunction with organised movements, global solidarities, prototypical models of collective organisation, in a favourable social-political conjuncture, and in a context of a lot of precarity, poverty, injustice, corruption. Without all this coinciding, most would never have dreamt of stepping into political institutions. The 30,000 initial signatures that *Barcelona en Comú* had collected, and the self-organisational drive that followed them, were to make sure this was a collective project, not the whim of a few. And while everyone anticipated that it would be an uphill battle, few had concrete ideas of what this would imply.

Those who were getting ready to take on official roles did their best to prepare, anticipate, build support networks. They found themselves thrown into a new institutional and media reality marked by caution and distrust, which they had expected. What they didn't expect was the extent to which they would not be able to share this experience – amongst themselves or with their previous collective contexts in social movements. Councillor Claudia Delso of A Coruña says those within institutions do speak to one another, but don't socialise their experiences '[...] because of a fear of the interpretation that will be made of this [...]' in the given harsh political and media context. But: 'I think there's a whole surrounding environment that's thinking about this, that is helping us find ways out which are absolutely fundamental and vital' (Interview Claudia Delso 2018; my

translation from Spanish). Social movement debates and reflections matter, they do reach and touch the skins of those on the institutional frontlines.

Municipalism set out to refuse politics as an inside job, with feminists being most active and persistent in seeking ways to socialise knowledge and vulnerabilities despite the dominant political culture of secrecy and pretense infallibility. 'Efficiency, electoral needs, media visibility and urgency are the enemies of prioritising a feminisation of politics' writes Laura Roth in a brief feminist municipalist manifesto (Roth 2021). Urgency and efficiency mostly tend to reconfirm existing channels of power and knowledge. Media wars and smear campaigns undermine shared debates and transparency, promoting poker face politics. Madrid councillor Celia Mayer laments that 'we're trapped between private chats and the media' (Traficantes de Sueños 2017; my translation from Spanish). Instead of collective thinking and discussion, the media end up determining interpretations and debates. This produces a lack of evaluation, self-criticism and learning amongst those in formal politics.

At the micropolitical level, being able to express vulnerabilities, doubts and mistakes is a key aspect of transformative movements. Socialising problems, making incompleteness known, reaching out to others for support, recognising that we need others: these are, however, hardly a given in social movements either. The struggle against masculinist cultures of independence, exclusiveness and authority is not confined to institutions, as any feminist can confirm. But institutions are an important site for battling those cultures, as they emanate powerfully from within them.

Despite their relative isolation, municipalist feminists have shown which place vulnerability can have in

public institutions. Small acts can go a long way in the subversion of big cultures. Ada Colau, who also used to work as an actress, has made a point of letting herself cry publicly, and of admitting that she struggles in her role (Faus 2016). Like many other feminists in office, she refuses to negate her body and those of others. To allow oneself to feel, to be affected and resonate with things that happen is a powerful act, in city hall as much as in party spaces and activist cultures: against the projection of sovereign, cool individuality. Though mediatised, such expressions of vulnerability still carry that *sensitive common* of the 15M, as well as the feminist refusal of cool. The people who keep asking the question of 'we' in a tense political context are not dreamers lacking strategy: their strategy is the transformation of culture as a way of achieving change.

As far as municipalist party platforms are concerned, the 'feminist diagnosis of gender dynamics' of *Barcelona en Comú* (Institut Diversitas 2018) gives some key insights into what changing political culture might concretely mean. It looked at the participation of women and men in different political spaces; the distribution of tasks, of speaking time, care work, roles; possible feminist models of leadership, coordination, facilitation, care; everyday reconciliability, the sustainability of life; different ways of doing politics and the feminisation of politics as a concrete focus within the organisation. The report summary features a schema on 'masculinity and new forms of political interaction':

> - 'winning the political debate' via the imposition of positions vs. recognition of diverse postures
>
> - using absolute opinions (locking down positions)

> vs. valorising elements of contrary postures that can be shared
>
> - always showing assurance and authority vs. relativising one's own assumptions
>
> - difficulty in sharing political discrepancies vs. facilitating shared spaces of work
>
> - speed in the taking of decisions vs. allowing for time of deliberation
>
> - exclusive, restricted and informal spaces of decision-making vs. inclusive and transparent spaces of decision-making
>
> (Institut Diversitas 2018: 10; my translation from Catalan).

Those were some of the cultural shifts that the new municipalist organisations were adamant about translating into the sphere of institutional politics. A task that was easier to realise within the party – autonomous in the sense of giving itself its own forms and laws – than within the city administration.

Institutions without bodies

> On a day in the institution, you get up happy because they give you news that some building work you've been waiting on for 3 months gets the go-ahead, then you read an email that says you're lacking money for something and you get pissed off, then you meet up with people who explain a program of work placement to you that's super important to them [...] you have to empathise and figure out if this project fits into the categories of the institution, whether you find it interesting and it's in the public interest [...]; then you run to a historical remembrance event, you walk there and prepare for it and when you arrive you

> get emotional, because these things always move you; from there you run to the managing board of the Liceu Theatre, there's the man from the state, the man from the *Generalitat*, the man from the *Diputació*, the gentlemen from the Liceu, and you have to read between lines there and understand what they're saying about the budget, because there's really some political moves there that you don't quite grasp, but you have to also remember that you have to be very nice with that man there and give him a wink so that he helps you out with the Raval Nord Health Centre, whilst a lover simultaneously writes you and says they can't meet tonight, so you feel down. Then later you go for lunch with someone you have to talk some work things over with, but they tell you that their father was sent to hospital [...]' (Interview Gala Pin 2019; my translation from Spanish).

Care requires time and attention. The described levels of cognitive and emotional overload don't even allow for sustained 'caring about' (concern, attention, remembering), nor taking-care-of (sorting things out), not to mention care-giving (sustained dedication) and care-receiving (being in touch with one's own vulnerability). Caring-with, as solidarity, is also reduced to a reactive moment when there is no time to process feelings of empathy. It would take three bodies or three days to meaningfully accommodate and socialise the processes and experiences councillor Pin's recounts.

Yet they are hers alone. And they imply not just attention and work, but also responsibility. Lack of time and spaces for socialising thoughts and decisions means that for those in official roles, responsibility is individualised. Almost inevitably, this triggers fear, mistrust, guilt and defensiveness. Making important decisions alone, under

conditions of extreme pressure and stress, means making decisions badly: '[...] decisions are also taken with the body, and the institution makes you negate the body' (Interview Gala Pin 2019; my translation from Spanish).

The negation of the body in the institution renders a deep-reaching feminist transformation impossible. Maria Galindo speaks of the inquiry on gender that she did in the Bolivian parliament during the mandate of Evo Morales:

> We're in democracy without bodies. The body is expelled from political matters. The parliamentarians themselves told me that they had never addressed the issue of the body. It isn't considered important. Thus, when they debate abortion, there are no established bases for political discussion, and those of us who did indeed build them [the bases] are expelled from the right to debate (Galindo & Brunner 2019; my translation from Spanish).

Changing political culture is not a matter of replacing male with female bodies – of pregnant, menstruating, lactating bodies to pretend they can stand anything, of them trying to forget those they regularly care for. 'The feminist imaginary stands for political proposals towards the transformation of society. It's not an ideology of rights for women within a neoliberal patriarchal system' (Galindo & Brunner 2019; my translation from Spanish).

To properly and profoundly transform this culture, in the sense of a becoming-feminist of politics, means to grapple with the body not just as an object (upon which policies impact; which inconveniences political process). It means to enable other ways of inhabiting, speaking, listening, feeling, sensing. To stay with the body is to stay with the trouble.

> During my four years on the frontlines, I have felt physically blocked in my diaphragm – the wide muscle located between the chest and abdomen, which rhythmically contracts and relaxes to help us breathe air into and out of our lungs. I had bronchitis four times and pneumonia once and even had to begin using a night guard to sleep. But the strain placed on my body didn't just come from the daily management of a councillorship that we built up from nothing, tackling the million and one exciting challenges it presented – challenges which were often rife with problems caused by the datedness of the institution itself. What strained my body the most was observing, enduring and participating in the traditional exertion of power and, in turn, one of its more unpleasant outcomes: power struggles. I resigned myself to thinking that politics could only be approached with a mindset that polarises, excludes and rejects otherness (Delso and Traviesas Mendez 2019).

Delso says she needed to find her way back to 'fragility, fears, vulnerability, grief and everything that does not fit into the world of politics' after her first four years as a councillor: 'I keep asking myself why we have not been able to change our approach in a way that is much more tangible than just a weaving a narrative. Or at least why we haven't made a more heartfelt attempt to do so' (Delso & Traviesas Mendez 2019). Traviesas Mendez thinks this is due to their male peer's resistance to changing political semantics: 'Most of our male colleagues are not ready to surrender those concepts. Doing so requires a deep personal reckoning' (Delso & Traviesas Mendes 2019). Here we find another internal micropolitical faultline within municipalism, running along lines of gender, that has rarely found public expression beyond the discourses on feminising politics and care.

No (wo)man's land

Translating movement knowledges and cultures towards institutions was a key aim of municipalists, particularly for feminists. After four years, many look back with a sense of failure:

> There's elements of listening and communication and of processes of construction, let's say, of trial and error that happen in movements but that we find very hard to make happen with the institutional. [...] For me, there's something we bring from the movements but that we're not able to place at the centre and to dare, and that's where fear comes in... (Interview Claudia Delso 2018; my translation from Spanish).

'Placing life at the centre' has been the key slogan of the feminist movements that underpin a lot of the thinking of Delso, Traviesas-Mendez, Pin, Colau, Forné-Aguirre, López, and many other municipalist councillors and workers. For those who went into institutions in particular, that centre has gotten lost, political-affective coordinates turned upside down, and their own positionality has become unclear.

> In fact, I rather feel a bit distant [from movements] and that worries me a lot, because before I felt closeness, and now it's like I'm in an intermediate space which is a bit of a no-mans-land, and it's hard to know how to deal with it, because in fact the idea was to translate the lessons from all this more movement- and militancy-based phase into... well, to take those lessons and bring them into municipalist dispositifs that can then translate into real politics, into public policy (Baciero 2018; my translation from Spanish).

With the centre having been shifted to the institutions – for reasons manifold and complex, as we have seen – it has become a lot more complicated to translate movement-based knowledges and cultures towards institutions.

Who cares?

Should movements care about the debacle of their (ex)comrades in the halls of power? Do movements not risk immobility and impasse if they get too absorbed in the spectacle of institutional struggle? Certainly they do, and in many cities, it took them a while to find back – or find anew – their place, voice, strength and mission. With all eyes and minds focussed on municipalism, on this new field of learning and practice within, across and beyond institutions, it took a while for movements to catch their breath and focus back on their own place and roles, particularly since these roles partially changed with a dialoguing administration. It is dangerous for movements to empathise with new politicians and thus accept the latter's political failings, out of a sense of loyalty or friendship. This process can easily lead to subsumption of movements, without anyone in the institutions necessarily ever desiring such a dynamic.

Disentangling the emotional and relational interdependencies across these two fronts took some years in the base of Barcelona. The affective dilemmas municipalism brought with it – as broad dilemmas of social relationality, not just as interpersonal problems – were not known first-hand to many people.

Should and could movements address their ex-comrades in institutions on the same terms as before, with the trust that they're on the same side? Should and could councillors try and explain their institutional ordeals to movements? If

councillors relay their challenges, they might not expect the listeners to take over their responsibility, but in a scenario marked by trust, won't people realistically feel caught up or immobilised by these stories? Where is the line between soliciting empathy and manipulation or emotional blackmail? How to navigate this complexity without leading into either blind apologism or blind condemnation?

Raquel Gutiérrez and Rosa Lugano, reflecting on an impressive conversation between Bolivian activist Maria Galindo and then vice-president Alberto García Linera (Galindo & García-Linera 2014; see also Lugano & Gutiérrez Aguilar 2016), take to narrating the process lived on the movement side with strong words, allowing for no apology of politicians' missed opportunities:

> ...there is a continuity and causality between social mobilisation and the occupying of the state by the so-called progressive governments, but once these settled [in the institution], that force was made minority, its protagonists converted into students and spectators. Everything is thus inscribed in a new turn of the screw – and of language – of plunder, which is the intimate key to capital's power (Lugano & Gutiérrez Aguilar 2014; my translation from Spanish).

Certainly, many people became unhappy spectators of Spain's new municipalism, feeling concerned by the complexity and difficulties of government, but also feeling patronised by the electoralist language of 'governing for all' that municipalists often adopted. Claudia Delso offers a self-critique relating to the unifying narrative of municipalism:

> Without a doubt, one thing that we did very well was creating and communicating a story: we dismantled the political status quo so that we, as

> leaders, could return the institutions to the 99%. We have collectively created a narrative that is epic, compelling, and richly woven but which is, in my view, also incredibly self-indulgent, considering that we have focused our political communication efforts on feeding this narrative rather than on addressing the underlying institutional dysfunction and focusing on other realities and discourses (Delso & Traviesas Mendez 2019).

The main effect Delso and Traviesas Mendez point out is that of failing to change political culture. Commons politics should mean being part of a community rather than just speaking about commons: yet how institutional workers are to conceive of such a community remains a difficult question. Projecting unity between movements and institutions is misleading and dangerous; imagining a community of those struggling within institutions is compelling given their mutual alienation, but also dangerous due to the endogamic and elite tendencies of institutional politics.

Being part of local, territorial, neighbourhood community as councillors and representatives seems the most promising option, to try to turn the function of delegation into one of spokespersonship. This is another insight of Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar, who distinguishes communal politics from liberal politics by the fact that within community, no one hands over their capacity to take care (*hacerse cargo*). Community spokespersons do not represent, they merely transmit. Liberal politics, on the other hand, builds on delegation and representation, which implies giving away responsibility. This marks a fundamental difference in how we embody and inhabit politics.

Lessons for collective practice

Municipalism is not just an approach or political orientation directed from formal political spheres towards society, nor is it an approach directed from organised politics towards supposedly unorganised social movements. In the most promising understanding, municipalism encompasses a broad social and collective understanding of relations of forces that indeed tries to break down absolute ideological or relational divisions between those 'inside' and those 'outside' (of the institutions or the everyday social). We have found instances of how these divisions play out, how people try to undo them, and how this produces processes of learning as well as failure.

Micropolitics and the commons have emerged as sharing strong affinity in the present account, as they start from an understanding and practice of politics that's grounded in everyday practice, bodies and relations. In this vein, we have explored different affective, spatial, temporal and bodily regimes that municipalism has brought upon people and groups, as a drastic reconfiguration of the topography of social movements. Stress, fear and the individualisation of responsibility have emerged as strong affective vectors of institutional work. Getting an insight into the struggles to overcome those affective regimes and their dynamics of alienation, we have also explored some of the struggles around positionality that ensued through different phases of the configuration of municipalist politics. All these have shown us the importance of paying attention and respect to micropolitical dynamics, and the urgency as well as difficulty of enabling a politics of care within and beyond the machinations of formal power and representation.

We have seen a series of limitations and micropolitical blind spots that have produced certain effects within municipalist movements – of alienation, miscommunication, silencing, division. Many of those we have not seen for the first time, nor the last, in our collective histories. Insisting that these are not the only reasons for how things develop, but very important ones that tend to be underrated, I have affirmed that micropolitics merits more than a side note.

Micropolitics is not a matter of morality as divorced from 'real' politics – on the contrary, where micropolitics fails, any collective project loses the power to transform subjectivites and practices with very real political effects. And while micropolitics starts from given relations, assemblages, affective and subjective landscapes, it does not equal *realpolitik*. Realpolitik is politics based primarily on pragmatic considerations of given circumstances and factors, urgent needs and an interest in maintaining and growing power (*Machtpolitik*). Micropolitics is not the shortest way to relative comfort or compromise, it's not power brokering at a small scale. It's about the ways in which relations, inhabitation, organisation and care can transform subjects and subjectivities – at an individual and collective level at the same time.

Furthermore, it's useful to ask the question of 'building power from below' apart from the idea of Machtpolitik. We have seen that municipalism has set out from a place of great imagination and ideas – amongst those the commons – that have built power in immensely collective ways in its initial campaigns, linking the spheres of the relational, inhabitational and organisation to claim the domain of representation. This power was built in a crisis of social reproduction, in a

moment and modality of sustaining life, fighting for social rights and vital redistribution – by democratising space and removing elites and their corporate symbionts from institutions. It has entailed powerful subjective processes that increased people's capacity to act collectively, as well as eventually decreasing them in some aspects. Whatever the outcomes of different processes, we should not confuse this power with the subsequent pressures and protocols of the institution and party that have compelled municipalism towards keeping power in some places. Machtpolitik is an effect that must absolutely be recognised and understood, but should not be mistaken for the original or inevitable meaning of municipalism. That would be cynical and erase a whole lot of knowledges and experiences: such erasure never serves our collective interest or cultures.

What is clear is that electoral victories should not be taken as the measure of the strength of 'the Left' or social movements – in any city, region or country. Votes say precious little about the real state of a society, about the power people really have. What we have to look at to understand this strength and power is the degrees and modes of struggle, transversality, care and solidarity across different social movements and groups. Where there is communication, debate, mutual support and coordination across different sectors of movements, there is strength. These forms of interconnection are often invisible to the outside eye, but they are easily visible in the mobilisations and victories of struggles, even when they are minor. The 15M and its sister movements gifted Spain with a boost in such mobilisation and victories, shifting relationalities and subjectivities at a collective scale, making communities and thus society stronger.

Electoral victory was an expression thereof in 2015, but should never be confused for its origin or safeguard.

Where conditions of transversal solidarity and mobilisation, and thus of collective mutual care and also reproduction, are not given, an attempt to move into electoral and institutional domains is likely to lead only to peril and pain. Electoral victories might be splashes and spillovers of popular mobilisation, but they can never determine or replace the ground and heartbeat of transformation, which lies in collective care and solidarity. That ground, with its pulsations and vibrations, is often more easily felt than seen.

Within, against and beyond the state

With micropolitical ardour, Raquel Gutiérrez defines politics as the capacity to intervene in public matters, but takes care to differentiate between two ways of doing that.[13] One involves a prescriptive, governing logic. The other involves what she sometimes calls 'politics in the feminine' and comprises a moment of trust between diverse ones (*diverses*), a sense of including (*sentido incluyente*) and making political spaces where we fit (*hacer caber*). Politics, as minding what's public and common, can be a source for reciprocal strength, rather than a game of hegemony. As such it implies sensibility: ways of sensing, feeling and relating that aren't bent on dichotomies or polarisations, but capable of seeking out the gaps, cracks, energies, desires and needs that can open new possibilities and give strength. In this

13 I am paraphrasing Gutiérrez here, and below, based on her online seminar in the Nociones Comunes course 'La Vida en el Centro', 26.05.2021. https://aula.fundaciondeloscomunes.net/curso/la-vida-en-el-centro

logic, politics is what bodies can do together, as relation and potential, always to do with the other as concrete body rather than abstract notion. Latin American Indigenous, popular and feminist struggles are bearers of this kind of politics, which is very close to what we are calling micropolitics here.

Those struggles were as important and formative to Spanish municipalists as were Latin American experiences of electoral victory and claiming state power. Zapatista and popular autonomous movements, intent on building counter-power from below, had been a part of the politicisation of a generation that shaped municipalist imaginaries. The state plays a complex role in these imaginaries. Municipalism brought with it a profound and differentiated learning process regarding building power, the state, the public and the commons.

It is useful to distinguish, as Raquel Gutiérrez does, between non-state-centric politics and an anti-state-politics. What grassroots movements in Latin America as well as Spain had been driven by is a turn to institutions that doesn't imply centring on the state. The notion of autonomy they embodied was one that refused subsumption, whilst, however, also refusing categorical anti-state politics. This was not least due to the fact that struggles for the welfare state were fundamental to the political imaginary of movements – even to their imaginary of the commons.

As Gutiérrez points out, in Europe, it's perhaps public services that are the common, whilst in most other places (including Latin America) there is no public provision that's actually for everyone (there's only the commons and the private). The struggle to make the public

more inclusive and more common – in the sense of making it more accessible, open to intervention, participation, decision by everyone – does not necessarily go against the common or commons in Europe. What Gutiérrez puts so clearly, municipalists in Spain intuited as they moved towards institutions. They intuited that this would have to be a subtle, subversive struggle within and against the state.

Gutiérrez speaks of the Latin American political-institutional experience as one of failure, yet she affirms the need to still articulate movements and institutions:

> This is a question that was often asked in Latin America in terms of an excluding binarism, which, moreover, is a binarism that sterilises the real possibility of taking actions of sustained and profound force. It was movement or institution, and never could one think movement 'and' institution, and set the terms for movement and institution in tendentially less hierarchising conditions, where tasks are given to those who enter the institutions, because what they have to work on are these hierarchies (Gutiérrez Aguilar & Reguero 2017, my translation from Spanish).

In Spain, the state-level party Podemos had learned much from Latin America, too, though more on the hegemony side. It showed municipalism some key flaws to avoid: the processes of verticalisation that destroyed Podemos' vibrant *círculos* (akin to the *ejes* in Barcelona), the dangers of hyper-leadership (Pablo Iglesias, Ada Colau), and the subsumption of the political process by dynamics surrounding the central state (the corruption of ruling elites, the influences of big capital on the

central state, nationalism and even independentist struggle), amongst other things. Whilst municipalism couldn't fully escape those tendencies, it was bent on finding lines of escape from state-centric politics.

Minor municipalist strategies

After 2015, it became clear – at a broader social level – that in the absence of competences on social rights, employment, citizenship and migration, and very limited legislative power, amongst many other things, municipalism would largely need to operate via a series of 'minor' (in the sense of Deleuze) political manoeuvres and subversions, rather than being able to simply realise sweeping policies.

The minor political strategies of municipalism consisted of enabling subversion to happen from below. *Barcelona en Comú* turned to the invention of local schemes and dispositifs that operated as social as well as political machines – from housing or migrant cooperatives to neighbourhood-run cultural centres, to municipal campaigns for receiving refugees or closing detention centres – in a myriad of experiments of situated and participatory local politics. A specific know-how with its tactics and strategies for more situated governance emerged, with singular approaches to the relation between movements and institutions.

Those strategies of minor politics yielded highly interesting processes and lessons, feeding the desire to win a second mandate in order to bring some of these dispositifs and broader strategies of transformation to a point of maturing. Many pilots, projects and programmes took off after 2017, and would need more years

to be tested, improved and rounded off, as well as to settle into the neighbourhoods and institutions. Participatory or collaborative local dispositifs take their time, for outreach and deliberation, development and ongoing evaluation.

The role of neighbourhoods and local actors appeared as key for engaging sustainable and resilient transformations. Not just because local actors had long been key protagonists in politics in Barcelona, but also because any durable political transformation would have to be rooted at the neighbourhood scale, integrated into people's lives and everyday relations. Organised neighbourhoods are also those who can best defend programmes and policies as their own, adapt them and appropriate them, and resist enclosures to come – to claim the public for the common, to become a source of mutual strength.

This minor politics, functioning also as a subversion of community, did not mean limiting municipalism's radical claims or failing to use the municipality as a discursive platform for challenging processes at other levels. *Barcelona en Comú* used its major platform to welcome and support the arrival of people seeking asylum in Europe, to vocally and unequivocally counter the rise of right-wing currents and politicians in Spain and beyond, or to establish and make public the fight against supranational lobbies and platforms like *Airbnb*, or the multinational water corporation *Agbar*. For any of these to be more than inconsequential speech acts, publicity or populist promise, it required minor dispositifs: like organised neighbourhoods pushing for refugee rights and establishing cooperations with municipalities in Italy

or Greece.[14] The list of those minor dispositifs, particularly if it were to list not just those that were realised or successful, but also those that were dreamt up, drawn up, started but not completed, is very long and rich. Indeed there is as much to learn from those often invisible speculations, attempts and efforts as there is from successful manoeuvres and programmes: another site for learning, if one were to want to make a book of dreams.

The struggle to reclaim the public and make it common is crucially about reappropriation, and thus also about property. It must challenge private property and accumulation, most perversely articulated in corporate greed and power today. This is where municipalism was up against the toughest, global dynamics (Delclós 2017). It's also where there remains most to invent and learn – not for this cycle, as it's likely too late, but for new rounds of invention and experimentation in the institutional realm. It's not least from Indigenous struggles, from all those reclaiming and defending common

---

14 As was the case in 2015/16, when Barcelona's neighbourhoods got organised to welcome refugees and the city worked to support them in establishing partnerships across Europe, as well as building networks of municipalities that push for European states to open borders, and so on. During this time, we worked on a report on municipal possibilities for political intervention into what was starting to be called the 'refugee crisis', to extend the spirit of solidarity and mutual aid that had led people across Europe to stand against state indifference and racism. This involved a long series of visions – from challenging the central state's authority over Barcelona's port and its refusal to let ships with people seeking asylum dock there, to building networks of neighbourhoods and solidarity initiatives across Europe and beyond, to forms of urban citizenship and municipal ID, and so on. See, e.g. Ramas, Rübner Hansen and Zechner 2016, a conversation between some of those involved in this endeavour, reflecting on an autonomous encounter we organised in relation to these minor strategies from a movement viewpoint.

resources in the Global South, that we could learn this. A search for precedents, perspectives and alliances that is never finished, pointing to ever more dreams for the commons. It becomes clear that movements, too, are schools for transforming worlds through how we know and inhabit them.

IV. BY WAY OF CONCLUDING: STRUGGLES FOR CARE, STRUGGLING TO CARE

Both interdependence and autonomy

So how do we think and practice interdependence and autonomy together? Across these pages I have offered stories and examples, avoiding verdicts and recipes that would make an answer seem all too simple. Articulating interdependence and autonomy is an ethical-political matter that requires situated and embodied notions. It takes both micropolitics and care to address this: micropolitics as more inscribed in the traditions of autonomy, and care as more inscribed in the politics of interdependence. Yet these are not opposites, they are dynamics and tendencies our struggles share: to name them can help us detect productive tension, the kind that sparks new relations, reflections and collective becomings. Reclaiming autonomy as feminists, we can learn from Indigenous and migrant struggles, from community, territorial and mobile commons (respectively via Vega Solis, Martínez Bujan & Paredes Chauca 2018; Korol 2019; Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013).

The task we face, of reinventing ways of respectfully co-inhabiting this planet with others of all kinds and bodies and *cuerpas*, whilst seeing capitalist destruction and its coefficients of patriarchy and colonialism firmly to their deathbeds, really requires us to get creative. We need to build autonomy from corporate-financial markets and indeed also from the states that defend them, to rebuild ways of depending on one another carefully. Care-ful does not necessarily mean slow, nor does it mean hesitant or weakly: some transformations can be made with a care that implies utmost urgency and intensity. The way bodies, *cuerpas*, voices, affects, overlap and compose in Barcelona's streets on March 8th – as

they do during those years of writing – is an instance of how wild and beautiful our care is (Zechner 2020a)[1]. Not tame, domesticated care, but care that vibrates with desires for becomingautonomous and becoming closer at the same time.

Across these pages, we have learned that it takes a transversal approach in order to build social power in inclusive and sustainable ways. I've tried to think through the possibilities and aporias this implies in a set of concrete situations, with the different conditions and positionalities they come with. Transversal here means cutting across different spheres of power:

1. The non-organised social of informal relations: the extended family, friendships, informal communities, loose networks;
2. The inhabiting social, where the organising principle is space: neighbourhoods, homes, social centres, assembly spaces, distribution points;
3. The organised social, with protocols and formal divisions of work: unions, associations, institutions, clubs, cooperatives, organised networks;
4. The representational, whose organising principles are governance and mediation: institutions, welfare and legal systems, parties, the media (Zechner and Rübner Hansen 2015).

Micropolitics is an approach to understanding and building power that takes the spheres of informal, networked relations and of the inhabiting social into account when thinking politics and power relations. In

1 Just after the #8M of 2020, and just before the COVID pandemic kicked off, I wrote this text to honour the co-*madres* with whom I shared the feminist march.

this definition of politics, which learns from feminism ('the personal is political', care ethics and politics and beyond) as well as schizoanalysis, institutional analysis and pedagogy (Félix Guattari, Jean and Ferdinand Oury, Francois Tosquelles, Suely Rolnik and beyond) as well as Marxism and anarchism, all the spheres of power are equally important. There is no primary vs. secondary level of contradiction and struggle. Thus, with micropolitics, it appears as grossly negligent to analyse institutional or party power without thinking the spatial-inhabitational and everyday relational spheres at the same time.

Commons and commoning have been a key starting point for the practices of childcare and organising at stake in this account. Commons dwell on the relational, inhabitational and organisational spheres, leaving the questions of representation and governance to follow after the very practices and relations of commoning. Consequently, governance has not been the central question for us here, but rather an effect of micropolitical processes. Our main interest has, however, been in the articulation of the three 'bottom' spheres of building power, across relations, space and organisation. In this sense, it is productive to tie our micropolitical analysis to different feminist, autonomist and Indigenous traditions of thinking about commons. An example with which we need to cross-read micropolitics is the 'four flowers of the common' as Raquel Gutiérrez describes them from Indigenous practice:

> We learned a lot from the American Indigenous tradition. They speak in a properly poetic way – I really like how they put it. They speak of the *four flowers of the common*, saying: land/ground/

> soil [*tierra*], work/chores [*trabajo-faena*], assembly and celebration [*fiesta*]. These are the four things that make up the possibility... There have to be these four things in order for there to be a common (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2017b; my translation from Spanish).

We return to our starting point here, coming back to questions of care and ecology. What we can learn from the relation between care, earth and people in Indigenous traditions is vast. And learn we must.

The knowledge that's been of interest to me here is the kind rooted in living experience and collective thinking. The kind that can be useful, resonant, that can open to ideas, dreams and inspirations for our common becomings. The kind of thinking that lets us breathe in deeply. As such it also needs to let us breathe out, fully: situated knowledge doesn't only inspire, it also expires.

Like Guattari says, a group needs to know when to die, and we need to learn when to let go of collective processes (Guattari 2003). But the question is not just when, but also how to let go. This is the task of memory, telling stories, building a culture of precedents, the one I have tried to honour here somehow. The story I told here has been let go by many people, by the time I write these lines: many have breathed out and moved on from the municipalist cycle in Spain, many of the children, parents and carers have moved on by generational processes. These generational processes matter, too, as they link our individual and collective lives. And to think generations not in terms of genes or genesis but as processes of becoming and cosymbiosis, we need to grapple with reproduction and care, as we have done here.

Autonomy and interdependence are in tension, but they are not rigid binaries. Autonomous does not mean

alone, unto oneself, independent. To be autonomous might mean to know our connections and synergies and to make powerful decisions about our interdependences, to walk a specific path with others. To be interdependent, on the other hand, might mean to know our autonomy and from there to reach out to embrace our entanglements and connections – to see the others, the forest, as we walk the path, and not feel threatened by the density. We may see autonomy and interdependence as different pathic states, different orientations and embodiments, which are not opposed but rather complementary.

Care networks and ecologies: A mapping exercise

I want to end this book by offering a practical exercise that I have been fond of using in workshops these years. We've done this twice with the Poble Sec mothers' mutual support group, once while we were all still pregnant and then half a year after we'd had our babies, and we found it very helpful for understanding our situations and the problems we had in common. It's a mapping tool that helps visualise and politicise care and reproduction, starting from the personal and moving towards the collective and institutional, then onwards towards the ecological.

This is a mapping exercise you can do alone or in a group. Its purpose is to help you define and trace relations of care, to understand how they feature in your lives and link you to other people, groups, organisations, institutions and also more-than-human beings and ecosystems. It's a journey that takes you, step by step, towards a broad picture of visualising and questioning your modes of interdependency as well as alienation in the world.

You can use this exercise to get at a specific problem or dimension of care, as well as to just explore. In any case, be aware that your care map will be a mere snapshot of your now, something that can change quickly as your situation changes.[2] Depending on which questions and how much time you have, you can go through all the layers of the map or just do some of them. If you are doing this as a group, it's very rewarding to take 2–3 hours to slowly move through the layers, discussing in between

2 Events like migration, becoming a parent, falling ill, moving in with new people, a pandemic, natural disaster and many other factors can make a major difference in this picture, positively and negatively.

and leaving time to reflect at the end. If you are doing this alone, you can carry it with you over some days as a continuous exercise, writing in your diary as you go along.

Instructions: Mapping the networks and ecologies of care that sustain us

You need:

- 1–2 pieces of paper (the bigger, the better)
- one or several pens (ideally in different colours)
- anything between 30 minutes and 3 hours of time

Step 1. Preparing your map's key:

First we brainstorm our 'key' to the map, the relations of care we want to explore.

On a piece of paper, note down different modes of relating that constitute some form of care, to your mind – come up with at least 6.

Think of different aspects: care for bodies, minds, souls, places, nature, species, etc. Take enough time to brainstorm until you feel you have included the most important aspects of care – and the ones that interest you most. Some inspirations are (but do come up with your own, or modify these): *looking after someone's body, financial co-dependence, sharing a space, nurturing learning, providing food, sharing resources, friendship, being on emergency call, emotional support, providing safety, providing access, passing on jobs, etc.*[3]

---

3 Note: when facilitating this as a workshop, I usually draw on Joan Tronto's 5 phases of care (from her 1993 book *Moral Boundaries* and later work on caring democracy) to encourage a reflection about different modalities of care and how they relate to power. The 5 phases are: caring-about (worry, concern), taking-care-of (action, gesture), care-giving (sustained practice, labour), care-receiving (vulnerability, interdependency, feedback), caring-with (solidarity).

Write the categories you came up with onto your paper, one below the other. Now give each one a visual cue – a different colour, or if you only have one pen then it could be a different kind of line (dotted, continuous, wavy, zigzag, etc.). Now you have your key.

Step 2. Mapping in layers:

Start

We start with you. Put your name down in the centre of the map (individual or collective name).

Layer 1 – Others

Take some minutes to write down names of living others (human, animal, etc.) that are most present in your care network. Place their names around you, somewhere between your name and the edge of the paper. Perhaps some names cluster together a bit. Don't think too much about it.

When you feel you have the most important people (and maybe critters) in your care network written down, you can start to connect yourself and them, using the categories you came up with. You might have a very dense colourful connection to some but not to others. Additionally you can make arrows out of the lines to specify which relations go both ways, and in which one's care is monodirectional. If you come up with missing categories for your key, just add them in.

Optional extra: you can also draw connections between the names on your map, filling it in to the best of your knowledge (knowing that your knowledge of those relations is probably limited). Doing this, your map begins to look like a network.

Layer 2 – Collectives

Now take some minutes to write the names of collective entities that you are in a relation of care with, onto your map. Collective entities could be groups, associations, NGOs, chat groups, cooperatives, social centres, etc. Place them around yourself on the paper, leaving space in between.

When you feel like you are done, get to drawing connections between you and these collective entities, again going by your key of care relations. Again you may make lines into arrows to note down where relations are reciprocal or not; and you may also draw lines between the collective entities to sketch out some of the ways in which they relate. How do they depend on one another, and how do you depend on them? What kinds of constellations are emerging here?

Layer 3 – Institutions and market actors

This is where we get to the larger scale of social reproduction. Take some time to think about what institutional or commercial bodies provide care for you – for your body, mind, work, spaces and so forth, as defined in your key. Here, too, you might notice some categories are missing in your key, feel free to add them. Anything from doctors to hospitals, shops, insurance providers, housing cooperatives, food coops and so forth can go here – whatever you depend on to have your needs met. Think of institutions or businesses you are directly in touch with, via contracts or consumption. Put their names down on the paper, wherever you see fit.

Now again draw lines of connection between you and them. Are they now mostly unidirectional, or are some of your basic needs also met via mutualist ties at this level? How much state do you have in your map at this level,

versus how much commons-based and private-corporate agencies? And what about the links between these more abstract meta-instances, can they still be mapped with the categories you have? Or are they now mostly financial and legal ties, which would lead you to map flows on money and conglomerates of power? What does the emerging picture here make you feel and think?

Optional extra: you can also try place some of the entities that these large-scale actors depend on, like the farmers who supply the food, the meat processing plant, the pensioners on which the pension fund draws, the nurses who make the hospital work, etc. This will take you far but might be interesting, too.

Layer 4 – Species, plants, ecosystems, planetary commons

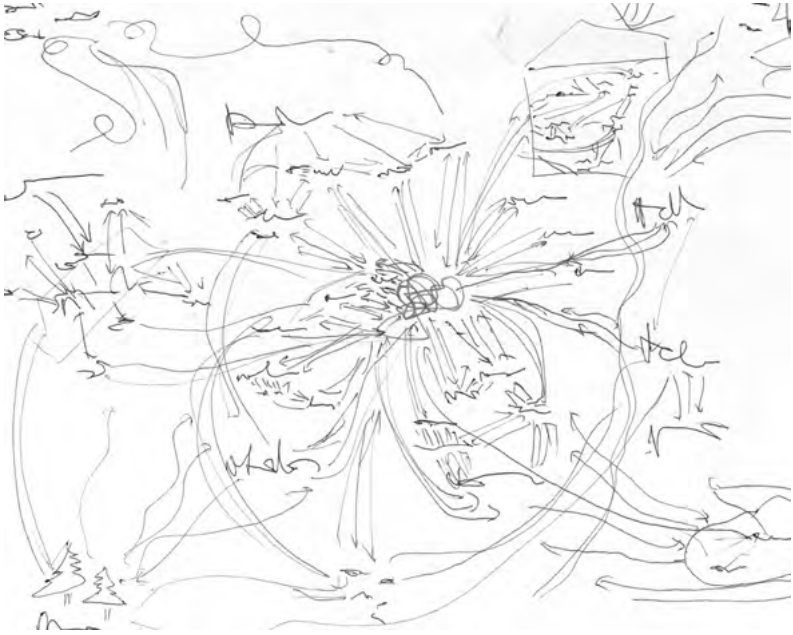
In this last layer, you can try to tackle the ways in which care ties you to worlds that are more than human. Here it probably also gets more experimental for most of us. Think of names of species, like the insects who pollinate in your garden, the chicken whose meat you might be consuming, or the squirrels, birds or rabbits who might populate the garden or park you frequent. *How do you relate to these?* Think also of gardens, parks, fields, rivers – *do they not provide some care for you, feed or spiritually nourish you, give you space for movement and exercise, provide you with spaces for self-care?* Perhaps new categories emerge from these reflections. What about ecosystems like large forests, river networks, fertile soils – *how do these sustain your life by virtue of their existence and animatedness?* And even larger, at the level of planetary commons like water, rain, air, wind, soils, minerals, sunlight and tides – *how do these sustain you? What*

kinds of relations do you have to those, and can these be said to contain care? Capitalism makes us relate to all those things as 'resources', in a transactional, extractive manner: can you see how they are much more than that, and relate to them in a more mutual way?

Looking even further, as you draw connections between yourself and these entities, you can see what arrows become of your lines here, what sorts of directionalities emerge. It's likely that new categories emerge from here, opening new ways of thinking about care. You can also try connect these different forms of life and elementary force between themselves, to arrive to their ecosystemic connections, and question your place within them.

Step 3. Concluding reflections:

Now you see yourself, sitting like a little spider in a big colourful web, held by a myriad of relations and complex constellations, drawing nourishment and giving care. Breathe and be gentle as you contemplate your map, remembering it's a momentary snapshot, and perhaps identifying some areas you'd like to change. How does it make you feel? Take time to contemplate this map, talk about it with others if you feel like it. Look at what's there and visible as well as what might be missing. What do you tend to see and value? What surprised you? What needs transforming? What kind of image is this, what does it remind us of, what is its beauty?



Acknowledgements

I've been working with collective knowledge in these pages, finding words *for* and *from* shared modes and processes of learning. It's impossible to name all those bodies, minds and souls who feed into the ecological assemblage that is the post-15M world of Barcelona and beyond. Still I want to thank this world for its great, tender intelligence, as I try take it with me everywhere I go.

Very concretely, the complicity, debate and support of fellow mothers in Poble Sec has given me a precious grounding that allowed me to escape loneliness and find new kinds of feminist alliance, care and commoning. Theirs is the energy that makes this book vibrate. Lucia Zandigiacomi, Panagiota Kotsila, Núria Vergés, Sesi Bergeret, the little Luna, Leonidas, Nina and the cool *tribú canalla* have made the everyday an adventure, and a feminist one at that. Much love. At the beginning of this journey stands my daughter Mila, catalyst of becoming and transformative force of sweetness and learning, my patient partner in the embodied and mutual childcare research here. I am very grateful we could learn and grow together in this way and context. Sisterly nods and heart emoticons also to the friendly m/others who accompanied me these years: Nelly Alfandari, Theodora Vetta, Cristina Ribas, Svetlana Rakocevic, Mara Ferreri, Adriana Eysler and the PWB family, amongst others.

Special gratitude also goes to Bue Rübner Hansen, my partner in collaboration and care, for help with childcare and academic hurdles, as well as for thinking with me. I am very glad I could add his preface to the

weave of voices here, so important has he been on this journey.

As we coincide in space-time and becoming, all of us, we are lichens, cosymbiotic assemblages spanning and metabolizing-metamorphosing bits of forest floor or tree; to tell stories of this connectedness and draw force from it, rather than fear, is the greatest gift. It was time for a "monograph" with this book, but I am glad to have brought in nearly as many voices as in the collective books I've edited. In this sense, I'm also grateful to the more distant but nonetheless powerful voice of Joan Tronto, for her inspiring thought and generous engagement with my work.

Deep appreciation also goes out to Alexandros Kioupkiolis, principal investigator and fellow gardener of the *Heteropolitics* project from which this research stems: thank you for carefully commenting, revising, and, above all, for the generosity, trust and freedom you left me for doing my work. It means a lot to open these spaces within academia and channel the forces of possibility. Thanks to Alexandros and also Maria Deligiannidou, this book was made structurally possible and received funding from our common ERC project.

To each and every one of my interviewees, I'm grateful for the trust, time and thought you gave me. Yay to all the lovely activist people of Poble Sec, who supported my research trusted my agenda and shared their thoughts (Lucia Zandigiacomi, Javier Rodrigo, Xavier Latorre Tápis, Pepi Dominguez, Alba of Petit Molinet, Francesca and Alba of La Rimaieta, Afra Herreu, and many more). Thanks also to Claudia Bernardi from the Tana dei Cuccioli playspace in Rome, to the people of the Mesopotamia Solidarity School in Athens,

and to Marta Malo from Madrid for providing referents. For municipalist knowledge, I'm very grateful to the generous people from *Barcelona en Comú* and other Spanish municipalist platforms who shared their thoughts and materials (Xavi Ferrer, Kate Shea Baird, Gala Pin, Laia Rosich, Carolina López, Claudia Delso, Alejandra de Diego Baciero, Santi Fernández Patón), as well as to interlocutors inhabiting various formal or strange positions vis-à-vis institutions (Mauro Castro, Raquel Gallego, Sergi Cutillas, the mamas of Intermediae Madrid, etc).

Big thanks to my editors Lina Dokuzović and Niki Kubaczek at transversal texts, for their generous support, very useful feedback, close readings and corrections; as well as to Birgit Mennel for her forthcoming translation, and to Gerald Raunig for helping along. Much of the militant thinking that I draw on here was published thanks to the labours of love and friendship that sustain the transversal platform. Gracias to Imayna Caceres for her help with the images here.

Love to all those witches, midwives and interweavers who make worlds but often remain unseen. We keep learning.

Interviews & fieldwork materials cited:

Baird, Kate Shea: interview in Barcelona, 01/02/2018

De Diego Baciero, Alejandra: online interview, 14/05/2018

Delso, Claudia: interview in Barcelona, 17/06/2018

Dominguez, Pepi: interview in Barcelona, 10/02/2018

Fernandez Patón, Santi: interview in Málaga, 26/02/2018

Gallego, Raquel: interview in Barcelona, 29/01/2019

Latorre Tapis, Xavier: interview in Barcelona, January 2019

Pin, Gala: interview in Barcelona, 16/10/2019

Rodrigo, Javier: interview in Barcelona, 16/01/2018 and email-feedback to my research report, 02/11/2020

Zandigiacomi, Lucía: interview in Barcelona, 03/02/2018

Workshop held at *la Casa Invisible* in Málaga (transcript), February 2018

Comunes y Crianza Colloquium (2018) *Comunes y Crianza. Hace falta un Poble Sec para criar?* Colloquium in Poble Sec, 4&5 October 2018.
Report: http://heteropolitics.net/index.php/2018/09/12/crianza/
Audio recordings: https://archive.org/details/CrianzaComunes1 and https://archive.org/details/CrianzaComunes2

Bibliography

Alcega, M. & La Tribú en Arganzuela (2016) 'Entrevista a la Xell'. *Tribú en Arganzuela* blog, http://tribuarganzuela.tumblr.com/post/154156358952/entrevista-a-la-xell-red-de-educaci%C3%B3n-libre-de

Ayuntamiento de Barcelona (2017a) *Comuns Urbans i Patrimoni Ciutadà*. La Hidra Website. http://lahidra.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Patrimoni-Ciutada-Marc-Conceptual-v.3.01.pdf

— (2017b) *Programa de Patrimoni Ciutadà d'ús i gestió comunitáries*, Dossier. https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/participaciociutadana/sites/default/files/documents/comunsurbans_doc_sm_0.pdf

— (2018) *Dossier Ciutat Jugable*. City of Barcelona website. https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/premsa/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/180218-DOSSIER-Ciutat-Jugable.pdf

Barbagallo, C. (2016) 'Feminist Demands and the Contradictions of Choice: Work and Childcare in Neoliberal Britain.' Draft paper.

Barbagallo, C., Beuret, N. and Harvie, D. (2019) *Commoning with Silvia Federici and George Caffentzis*. London: Pluto Press.

Barcelona en Comú (2017) Dos anys després - les lluites. Video on website, https://barcelonaencomu.cat/ca/video/les-lluites-dos-anys-despres

Bärtsch, Drognitz, Eschenmoser et al. (2017) *Ökologien der Sorge*. Vienna: Transversal Texts.

Bayat, A. (2010) *Life as Politics*. Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press.

Binger, L. (2018) *68*. Self-published.

Carrillo Vidal, A. & Manzi Araneda, J. (2020) 'Nuestras luces en la penumbra: potencia feminista y urgencias destituyentes', in: Gago, V., Malo, M, & Cavallero, L., *La Internacional Feminista*. Madrid/Buenos Aires: Traficantes de Sueños/Tinta Limón.

Casas-Cortes, M. (2019) 'Care-tizenship: Precarity, Social Movements, and the Deleting/Re-Writing of Citizenship', *Citizenship Studies*, 23:1, 19–42.

Colau, A. Spegna, G. & Forti, S. (2019) 'Entrevista con Ada Colau,' *CTXT*, 30/04/2019, https://ctxt.es/es/20190403/Politica/25304/Steven-Forti-Giacomo-Russo-Spena-entrevista-Ada-Colau-Barcelona-politica-espa%C3%B1a-Catalunya-elecciones.htm?fbclid=IwAR0812ndxHU61krCfZgpIVARMrKc5X0LIx3YL5_ZfMeXA2aphdOsl6lmzlA

Colectivo Situaciones (2009) *Inquietudes en el Impasse,* Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón.

Comunes y Crianza Colloquium (2018) 'Comunes y Crianza. Hace falta un Poble Sec para criar?' Colloquium in Poble Sec, 4–5 October 2018. Report: http://heteropolitics.net/index.php/2018/09/12/crianza/ Audio recordings: https://archive.org/details/CrianzaComunes1 and https://archive.org/details/CrianzaComunes2

Dalla Costa, M. and James, S. (1975) *The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community*. London: Falling Wall Press.

De Angelis, M. (2016) *Omnia Sunt Communia*. London: Zed Books.

— (2019) 'The Strategic Horizon on the Commons'. In: *Commoning with Silvia Federici and George Caffentzis*, C. Barbagallo, N. Beuret and D. Harvie (eds). London: Pluto Press. 209–222.

Delclós, C. (2017) 'Cities Against the Wall', *Commons Transition Blog,* https://commonstransition.org/cities-against-the-wall/

Delso, C. & Traviesas-Mendez, C. (2019) 'Conversations about the Little Things*', Minim Municipalism* website*,* https://minim-municipalism.org/magazine/conversations-about-the-little-things

Del Olmo, C. (2013) *Dónde está mi Tribú? Maternidad y Crianza en una Sociedad Individualista.* Madrid: Clave Intelectual.

— (2014) 'Construir un discurso maternal (decente).' *Rebelión Blog*. https://rebelion.org/construir-un-discurso-maternal-decente/

DeSoto, P. (2017) 'Os mapas do #15M: a arte da cartografia da multidão conectada'. *Liinc*, pp 175–189 13(1). https://pablodesoto.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/DeSoto-Los-mapas-del-15M.pdf

EIPCP (2008) 'Monster Institutions,' *Transversal web-journal issue,* http://transversal.at/transversal/0508

El País (2011) 'Hasta 8,5 milliones de Españoles apoyan al movimiento 15-M', *El País*, https://elpais.com/politica/2011/08/03/actualidad/1312388649_737959.html

España Naveira, K. (2019) 'Por una suavidad agujerante,' *Transversal Webjournal,* https://transversal.at/blog/por-una-suavidad-agujereante

Faus, P. (2016) *Alcaldesa,* documentary film.

Federici, S. (2004) *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation.* New York: Autonomedia.

— (2013) 'Women, Reproduction, and the Construction of Commons' Talk at Museum of Arts and Design New York, April 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBBbVpbmRP0

Federici, S. & Caffentzis, G. (2014). 'Commons against and beyond Capitalism', *Community Development Journal,* 49(S1): i92–i105.

Fernández, E., Malo, M. & León, C. (2012) *Retaguardias y vanguardías*. Podcast series, *Zemos Blog*, http://blogs.zemos98.org/carolinkfingers/2012/12/01/retaguardias-y-vanguardias-parte-1/

Fernández Patón, S. (2019) *Municipalismo y asalto institucional: una visión descreída*. Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños. https://www.traficantes.net/libros/municipalismo-y-asalto-institucional

Fernández Savater, A. (2018) 'La destrucción de la empatía (y las lagrimas felices),' *El Diario,* https://www.eldiario.es/interferencias/8M-Patricia_Ramirez-Mame_Mbaye_6_753184690.html

Forné Aguirre, L. (2019) 'Com construir una ciutat comuna: crear un, dos, tres... mil "Canbattlós"'. *El Critic*, https://www.elcritic.cat/opinio/laia-forne/el-dificil-equilibri-sumar-autonomia-i-funcio-publica-23907

Foro de Vida Independiente y Agencia de Asuntos Precarios Todas A Zien (2011) *Cojos y Precarias haciendo vidas que importan.* Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños. https://www.traficantes.net/sites/default/files/pdfs/Cojos%20y%20precarias-TdS.pdf

Galindo, M. & Brunner, E. (2019) 'Entrevista a Maria Galindo, anarcofeminista Boliviana,' *Periódico Libertario,* http://periodicoellibertario.blogspot.com/2019/03/entrevista-maria-galindo.html

Galindo, M. & García-Linera, A. (2014) 'Maria Galindo entrevista a Álvaro García Linera: Gobernar es un acto de mentir,' *La Vaca,* https://www.lavaca.org/notas/maria-galindo-alvaro-garcia-linera-gobernar-acto-de-mentir/

Gil, S. (2011) *Nuevos Feminismos.* Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños.

Gil, S. & Pérez Orozco, A. (2011) *Desigualdades a flor de piel: Cadenas Globales de Cuidados.* Madrid: Exterior Ministry and UN Womens Division.

Guanyem Barcelona / Barcelona en Comú (2015) 'Gobernar Obedeciendo: Código de Ética Política,' *Barcelona En Comú* website, https://barcelonaencomu.cat/es/gobernar-obedeciendo-codigo-de-etica-politica

Guattari, F. (2003) 'La transversalité [1964],' *Psychanalyse et Transversalité: Essais d'Analyse Institutionelle.* Paris: La Découverte.

Guattari, F. & Rolnik, S. (2006) *Micropolitiques*. Paris: Les Empecheurs de penser en Rond.

Gutiérrez Aguilar, R. (2008) *Los Ritmos del Pachakuti. Movilización y levantamiento indigena-popular en Bolivia,* Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón.

— (2017a) *Horizontes Comunitario-Populares.* Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños. https://www.traficantes.net/libros/horizontes-comunitario-populares

— (2017b) 'Raquel Gutiérrez en Barcelona,' Encounter with Social Movements in Barcelona, https://soundcloud.com/fundaciondeloscomunes/raquel-gutierrez-en-barcelona

Gutiérrez Aguilar, R. & Lugano, R. (2014) 'María y Alvaro: la fuerza de las luchas; la fuerza de la maniobra,' *Anarquía Coronada* blog, http://anarquiacoronada.blogspot.com/2014/07/maria-y-alvaro-la-fuerza-de-las-luchas.html

— (2017) 'No queremos gestionar el infierno, queremos desarmarlo y construir algo distinto: Entrevista con Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar', *Pikara Magazine*, https://www.pikaramagazine.com/2017/05/raquel-gutierrez-aguilar/

Haraway, D. (2016) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Hodgson, L. (2004) 'Manufactured Civil Society: Counting the Cost', *Critical Social Policy*, 24(2): 139–164.

Institut de la Infancia (2016) 'Parlen els protagonistes: el dret dels infants a la ciutat, millorem el nostre espai públic'. *Institut de la Infancia Website*. http://institutinfancia.cat/mediateca/parlen-protagonistes-dret-dels-infants-ciutat-millorem-nostre-espai-public/

Institut Diversitas (2018) *Diagnosi de Gènere en Barcelona en Comú*, unpublished. Summary of this internal report: https://barcelonaencomu.cat/sites/default/files/document/informe-diagnosi-genere.pdf

Izquierdo-Brichs, F. (unpublished) 'Barcelona en Comú. ¿Partido político o movimiento social?' Working document, UAB Barcelona.

Kavanagh, D. (2013) 'Children: Their Place in Organisation Studies', *Organisation Studies*, 34(10): 1487–1503.

Keller Garganté, C. (2017) 'Grupos de Crianza Compartida: una alternativa comunitaria en la organización del cuidado en la primera infancia.' *Quaderns-E*. 22(2) 2017: 167–182.

Korol, C. (2019) *Feminismos Territoriales. Hacía una pedagogía feminista*. Valparaíso/Concepción/Santiago: Quimantú.

La Hidra Cooperativa (2021) *Patrimoni Ciutadà: un marc per a la collaboració públic-comunitària*. Report. https://lahidra.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/informePatrimoni.pdf

León, C. (2017) *Trincheras Permanentes: intersecciones entre política y cuidados.* Logroño: Editorial Pepitas.

Lorey, I. (2015) *State of Insecurity*. London: Verso.

Llopis, M. (2015) *Maternidades Subversivas.* Tafalla: Editorial Txalaparta.

Lugano, R. & Gutiérrez Aguilar, R. (2016) 'Gobernar es un acto de mentir', in: *Devenir Casta*, Barcelona: Pensaré Cartoneras: 99–123.

MAC3 Barcelona (2017) 'Persiste el bloqueo institucional que queríamos superar?'

MAC3 Málaga (2017) 'Lectura de dos años de apuesta municipalista en Málaga,' *MAC3* website, http://mac3.uno/files/2017/10/MAC3_AperturaM%C3%A1laga.pdf

MAC3 website, http://mac3.uno/files/2017/10/PonenciaMAC3_barcelona.pdf

Massumi, B. (2002) 'The Political Economy of Belonging'. In: *Parables for the Virtual*. North Carolina: Duke University Press.

Merino, P. (2017) *Materindad, igualidad, fraternidad: las madres cómo sujetos políticos en sociedades poslaborales.* Madrid: Clave Intelectual.

Michon, P. (2007) *Les Rhythmes du Politique. Démocratie et Capitalisme Mondialisé.* Paris: Les Empecheurs de Penser en Rond.

Mies, M. (2014). 'No Commons without a Community', *Community Development Journal, 49*, I106–I117.

Molinier, P. & Laugier, S. (2009) 'Politiques du Care'. *Multitudes Majeure*, 39, Special Issue on Care. https://www.multitudes.net/politiques-du-care/

Monterde, A. (2016) 'Map of Acampadas and Municipalist Candidacies,' *Arnau Monterde Blog*, https://arnaumonty.wordpress.com/2016/08/11/mapa-de-las-acampadas-del-15m-candidaturas-municipalistas-y-gobiernos-emergentes-en-las-ciudades-de-mas-de-100-000-habitantes

Museo Reina Sofia & Fundación de los Comunes (2009) 'Governance cultural vs. Instituciones de lo Común,' *Museo Reina Sofia Event Page* https://www.museoreinasofia.es/actividades/governance-cultural-vs-instituciones-comun

Neilson, B. and Rossiter, N. (2008) 'Precarity as a Political Concept, or, Fordism as Exception', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 25(7–8): 51–72.

Nociones Comunes (2013) 'El ADN de la Vida: crianza, cuidados y comunidad', *Nociones Comunes course website* https://nocionescomunes.wordpress.com/2013/02/11/el-adn-de-la-vida-crianza-cuidados-y-comunidad/

— (2014) 'Como coño se sostiene esto? Cuidados, ciudades y común,' *Nociones Comunes course website*, http://lahidra.net/curso-como-cono-se-sostiene-eso/.

Observatorio Metropolitano Barcelona (2013) 'Lecturas para pensar las Instituciones de lo Común,' *Diagonal Periodico,* https://www.diagonalperiodico.net/culturas/quitar-puertas-al-campo.html

Papadopoulos, D. (2018) *Experimental Practice. Technoscience, Alterontologies, and More-Than-Social Movements.* North Carolina: Duke University Press.

Papadopoulos, D. & Tsianos, V. (2013) 'After Citizenship: Autonomy of Migration, Organisational Ontology and the Mobile Commons'. In: *Citizenship Studies*, 17:2, 178–196.

Pérez, M. & Salvini-Ramas, P. (2019) 'The Right to Care: Entering Outside in the Southern European Crisis of Welfare.' *Ephemera Journal*, 19(2): 389–400. http://www.ephemerajournal.org/contribution/right-care-entering-outside-southern-european-crisis-welfare

Pérez Orozco, A. (2014) *Subversión feminista de la economía.* Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños. https://www.traficantes.net/libros/subversi%C3%B3n-feminista-de-la-econom%C3%ADa

Pin, G. (2016) 'Hombres de más de 40 con corbata', *El Diario*, https://www.eldiario.es/opinion/tribuna-abierta/hombres-corbata_129_3701084.html

— (2019) 'Sí, el poder corromp,' *El Critic,* https://www.elcritic.cat/opinio/gala-pin/si-el-poder-corromp-44289

Puerto, S. (2019) 'Grupos de madres: recuperar la tribú.' *CTXT*. https://ctxt.es/es/20190612/Politica/26613/Sara-Puerto-maternidad-mujeres-madres-soledad-lactancia.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22.XQFeuII2F-4.twitter

Puig de la Bellacasa, M. (2017) *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More-than-Human Worlds.* Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

Ramas, P., Rübner Hansen, B. and Zechner, M. (2016) 'Gathering and Instituting: An Encounter for Urban Citizenship and Migration Rights in Barcelona', *L'Internationale*, https://www.internationaleonline.org/opinions/102_gathering_and_instituting_an_encounter_for_urban_citizenship_and_migration_rights_in_barcelona/

Rolnik, S. & Bardet, M. (2018) 'Cómo hacernos un cuerpo? Entrevista a Suely Rolnik', *Lobo Suelto Blog* http://lobosuelto.com/como-hacernos-un-cuerpo-entrevista-con-suely-rolnik-marie-bardet/

Roth, L. (2021) 'A Feminist Municipalist Manifesto', *Minim Municipalism Blog*, https://minim-municipalism.org/debate/municipalism-and-feminisation#post-4996

Roth, L. & Baird, K-S. (2017a) 'Municipalism and the Feminization of Politics,' *ROAR Magazine*, Issue 6, summer 2017, https://roarmag.org/magazine/municipalism-feminization-urban-politics/

— (2017b) 'Left-wing Populism and the Feminization of Politics,' *ROAR Magazine,* https://roarmag.org/essays/left-populism-feminization-politics/

Roth, L., Zugasti Hervás, I. & De Diego Baciero, A. (2017) *Feminise Politics Now!* Toolkit by the Municipalist Movement. Madrid: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung

Rübner Hansen, B. (2020) 'City of Refuge and Migration', In: Wenke & Kron (Eds.) *Solidarity Cities in Europe*. Berlin: Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. https://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/sonst_publikationen/Broschur_SolidarischeStaedte_engl_web.pdf

Sander, H. (2008) 'Die Entstehung der Kinderläden,' *Helke Sander's blog*, https://www.helke-sander.de/2008/01/die-entstehung-der-kinderlaeden/

Simondon, G. (2008) *Imagination et invention (1965–1966)*. Chatou: Éditions de la Transparence.

Starhawk (1987) *Truth or Dare: Encounters with Power, Authority and Mystery*. San Frascisco: Harpers Collins.

Traficantes de Sueños (2017) 'Que ha aportado el municipalismo? Cual es su futuro?' *Traficantes de Sueños Soundcloud*, https://soundcloud.com/traficantesdesue-os/que-ha-aportado-el-municipalismo-cual-es-su-futuro

Tronto, J. (1993) *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethics of Care*. New York: Routledge.

— (2009) 'Interview with Joan Tronto, 4th August 2009'. *Ethics of Care* blog. https://ethicsofcare.org/joan-tronto/

— (2013) Caring Democracy. Markets, Equality and Justice. New York: NYU Press.

Universidad Nómada (2008) 'Mental Prototypes and Monster Institutions,' *Transversal* web-journal, http://transversal.at/transversal/0508

Vega Solis, C. (2009) *Culturas del cuidado en transición: Espacios, sujetos e imaginarios en una sociedad de migración*. Barcelona: Universidad Oberta de Catalunya.

Vega Solis, Martínez Buján and Paredes Chauca (2018) *Cuidado, comunidad y común*. Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños. https://www.traficantes.net/libros/cuidado-comunidad-y-com%C3%BAn

Vercauteren, D., Mueller, T. & Crabbé, O. (2007) *Micropolitiques des groupes: pour une écologie des pratiques collectives,* Fourcalquier: HB éditions. https://micropolitiques.collectifs.net/

Vivas, E. (2019) *Mamá desobediente. Una mirada feminista a la maternidad*. Madrid: Capitain Swing.

Zechner, M. (2013a) *The World We Desire Is One We Can Create and Care for Together, Phd Thesis.* London: Queen Mary University London.

— (2013b) 'An der Zukunft rütteln und schütteln', *Kulturrisse Magazine*, https://www.igkultur.at/artikel/der-zukunft-ruetteln-und-schuetteln

— (2015) 'Barcelona en Comú: the City as Horizon for Radical Democracy', *ROAR Magazine*, https://roarmag.org/essays/barcelona-en-comu-guanyem/

— (2016) 'Let's Play? Citizenship, Subjectivity and Becoming in Municipalism,' in Brunner, Christoph, Kubaczek, Niki, Mulvaney, Kelly, Raunig, Gerald (eds.) *Die Neuen Munizipalismen. Soziale Bewegungen und die Regierung der Städte,* Vienna: Transversal Texts: 67–83. https://transversal.at/transversal/0916/zechner/en

— (2020a) 'Mama, mar revuelta: la sombra de nuestras cuerpas en el 8M', *Cuaderno Educativo 202–-21*, MACBA: 21. https://www.macba.cat/edu/quadern-educatiu-spa.pdf

— (2020b) *Report from Spain: Childcare Commons in Barcelona and the Micropolitics of Municipalism.* Fieldwork report from the *Heteropolitics* project, http://heteropolitics.net/index.php/2021/01/04/report-on-the-fieldwork-in-spain-childcare-commons-and-the-micropolitics-of-municipalismo/

— (2021) 'To Care as we Would Like to: Socioecological Crisis and the Impasse of Care', Gropius Journal https://www.berlinerfestspiele.de/en/gropiusbau/programm/journal/2021/manuela-zechner-to-care-as-we-would-like-to.html

Zechner, M. & Rübner Hansen, B. (2015) 'Building Power in a Crisis of Social Reproduction,' *ROAR Magazine,* 0, https://roarmag.org/magazine/building-power-crisis-social-reproduction/

— (2019) 'Extending the Family,' in Barbagallo, C., Beuret, N., Harvie. D. (eds.) (2019), *Commoning with George Caffentzis and Silvia Federici*, New York: PM Press.

— (2020) 'Careless Networks? Social Media, Care and Reproduction in the Web of Life,' *Spheres, Journal for Digital Cultures*, *6*. http://spheres-journal.org/careless-networks-social-media-care-and-reproduction-in-the-web-of-life/

transversal texts
transversal.at
Aus dem Programm 2018

Tobias Bärtsch, Daniel Drognitz,
Sarah Eschenmoser,
Michael Grieder,
Adrian Hanselmann,
Alexander Kamber, Anna-Pia Rauch,
Gerald Raunig,
Pascale Schreibmüller,
Nadine Schrick, Marilyn Umurungi,
Jana Vanecek (Hg.)

Ökologien der Sorge

„Die Abwertung der Sorge ist nicht weit entfernt von der Abwertung der Umwelt, von einer Gesellschaft, die die Umwelt zerstört, von der Negation der Körper." (Precarias a la Deriva)
Ohne Sorge keine Liebe, keine Arbeit, keine Freude, keine Kunst, kein Leben. Die Gegenwart aus der Perspektive translokaler Sorgearbeit zu betrachten, heißt einen vielschichtigen, weitreichenden Gegensatz hervorzukehren: Wenig steht der kapitalistischen Logik dermaßen stark entgegen, wie die vielfältigen Schichten der Sorge. Gerahmt von den militanten Untersuchungen der Precarias a la Deriva und den ökosophischen Überlegungen Félix Guattaris unternimmt der vorliegende Band eine Reise durch queer-feministische, aktivistische und theoretische Räume gegenwärtiger Ökologien der Sorge.
Mit Texten von Manuel Callahan und Annie Paradise, Emma Dowling, Feel Tank Chicago, Félix Guattari, Isabell Lorey, Precarias a la Deriva, Maria Puig de la Bellacasa und Francesco Salvini.

ISBN: 978-3-903046-13-9
Januar 2018
231 Seiten, broschiert, 15,- €

transversal texts
transversal.at
Aus dem Programm 2017

Christoph Brunner, Niki Kubaczek, Kelly Mulvaney und Gerald Raunig (Hg.)

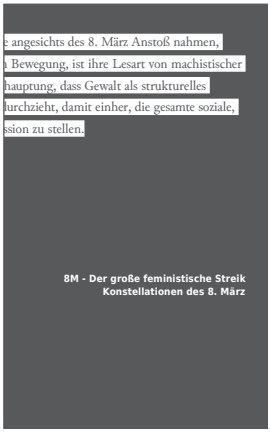
Die neuen Munizipalismen

Während in vielen Ländern Europas rassistische und neue faschistische Kräfte Zuspruch gewinnen, zogen bei den letzten Gemeinderatswahlen in Spanien Plattformen aus sozialen Bewegungen flächendeckend in die Stadtparlamente ein. Aus den mikropolitischen Erfahrungen des letzten Jahrzehnts, aus der Bewegung gegen Zwangsräumungen, aus den Besetzungen, Versammlungen und Arbeitsgruppen um den 15M war die munizipalistische Bewegung entstanden. Das Buch versucht die Praxen und Prozesse, Strategien und Verfahren zu diskutieren, die sich in der vielfachen Erfahrung des Munizipalismus ansammeln, ihr Scheitern und ihre Erfolge, ihre mögliche Übersetzung über die Grenzen Spaniens hinaus.

Mit Beiträgen von: Montserrat Galcerán Huguet, Niki Kubaczek, mac1, Kelly Mulvaney, Pablo Carmona Pascual, Gerald Raunig, Raúl Sánchez Cedillo, Manuela Zechner

ISBN: 978-3-903046-12-2
September 2017
145 Seiten, broschiert, 10,- €

transversal texts
transversal.at
Aus dem Programm 2018



Mit Texten von
Verónica Gago, Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar, Susana Draper, Mariana Menéndez Díaz, Marina Montanelli und Suely Rolnik.

8M
Der große feministische Streik. Konstellationen des 8. März

#VivasNosQueremos, #NosMueveElDeseo, #NosotrasParamos – Wir wollen uns lebend(ig). Uns bewegt der Wunsch. Wir Frauen streiken. So gelangen die Slogans neuer feministischer Bewegungen aus Lateinamerika seit 2016 als Hashtags zu uns. Die hier versammelten Texte untersuchen die Genealogien dieser vielfältigen Bewegungen, die aus einem lauten Aufschrei gegen blutige, regelmäßig ungestrafte Feminizide entstanden und schließlich als internationaler feministischer Streik 2017 und 2018 massive Dimensionen erreichten. Die Mitte dieses Streiks bildet allerorts die entscheidende Frage, wie Sorgearbeit bestreikt werden kann. Ausgehend von einem tiefen Überdruss gegenüber allen Formen machistischer Gewalt tritt der Streik hier als sorgfältiges Flechten eines gemeinsamen Gewebes, als gemeinsames Organisieren und Lernen auf, aber auch als unmissverständliche Warnung: Mujeres en huelga, se cae el mundo – Wenn die Frauen streiken, verfällt die Welt.

ISBN: 978-3-903046-18-4
November 2018
130 Seiten, broschiert, 10,- €

Precarias a la deriva
Was ist dein Streik?
10,- € / ISBN: 978-3-9501762-6-1

Birgit Mennel, Stefan Nowotny (Hg.)
Die Sprachen der Banlieues
10,- € / ISBN: 978-3-9501762-7-8

Gerald Raunig
DIVIDUUM
15,- € / ISBN: 978-3-9501762-8-5

Gin Müller
Possen des Performativen
15,- € / ISBN: 978-3-9501762-5-4

Félix Guattari, Antonio Negri
Neue Räume der Freiheit
10,- € / ISBN: 978-3-9501762-9-2

Antonio Negri, Raúl Sánchez Cedillo
Für einen konstituierenden Prozess in Europa
10,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-06-1

Birgit Mennel, Monika Mokre (Hg.)
Das große Gefängnis
15,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-00-9

Rubia Salgado / maiz
Aus der Praxis im Dissens
15,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-02-3

Monika Mokre
Solidarität als Übersetzung
vergriffen

Gerald Raunig, Ulf Wuggenig (Hg.)
Kritik der Kreativität
20,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-01-6

Stefano Harney, Fred Moten
Die Undercommons
10,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-07-8

Stefan Nowotny, Gerald Raunig
Instituierende Praxen
15,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-04-7

Lina Dokuzović
Struggles for Living Learning
15,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-09-2

Brigitta Kuster
Choix d'un passé
12,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-05-4

Isabell Lorey, Gundula Ludwig, Ruth Sonderegger
Foucaults Gegenwart
10,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-08-5

Maurizio Lazzarato
Marcel Duchamp und die Verweigerung der Arbeit
10,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-11-5

Isabell Lorey
Immer Ärger mit dem Subjekt
15,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-10-8

Gerald Raunig
Kunst und Revolution
20,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-15-3

Christoph Brunner, Niki Kubaczek, Kelly Mulvaney, Gerald Raunig (Hg.)
Die neuen Munizipalismen
10,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-12-2

Tobias Bärtsch, Daniel Drognitz, Sarah Eschenmoser, Michael Grieder, Adrian Hanselmann, Alexander Kamber, Anna-Pia Rauch, Gerald Raunig, Pascale Schreibmüller, Nadine Schrick, Marilyn Umurungi, Jana Vanecek (Hg.)
Ökologien der Sorge
15,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-13-9

- Lucie Kolb
  Studium, nicht Kritik
  15,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-14-6

- Lucie Kolb
  Study, not critique
  15,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-19-1

- Raimund Minichbauer
  Facebook entkommen
  12,- € / 978-3-903046-17-7

- Cornelia Sollfrank (Hg.)
  Die schönen Kriegerinnen
  15,- € / 978-3-903046-16-0

- Christoph Brunner, Raimund Minichbauer, Kelly Mulvaney und Gerald Raunig (Hg.)
  Technökologien
  12,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-21-4

- Boris Buden, Lina Dokuzović (eds.)
  They'll never walk alone
  15,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-20-7

- Verónica Gago, Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar, Susana Draper, Mariana Menéndez Díaz, Marina Montanelli, Marie Bardet / Suely Rolnik
  8M - Der große feministische Streik
  10,- € / ISBN 978-3-903046-18-4

- Gerald Raunig
  Maschinen Fabriken Industrien
  20,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-23-8

- Sofia Bempeza
  Geschichte(n) des Kunststreiks
  12,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-22-1

- edu-factory
  Alle Macht der selbstorganisierten Wissensproduktion
  10,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-25-2

- Sofia Bempeza, Christoph Brunner, Katharina Hausladen, Ines Kleesattel, Ruth Sonderegger
  Polyphone Ästhetik
  12,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-24-5

- Gerald Raunig
  Ungefüge
  15,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-27-6

- Gerald Raunig
  Maschinischer Kapitalismus und molekulare Revolution (Doppelband)
  Band 1: DIVIDUUM
  Band 2: Ungefüge
  25,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-28-3

- Niki Kubaczek, Monika Mokre (Hg.)
  Die Stadt als Stätte der Solidarität
  15,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-26-9

- Raúl Sánchez Cedillo
  Das Absolute der Demokratie
  15,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-29-0

- Manuela Zechner
  Commoning Care & Collective Power
  15,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-31-3

- Kike España
  Die sanfte Stadt
  15,- € / ISBN: 978-3-903046-30-6

Commoning Care & Collective Power: Childcare Commons and the Micropolitics of Municipalism

Commoning Care & Collective Power traces the twin genealogies of childcare commons and the micropolitics of municipalism in Barcelona. It shows how grassroots movements engaged new institutional experiments after Spain's 15M movement, marked by struggles for social reproduction and a new feminist politics, leading towards commons municipalisms. Interested in both struggles *for* and *to* care, this book looks across subjective and collective processes. Interdependence and autonomy, care and micropolitics, building power and commons, neighbourhood and city: those are some of the terms brought into resonant tension. Zechner honours the groundwork of mothers' networks and commons nurseries, telling of powerful webs and infrastructures of care in the neighbourhood of Poble Sec. Midwives, mothers, carers and councillors prefigure schools and cities of care, as this book turns to explore how institutions are themselves sites of struggles to care. How to stay with the trouble of embodiment, interdependence and collective learning, even within institutional contexts? How might we grapple with the relation between movements and institutions? This book's interweaving of concepts and experiences traces a powerful cycle of collective learning, yielding new articulations between the commons and the public, and channeling new feminist forces.

Manuela Zechner is a feminist researcher, facilitator and artist. She works on care, ecology, micropolitics and social movements, subjectivity and embodiment. Currently she is doing postdoctoral research on transversal and translocal struggles across ecology and care, as part of the MovE project at Jena University, coproducing the Earthcare Fieldcast with Bue Rübner Hansen. As facilitator, she runs workshops and co-research projects across social movement, educational, arts and university contexts, often working with the Future Archive and free radio.